Dear Anyone Who Cares
Trajectories of Love & Sorrow

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Please make me make the right choices. Tell me right now if he is right for me or not. I love him more than anything in this world, I don't know if he realizes that I love him. I can't do this without him. I need him in my life. I will do anything for him.

Introduction

"As a cultural form, database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world."

—Lev Manovich, *Database as a Genre of New Media*

In 2008 she left again. It wasn't the first time she'd left behind something important: man who truly loved her, her children. It wasn't the first time she'd left something painful: an abusive mother, a loveless marriage. This time she left behind her data. The letters from friends, family, lovers. Her photographs, medical records and all the other scraps of information that get gathered over the course of a life. All these were tossed randomly into a large garbage bag. Why did she leave this all behind? What brought her to this point in her life?

Objectives

Data was gathered and analyzed in spreadsheets and shared with others in a PowerPoint presentation with the objective of exploring the relationship and boundaries between data and narrative. Where does the meaning we derive from the information occur? Is it from the data or the narrative? Are the two exclusive?

Methodology

Data came from three major: 1) Letters to A. 2) Diary and Letters written by A. 3) Medical records, govt. Docs. and other official sources. From these it was possible to construct a partial timeline of Angela's life. It became clear that the majority of her major life decisions related to three men, including moving from Maine to California, leaving California (and her two children) to move back to Maine, and leaving her life in Maine to move to parts unknown. A large amount of Angela's abandoned material consisted of letters from these three men. These were analyzed and the frequency of key words were recorded on a spreadsheet and graphed, facilitating comparisons between the three men.

Results

Instead of competing, the database enabled narrative. Take the following: TOM TOM TOM TOM TOM TOM TOM Love. Add to this the knowledge that these are the concluding signatures of a series of letters written over a three year period by a man to his wife in chronological order and we can write a narrative of a man who only expresses love for his wife as he is losing her. In a timeline an injury occurs followed by an honorable discharge from the navy or a marriage follows a pregnancy in cause-and-effect trajectories. Removing or randomizing the data could prevent this, but that would be adding arbitrary and artificial conditions.

Letter Greetings

James
- Angel
- My Dearest Angela
- Hey Lovely
- Hey Angela
- Hey Sexy
- Hey Angel
- Angela!
- Hey Beautiful
- Hey Angel
- Angela,
- Hey Angel
- Hey Angela
- Angela
- Hey M.L.
- Hey M.L. (Monkey Love)
- Hey M.L.
- Hey Gorgeous
- To My Monkey Love
- Hey My Monkey Love
- Hey Angel
- Hey Angel
- Hey Beautiful
- Hey Angel
- ANGELA
- Angel
- Hey Angel
- Angela
- Angela
- Hey Babe
- Hey Babe
- Angel
- (heart) Angel (heart)
- Hey Gurly Girl
- Angel
- Angel
- Angel
- Hey Beautiful
- Angel
- Angela
- Hey Baby
- Hey Babe
- My Love
- Hey Beautiful
- Your My Baby!
- My Brown Eyed Monkey Love
- My Love, My Heart and My Soul

Tom
- Hey Girl
- Hey Girl
- Hey Girl
- Hey Girl
- Hey Girl
- Hey Girl
- Hey Girl
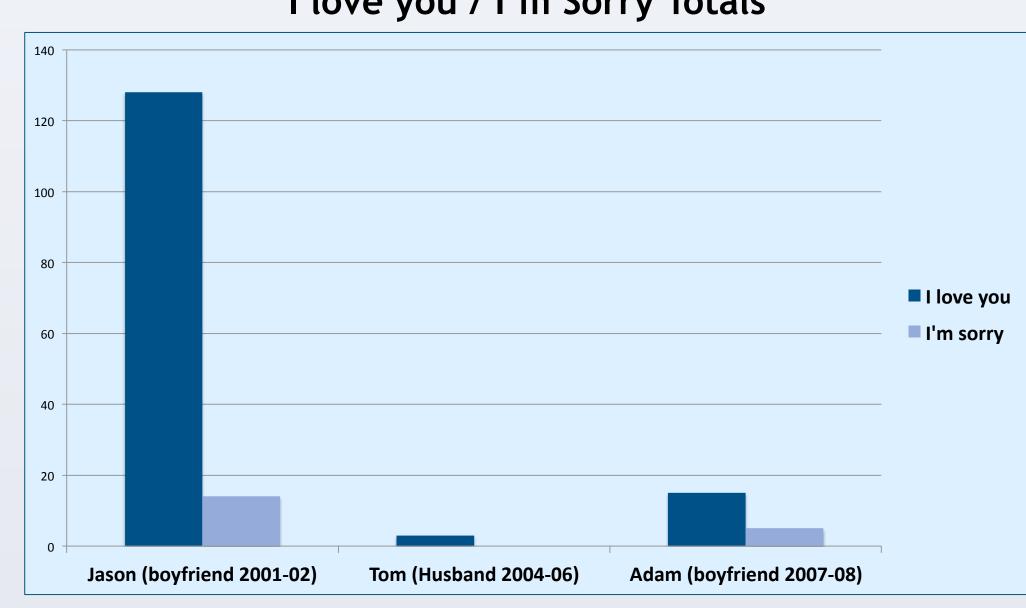- Well

Adam
- Angela
- Angela
- Angela
- Angela
- To the love of my life

Tom... Three years and the only time you told your wife you loved her was when you messed up so badly you thought she might leave you. Even then you didn't say you're sorry. Telling her how horny she makes you ≠ love. You couldn't even manage to say Love, Tom at the end of your letters, just your name written huge at the end. I don't blame her for leaving you. I just feel bad for the kids.
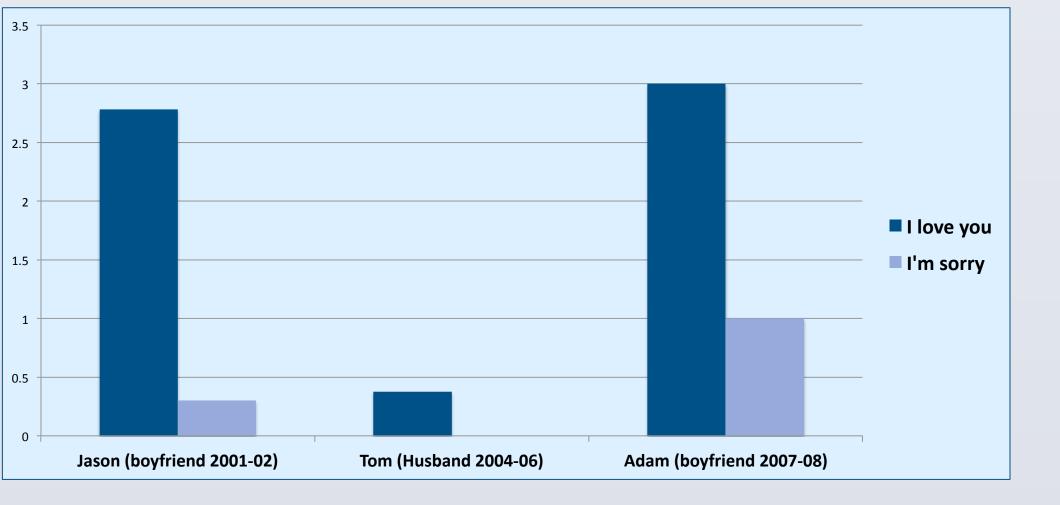
Observations

- Although James stated his love for Angela many more times in print than Adam, their per-letter average is very similar.
- Tom stated his love for Angela 3 times during their courtship and marriage, all in a single letter at the end of the relationship.
- Did she see in Adam the love she's lost in James? Unfortunately, Adam was 300% sorrier than James, usually because he kept spending their money on drugs.
- By the numbers, Adam and James appear to have similar amounts of love. However, looking at the greetings and closings of their letters, Adam and Tom both have the same lack of creativity. When James says he loves Angela, he follows it with specific reasons why. Adam just says it, more often when he thinks he's done something to lose Angela.
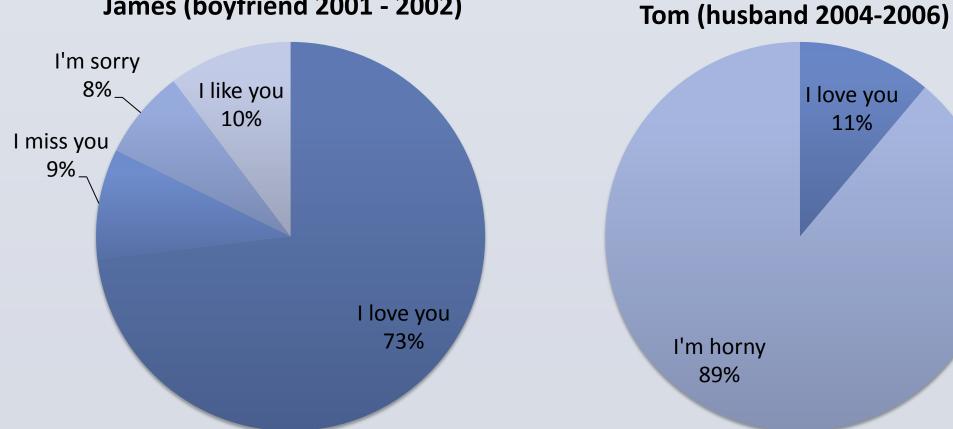
I love you / I'm Sorry Totals

I love you / I'm Sorry Averages
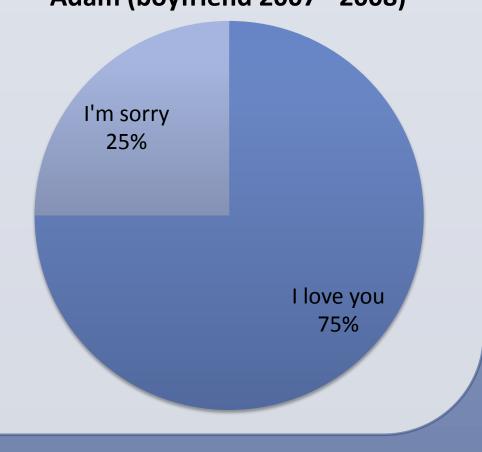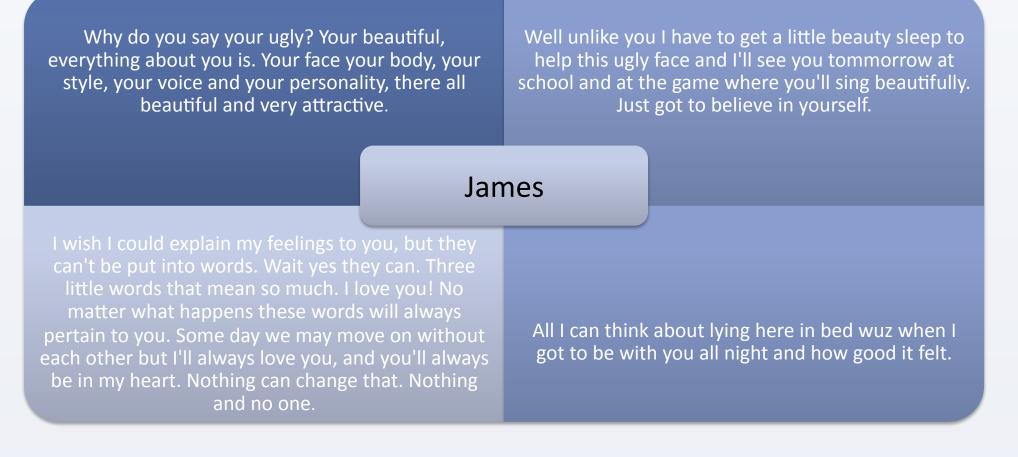

James (boyfriend 2001 - 2002)
- I'm sorry 8%
- I like you 10%
- I miss you 9%
- I love you 73%

Tom (husband 2004-2006)
- I love you 11%
- I'm horny 89%

Adam (boyfriend 2007 - 2008)
- I'm sorry 25%
- I love you 75%

Letter Closings

James
- Luv
- Love
- Love
- Always
- Love
- Love
- Love
- Love
- Thinkin of ya
- Love
- Love still please
- Love?
- Forever yours
- Forever yours
- Thinking of you
- Love
- Your Monkey Love
- Hopefully still your Monkey Love
- Love
- Love
- Luv
- Luv
- Luv
- Luv
- (none)
- Love
- Luv
- Love
- Luv
- Love
- Love
- Love
- Luv
- Love
- Luv
- Love
- Luv
- Love Always
- Love Always
- Love Always
- Love 4 ever
- Love, xoxo
- Always Thinkin and Dreamin of You, xoxo
- Love Always
- Love 4ever
- Love Always
- Love Always

Tom
- TOM
- TOM
- TOM
- TOM
- TOM
- TOM
- Love

Adam
- Forever and ever I love you babe
- Love you forever and ever
- I love you Angela Lee
- Alwase and forever babe
- your stud

Representative Quotes

Why do you say your ugly? Your beautiful, everything about you is. Your face your body, your style, your voice and your personality, there all beautiful and very attractive.

Well unlike you I have to get a little beauty sleep to help this ugly face and I'll see you tommorrow at school and at the game where you'll sing beautifully. Just got to believe in yourself.

James

I wish I could explain my feelings to you, but they can't be put into words. Wait yes they can. Three little words that mean so much. I love you! No matter what happens these words will always pertain to you. Some day we may move on without each other but I'll always love you, and you'll always be in my heart. Nothing can change that. Nothing and no one.

All I can think about lying here in bed wuz when I got to be with you all night and how good it felt.

I am starting to get real horny. I can tell cuz I just get random boners.

Don't ever let me hear you say some shit about you not being pretty. I don't fuck with ugly girls.

Tom

If we can make this work it will be a good thing, don't you think? If you don't you'd better tell me now, or I'll probably have to kill you.

I felt real shitty last night. Partly because you weren't pregnant and partly because you didn't feel good and I couldn't take care of you.

But anywase I am gunna try my hardest to change the things you want me to change it may take a little time but if i love you like I know I love you I am all set and it will come fairly easy.

You made me realize some shit today when you said you are older than me and you pretty much just cart my ass around in your car and I am nothing more than a leech on you. I know I don't have a car, money, a house, or anything really to show I toled you when we first started hanging out that I really didn't have much to offer except me and who I am and I thought you were fine with that.

Adam

Anywase if you haven't noticed I haven't really been talking about what you do wrong. I do feel like you are doing things wrong really I just think that we have way to many bills, fines, my mother, Tom, your family, your kids to be stressed about and somewhere along the road it is too stressful for us to put it all together.

I'm sorry I couldn't get you anything more than I did If I could I would give you the world but all I have is me sorry to disapoint.

Conclusions

1. Building a database appear to have eased the construction of narratives by facilitation the juxtoposition of   however...
2. Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint played a part in this. Neither are neutral tools. Excel forces data to be treated in very specific ways. PowerPoint forces presentation choices that communicate that data in a structured, linear manner.
3. The requirements of the software, and forcing all data to fit within a single PowerPoint poster required an extremely limited subset of the data to be used.
4. As a test of Lev Manovich's ideas, about database vs. narrative, this project tells us more about PowerPoint and the person who decided that specific data was significant.
5. If the data from a single human life is problematic for this format, perhaps all PowerPoint posters are suspect?

Timeline

1994
- First Suicide Attempt

1997
- May – Turns 14
- Sept – Starts High School

1998
- January – Starts Cheerleading and Field Hockey
- Summer – First consensual sex
- Sept — Sophomore year of HS. Still cheering, still field hockey

Birth
- May 13, 1983
- Father absent from birth, name not on birth certificate
- Older brother (b.1981)

1999
- Removed from mother's home, placed in foster care
- Younger sister placed with biological father
- Older brother arrested, jailed
- Sept — Begins Junior year HS
- Continues in foster care & group home

2000
- Continues in foster care & group home for remainder of school year
- June – moves in with aunt & uncle
- July – Cousin & lifelong friend Dean is killed by drunk driver
- Sept – Starts college
- Dec. – Drops out of college after semester of heavy drinking
- Starts spending time with James, future boyfriend

2001
- February – officially starts dating James
- May – turns 18
- June – Graduates HS
- April – Recruit training in Illinois, still with James
- Aug – Ends relationship with James.
- Sept – Starts college
- Dec. – Starts seeing Tom. Is now drinking heavily and often.

2002
- Feb. – Joins Navy
- March – fined for drinking underage
- April – Recruit training in Illinois, still with James
- Aug – Ends relationship with James.
- Nov – Cited for underage drinking
- Dec – Pregnancy scare with Tom. Second citation for underage drinking.

2003
- Feb – Contemplates suicide. Enters alcoholism treatment program
- April – Completes alcohol dependence program, begins AA

2004
- Jan – Gets pregnant (with Tom)
- Feb – Marriage to Tom
- Sept – 1st Daughter born
- Nov – Injured thumb skiing, surgery required

2005
- Feb – 2nd Pregnancy
- Nov – 2nd Daughter born

2006
- March – Honorable Discharge from Navy, starts receiving unemployment checks
- Struggles with post partum depression, fighting a lot with Tom
- July still in CA, now on anti-depressants

2007
- Leaves CA to move back to ME
- 2 children stay in CA with Tom
- Moves in with Alan
- On Mainecare. Pregnancy scare. Possible abortion.

2008 -
- Leaves Alam
- Disappears