



Editor's Introduction

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It has been three years since we published our first accounts of Insider Witnessing Practices in the inaugural release of the *Journal of Narrative Family Therapy*. It gives me such joy to introduce this Special Release that features the work and contributions of therapists around the world who have extended our curiosity and excitement far beyond our initial imaginations. This special release features 11 (!) articles written in the unique voices of therapists and clients from distinct contexts. I could not have been more thrilled to sit back and contemplate these rare accounts of collaborations between therapists and co-research projects with clients and each of their practice- and experience-based discoveries of where the ideas of witnessing have taken them. I would like to thank each author who contributed their writing to this special release and all of the teams currently studying and working on Insider Witnessing Practices in Argentina, Canada, Norway, and the United States. I would especially like to thank Sanni Paljakka and Tom Carlson for all their efforts on behalf of Insider Witnessing Practices including their many travels, their training, and for bearing the critiques that surely come with the introduction of any new practice. I reserve my greatest thanks for our co-researchers who have willingly scrutinized Insider Witnessing Practices in and of themselves and who continue to regularly inform us of the short- and long-term effects on their lives.

I hope that you, dear reader, are up for an adventure of the mind as these contributions have the capacity to suggest new paths into what has yet to be rendered into our collective knowledges of narrative practice!

As I was reading the unique accounts featured in this special release, I thought again, as I have so many times in my life as a practitioner-theorist, about the power of stories. Holland, et al (1998) remind us that “identities- if they are alive, if they are being lived- are unfinished and in process” (p. vii). But my question remains, what if such identities have become fixed by stories, especially those told by histories of abuse? What if a great deal rests on the stories of culpability or innocence of those who have suffered?





Rebecca Solnit (2014) reminds us of the hazards of such binding stories and points to ‘the task of learning to be free’ of them:

“What's your story about? It's all in the telling. Stories are compasses and architecture; we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and our prisons out of them, and to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all directions like arctic tundra or sea ice...We tell ourselves stories that save us and stories that are the quicksand in which we thrash and the well in which we drown...Not a few stories are sinking ships, and many of us go down with these ships even when the lifeboats are bobbing all around us...We think we tell stories, but stories often tell us, tell us to love or to hate, to see or to be blind. Often, too often, stories straddle us, ride us, whip us onward, tell us what to do, and we do it without questioning, The task of learning to be free requires learning to hear them, to question them, to pause and hear silence, to name them and then to become the storyteller” (p. 3-4).

If we seek the possibility of freedom, how do we assist people to “hear,” “question,” “pause and hear silence,” “to name,” and finally, to use the terminology of Michael White, “re-author their lives and relationships?” In his paper, “The Process of Questioning: A Therapy of Literary Merit?,” Michael put it this way: “This ‘form’ of stories of literary merit corresponds with the ‘form’ of therapy that brings forth unique outcomes, redescriptions and possibilities. Thus, we could investigate the benefit of defining a therapy of literary ‘merit’ in which the therapist’s greatest gift to persons seeking therapy is to help them become their own writers” (p. 40).

Like Michael, I have been keenly interested in finding the means for people to become the authors of their own stories. In fact, I might say that this question informed both Michael and me at the outset of narrative therapy and such matters have been on my mind ever since. I believe the question of “re-authoring means” has been quintessential to much that distinguishes narrative therapy practice from other ‘therapies.’ Practices most stridently concern themselves with questions of freedom of authorship include Consulting your Consultants, Co-





Researching, Outsider Witnessing Practices and relevant to this release, Insider Witnessing Practices.

I am thinking back to Michael's enthusiasm in 2007 as he was deliberating on the practice of Outsider Witnessing. In fact, I never knew Michael to write with such conviction as he did in regard to Outsider Witnessing Practices:

“Of all the therapeutic practices that I have come across in the history of my career, those associated with the definitional ceremony have the potential to be most powerful. Time and time again I have observed outsider witnessing retellings achieve what is quite beyond my potential to achieve in my role as a therapist. I have also witnessed this on many occasions when observing other therapists' explorations of definitional ceremonies. However, this does not diminish the significance of the therapist's contribution. The retellings of definitional ceremonies achieve resonance for the people who consult therapists when they are shaped by the appropriate outsider witness inquiry and when vital considerations to the success of these practices are closely monitored.” (White, 2007, p. 218).

I hope I can be forgiven for a similar degree of enthusiasm regarding Insider Witnessing Practices and the accounts of the effects on both therapist teams and clients alike as well as the generative creativity in their joint wondering of how and why these effects may have come about.

I have a hope that reading this special release may entice you, dear reader, to join us in the exploration of the theoretical developments and practice applications that have come from our adventures in Insider Witnessing Practices including the craft of counterstorying, the repoliticizing of practice, the calling out of binding master narratives, the close attention to the poetics of stories, and the means to raise oversight. In contrast to the humanist incitement to insight, the means for oversight depend on our relationships with witnesses to our stories of captivity and our stories of freedom. Interestingly, “oversight” just might be ‘the space of authoring’ (Holland et al, 1998, p. 169).





References

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