We all have our favourites – however in many ways and for many reasons - the Vancouver School for Narrative Therapy considers this article by Michael White the most important narrative therapy article ever written. Enjoy . . .

DECONSTRUCTION AND THERAPY - Michael White 1991

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Lest some readers be disappointed, before proceeding with my discussion of deconstruction and therapy I should inform you that this paper is not about the deconstruction of the knowledges and the practices of specific and established models of therapy, or about the deconstruction of any particular therapy "movement". Rather, in this paper I have chosen to cast certain practices of therapy within the frame provided by deconstruction.

As the first and foremost concern of my professional life relates to what happens in the therapeutic context, at the outset of this paper I will present several stories of therapy. I would like to emphasize the fact that, due to space considerations, these stories are glossed. They do not adequately represent the disorderly process of therapy - the ups and downs of that adventure that we refer to as therapy. Thus, there is a simplicity reflected in these accounts that cannot be found in the work itself.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth, a sole parent[1] , initially consulted me about her two daughters, aged twelve and fifteen years. She was concerned about their persistent antagonism towards her, their frequent tantrums, their abuse of her, and their apparent unhappiness. These problems had been upsetting to Elizabeth for some considerable time, and she was concerned that she might never recover from the despair that she was experiencing. She had come to the interview alone because her children refused to accompany her. As Elizabeth described these problems to me, she revealed that she had begun to experience what she thought might be "hate" for them, and this had been distressing her all the more.

When discussing with Elizabeth her concerns, I first asked about how these problems were affecting the lives of family members, and about the extent to which they were interfering in family relationships. I then asked more specifically about how these problems had been influencing her thoughts about herself: What did she believe these problems reflected about her as a parent?; What conclusions

had she come to about herself as a mother? Tearfully, Elizabeth confessed that she had concluded that she was a failure as a mother. With this disclosure I began to understand something of the private story that Elizabeth had been living by.

I then inquired as to how the view that she was a failure was compelling of Elizabeth in her relationship with her children. In response to this question, she gave details of the guilt that she experienced over not having sustained a "more ideal" family environment, of her highly tenuous and apologetic interaction with her daughters, and of the extent to which she felt bound to submit herself to their evaluation of her.

Was the havoc that the view of failure, and its associated guilt, was wreaking in her life and her relationships acceptable to her? Or would Elizabeth feel more comfortable if she broke her life and her relation- ships free of the tyranny of this view and its associated guilt? In response to these questions, Elizabeth's made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that the current status of her relationship with her children was quite untenable, and that it was time for her to intervene and have more to say about the direction of her life and the shape of this relationship.

I encouraged Elizabeth to explore how she had been recruited into this view that she was a failure as a mother and as a person, and about the mechanisms by which her guilt had been provoked. What experiences had been most instrumental in this recruitment? Did she think that women were more vulnerable to being recruited into the view that they had failed their children, or was it more likely that men would be recruited into this view? On this point she had no doubt - women!

The exploration of these questions brought forth some of the specifics of Elizabeth's recruitment into the view that she was a failure (for example, her experience as the recipient of abuse at the hands of her former husband, and the wider context of the gender specific nature of this construction (for example, the inequitable social structures that reinforce this view for sole parents who are women, and the prevalence of mother-blaming in our culture).

As we explored the various ways that the view that she was a failure had affected her life, and some of the details of how she was recruited into this view, Elizabeth began to experience in herself an identity distinct in relation to this view - failure no longer spoke to her of her identity. This development cleared the way for us to distinguish some of the areas of her life that had not been co-opted by this view.

I partly facilitated the identification of these distinctions by providing Elizabeth with an account of the myriad of ways that the idea of failure, and its associated

guilt, had tyrannized the lives of other women with whom I had talked - other women who had been subject to similar processes of recruitment. I then said that it was my understanding that this sort of tyrannization was never totally effective; that it had never entirely succeeded in eclipsing the lives of these women. I gave examples: "Some of these women had escaped the effects of this view of failure in their relationships with women friends, and others had kept alive their hopes that things could be different". In response to this, Elizabeth identified instances in several areas of her life in which she had been able to resist this tyranny.

I asked Elizabeth whether she thought this resistance was a positive or negative development in her life. As she said that this was a positive development, I inquired as to why she believed this to be so. During our subsequent discussion, it was determined that these instances reflected that she had not totally submitted to these negative views of who she was, and that she had some resolve to challenge the tyranny of guilt. This provided Elizabeth with evidence that her life had not been dominated by failure.

Then, through a series of questions, I encouraged Elizabeth to trace the history of this refusal. In the process of this, she identified a couple of historical figures who had witnessed some developments in her capacity to protest certain injustices. In our subsequent discussion, Elizabeth put both of us in touch with alternative versions of who she might be, versions of herself that she clearly preferred. As these alternative and preferred versions emerged from the shadows through our discussion, they became more available to Elizabeth to enter her life into.

As Elizabeth's enthusiasm for this alternative knowledge of who she was as a person became more apparent, I discussed with her the importance of seizing the initiative in putting others in touch with what she had discovered. To this end, I encouraged her to identify persons who might provide an appropriate audience to this other version of who she might be, persons who might participate in the acknowledgement of and the authentication of this version[3] . We then discussed various ideas about how she might introduce this other version of herself to these persons, and ideas about how these persons could be invited to respond to what Elizabeth was enthusiastic about m regard to these discoveries.

As part of the exploration of other versions of who Elizabeth might be, I had asked her to identify what it was about herself that she would personally like to have in a mother. Having articulated some details of this, I suggested that it might be important to catch her children up with this. Would she be prepared to tell them what she had discovered about herself as a woman and as a mother that she could appreciate, and to continue to remind them of this from time to time. This struck a

chord. Elizabeth seemed rather joyful about the idea. I was quick to share my prediction that, in the first place, it was unlikely that Elizabeth's efforts to "reclaim her life" would be greeted with a great enthusiasm from her children.

Elizabeth went away determined to have more to say about who she was, and to decline her children's invitations for her to subject herself to their constant evaluation and surveillance. Initially her daughters response to her taking over the authorship of her own life was dramatic. They came up with some very creative ideas for turning back the clock. However, Elizabeth persevered through this, and then everyone's life went forward. She forged a new connection with her daughters, they became more enthusiastic about life, the abuse subsided, and Elizabeth reported that, for the first time, they had the sort of mother-daughter relationship that she had desired. They had become more connected as confidantes, able to discuss important matters of concern with each other.

Amy

Amy, aged 23yrs, sought help in her struggle with anorexia nervosa. This was a longstanding problem, and it had withstood many attempts to resolve it. I first reviewed with Amy the effects that anorexia nervosa was having in the various domains of her life including the social, the emotional, the intellectual, and, of course, the physical. In response to this review, the extent to which anorexia nervosa was making it difficult for her to make an appearance in any of these domains became apparent to both of us.

We then spent time exploring, in greater detail, how anorexia nervosa was affecting Amy's interactions with others. I wasn't surprised to learn that it had her constantly comparing herself to others, and that it had instilled in her a sense that she was being perpetually evaluated by others. Apart from this, it was enforcing a shroud of secrecy around her life, and isolating her from others.

How was the anorexia nervosa affecting Amy's attitude towards, and interaction with, herself? What was it requiring her to do to herself? Predictably, it was requiring her to watch over herself, to police herself. It had her engaging in operations on her own body, attempting to forge it into a shape that might be considered acceptable - a "docile body". And it had her punishing her own body for its transgressions.

I then engaged Amy in an investigation of how she had been recruited into this these various practices, procedures and attitudes; these "disciplines of the self' according to gendered specifications for personhood; this hierarchical and

disciplinary attitude and relationship to her own body. In this investigation, Amy was able to identify a history to this recruitment though familial, cultural and social contexts. In our subsequent discussion, anorexia nervosa appeared as the embodiment of these attitudes, practices and contexts.

Through this therapeutic process, anorexia nervosa was "unmasked", and Amy became increasingly alienated from it. The various taken-for-granted practices and attitudes that anorexia nervosa "relied upon for its survival" no longer spoke to her of the truth of who she was as a person. Would Amy be content to continue to submit to anorexia nervosa's claims on her life, to continue to defer to its requirements? Or was she more attracted to the idea of challenging its claims to her life, and to the idea of taking her life over and making it her own?

Amy had no hesitation in stating that it was time to make her life her own, so together we reviewed the available evidence that she might be able to do so: events that reflected resistance to the practices and attitudes upon which that state of "the government of self' called anorexia nervosa depended. This led to the identification of various developments or events that were of an anti- anorectic nature[4]. I asked Amy to evaluate these anti- anorectic developments: did she consider these to be the more attractive and desirable developments in her life, or did she consider them trivial and unappealing? In response, Amy judged these developments to be the preferred developments in her life. I then engaged her in a conversation about why she thought these developments were desirable, and about why she thought they personally suited her.

As Amy seemed to be more strongly supporting these anti- anorectic activities, I encouraged her to help me understand the basis or the foundation of these in her life. I also encouraged her to reflect upon what these preferred developments said about what she believed was important for her life. During the ensuing discussion, Amy began to more fully articulate a preferred version of who she might be, one that incorporated alternative knowledges of life. This version gradually became available to her to enter her life into and to live by.

As Amy began to articulate and perform this alternative and preferred version of who she was, she took various steps to engage others in her project to reclaim her life. These steps were encouraged by my observation that "fieldwork" was an integral part of any such project. I had asked Amy to identify who, of all those persons who had known her, might be the least inaccessible to this new view of who she was. She decided to begin by re- introducing herself to those who were "far away", and contacted several school friends whom she had not seen for several years. Experiencing success in this, she moved to her more immediate

social network, which included members of her family of origin, whom she began to invite along to the therapy session. Within the therapeutic context, these family members contributed significantly to the acknowledgement of, and the authentication of, Amy's preferred claims about her life, and to Amy's ability to separate her life from anorexia nervosa.

Anne and John

John and Anne, a separating couple, sought therapy in an attempt to resolve their intense conflict over custody and access in relation to their children, and over property settlement. At the outset of the first meeting, they entered into a fierce dispute, each presenting various claims and counter claims, and only occasionally glancing furtively in my direction. After a time, I interrupted, thanking them both for being so open about the problems they were having with each other, and for providing such a clear demonstration of how things go for them.

After a pause, John and Anne launched into a fresh round of accusations. Fortunately, I was again able to interrupt, explaining that I believed I had a reasonable understanding of their experience of the relationship, and informing them that further demonstrations of this would be unnecessary. Two further such interruptions were necessary before the couple seemed convinced of this.

In the breathing space that followed, I asked to what extent this pattern of interacting - the adversarial one that they had just so clearly demonstrated - was dominating of their relationship. How was this adversarial pattern influencing their perceptions of each other and of their relationship? And how were these perceptions of each other and of their relationship influencing their responses to each other? What did this adversarial pattern have them doing to each other that might be against their better judgment?

After reviewing, with Anne and John, the extent to which this adversarial pattern had been dictating the terms of their relationship, I asked them if this had become their preferred way of responding to each other. Did they find this adversarial pattern captivating? Did this way of being with each other suit them best? Was this adversarial pattern of relating to each other tailor made for them? Did they experience this way of being together enriching of their lives?

Both claimed that this was not their preferred way of relating to the other, and both couldn't resist adding that it did seem the preference of the other partner. Since John and Anne claimed that this was not their preferred way of going about things, I suggested that it was unlikely that they had invented it for themselves.

I then encouraged Anne and John to help me understand how they had been recruited into this pattern of responding to differences of opinion over particular issues, and to identify the history of this pattern; Where had they witnessed this pattern before?

How were they originally introduced to these techniques for dealing with each other, and what situations first exposed them to these techniques? In what contexts would they expect to find these patterns commonplace, and what justifications are referred to most frequently in order to sustain them? How were they encouraged to subject their relationship to these patterns, to live their relationship out through these patterns?

During this discussion, as John and Anne articulated their experience of this adversarial pattern, it became apparent to them that their relationship was no longer at one with this pattern - they were able to think otherwise about their relationship. I asked them if they were prepared to leave what was left of their relationship to the designs of these patterns, or if they would prefer to intervene and have more to say about the direction of events - to determine a design for what was left of their relationship that would suit them both? In response to this question, John and Anne said that the adversarial pattern was impoverishing of their lives, and both indicated that they wanted to free themselves from its dictates.

We then worked to determine what basis there was for an attempt to retrieve what was left of their relationship, and managed to identify several interactions that had not been dominated by the adversarial pattern. One of these related to the extent to which they had been able to evade this pattern for a good part of the interview. Did Ann and John find these interactions with each other more satisfying? Were they at all enthusiastic about these develop- ments? Or were they more attracted to their more familiar ways of being with each other?

As they determined that they were more attracted to this alternative way of interacting with each other, I asked John and Ann what they thought this way of being together had going for it, and why they thought it would suit them to extend these developments. Following this I introduced questions that encouraged them to historicize these more positive developments in their relationship. In responding to these questions, Ann and John recalled a couple that they had befriended early in their marriage. This couple had witnessed several instances upon which they had been able to resolve a dispute satisfactorily and equitably. A review of this other couple's experience of John and Ann's relationship led to the resurrection of historically situated problem solving knowledges, and, although not without hitches, these became available to them to resolve their disputes over custody, access and property.

Robert

Robert was referred for therapy over abusive behaviour in relation to his partner, and in relation to one of his children. This abuse had only been recently disclosed. He had agreed to leave the family home, and the appropriate police and court measures were in the process of being instituted.

During our early contact, discussion centered on Robert's responsibility for perpetrating the abuse[6], on the identification of the survivors experiences of abuse, on the real short-term and possible long- term traumatic effects of this on the life of the survivors, and on determining what he might do to take responsibility to mend what might be mended.

Following this work, I asked Robert whether he would be prepared to join me in some speculation about the conditions and the character of men's abusive behaviour. This he agreed to do, so I asked him a series of questions within the category of those represented below: - If a man wanted to control and to dominate another person, what sort of structures and conditions could he arrange that would make this possible? - If a man desired to dominate another person, particularly a woman or a child, what sort of attitudes would be necessary in order to justify this?- If a man decided to make someone their captive, particularly a woman or a child, what sort of strategies and techniques of power would make this feasible?

During this speculation, particular knowledges about men's ways of being that are subjugating of others were articulated, techniques and strategies that men could rely upon to institute this subjugation were identified, and various structures and conditions that support abusive behaviour were reviewed. I then asked Robert to determine which of these attitudes he had given his life to, which of these strategies had been dominant in shaping his relationships with others, and which of these conditions and structures had provided the framework for his life. This was followed by further discussion centered on a review of the historical processes through which Robert had been recruited into the life space that was fabricated of these attitudes, techniques and structures.

Robert was invited to take a position on these attitudes, strategies and structures. Would he continue to subject his life to this particular knowledge of men's way of being? To what extent did he think it was reasonable to live life as "power's instrument", as an instrument of terror? To what extent did he wish to cooperate with these strategies and tactics that so devastated the lives of others? In view of his developing understanding of the real effects of his actions, did he think it

acceptable to depend upon these structures and conditions as a framework for his life?

As this work progressed, Robert began to experience a separation from these attitudes, and an alienation from these structures and techniques of power and control. His previously familiar and taken-for-granted ways of being in relation to women and children, and for that matter, his previously familiar and taken-for-granted ways of being with other men, no longer spoke to him of the truth of who he was as a man. For Robert to challenge his abusive behaviour no longer meant taking action against his own "nature", and he was now able to take entire responsibility for the abuse that he had perpetrated on others.

In the space that Robert stepped into as a result of this separation, we were able to fmd various unique outcomes; occasions upon which his behaviour had not been compelled by those previously familiar and taken-for-granted ways of being as a man. I asked Robert to evaluate these unique outcomes - did he see these outcomes as desirable? Did he feel positively about them? Or were they of no consequence to him? As Robert concluded that these outcomes were desirable, I asked him to share with me how he had reached this conclusion.

As our work progressed, the identification of these unique outcomes provided a point of entry for an "archeology" of alternative and preferred knowledges of men's ways of being, knowledges that Robert began to enter his live into. For example, m response to my encouragement to give meaning to these unique outcomes, to determine what ways of "being" as a man were reflected in them, Robert recalled an uncle who was quite unlike other men in his family; this was a man who was certainly compassionate and non- abusive. Robert subsequently did some homework on this uncle, and this contributed significantly to his knowledge of some of the more intimate particularities of this alternative way of being.

Robert's family had signaled a strong desire to explore the possibilities of reuniting. As Robert had begun to separate from those attitudes and practices that had justified and supported his abusive behaviour, and as he had entered into an exploration of alternative and preferred knowledges of men's ways of being, the time seemed right to convene a meeting with the family. Understanding his responsibility to safeguards to family members, he agreed to participate in certain structures that would contribute significantly to the security of family members. This included (a) a meeting with representatives of his partner and his child to disclose his responsibility for and the nature of the abuse, (b) a willingness to participate in weekly escape from secrecy 10 11 meetings · with his family and the nominated representatives, and (c) a preparedness to co-operate with other family

members in the development of a contingency plan should any family member again feel threatened by abuse.

Over time, Robert traded a neglectful and strategic life for one that he, and others, considered to be caring, open and direct.

An Interview With A Family

The interview had reached a point at which the therapist decided that it was time to hear from the team-members who had been observing the interview from behind a one-way screen. The therapist and the family traded places with the team-members; it was now their turn to be an audience to the team-members' reflections. The team-members first introduced themselves to the family. They then proceeded to share their responses to what family members had judged, or had seemed attracted to, as preferred developments in their lives and relationships.

It was the team members' task to relate to these preferred developments as one might relate to a mystery, a mystery that only family members could unravel. Initially, each observation from a team-member was followed by questions that might encourage family members to account for these developments, and questions that might engage them in speculation about what these developments might mean. Team-members also addressed questions to each other about these developments, invttmg further speculation about them. In this way, the family members' fascination in relation to previously neglected aspects of their lived experience was engaged, and they were provoked to enlist their "knowledgeableness" in regard to their own lives.

Some team-members then began to ask other team-members about why they found a particular development interesting. These questions encouraged team members to situate their reflections within the context of their personal experience and their imagination. Team members then invited each other to make transparent what they understood to be the intentions behind their reflections.

Following this, the family and the team again traded places, and the therapist proceeded to interview family members about their experience of the team's reflections; about what comments and questions family members found to be of interest and to the point, and about what comments and questions were not so. As family members began to relate those comments and questions that caught their interest, the therapist asked them to help her understand why they found these interesting, and what realizations and/or conclusions accompanied these comments and questions. The therapist then encouraged family members' speculative

assessment about how these realizations and conclusions could affect their day to day lives.

The therapist brought the interview to a close by im ting family members and the reflecting team to interview her about the interview, so that she might situate her comments and questions within the context of her own personal experience, imagination and purposes.

DECONSTRUCTION

These stories about therapy portray a number of recurrent practices. I believe that most of these practices relate to what could be referred to as a "deconstructive method", which will be explicated in the following discussion.

I should preface this discussion of deconstruction with an admission - I am not an academic, but, for the want of a better word, a therapist. It is my view that not being situated in the academic world allows me certain liberties, including the freedom to break some rules- for example, to use the term deconstruction in a way that may not be in accord with its strict Derridian sense - and to refer to writers who may not generally be considered to be proposing a deconstructivist method.

According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; those so-called "truths" that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of persons' lives. Many of the methods of deconstruction render strange these familiar and everyday taken-for- granted realities and practices by objectifying them. In this sense, the methods of deconstruction are methods that "exoticize the domestic". The sociologist who chooses to study his (sic) own world in its nearest and most familiar aspects should not, as the ethnologist would, domesticate the exotic, but, if I may venture the expression, exoticize the domestic, through a break with his (sic) initial relation of intimacy with modes of life and thought which remain opaque to him (sic) because they are too familiar. In fact the movement towards the ordinary world should be the culmination of a movement toward alien and extraordinary worlds. (Bourdieu 1988, p.xi-xii)

According to Bourdieu, exoticizing the domestic through the objectification of a familiar and taken-for-granted world facilitates the "re-appropriation" of the self. In referring to the re-appropriation of the self, I do not believe that he is proposing an essentialist view of self - that in this re-appropriation persons will "find"

themselves. Rather, he is suggesting that through the objectification of a familiar world, we might become more aware of the extent to which certain "modes of life and thought" shape our existence, and that we might then be in a position to choose to live by other "modes of life and thought".

If Bordieau's work can be considered deconstructive, then it is so in a specific sense. His primary interest is in the extent to which a person's situation in a social structure - for example, in academia - is constituting of that person's stance on issues in life.

However, we can also consider deconstruction in other senses: for example, the deconstruction of self-narrative and the dominant cultural knowledges that persons live by; the deconstruction of practices of self and of relationship that are dominantly cultural; and the deconstruction of the discursive practices of our culture.

Deconstruction is premised on what is generally referred to as a "critical constructivist", or, as I would prefer, a "constitutionalist" perspective on the world. From this perspective, it is proposed that persons' lives are shaped by the meaning that they ascribe to their experience, by their situation in social structures, and by the language practices and cultural practices of self and of relationship that these lives are recruited into. This constitutionalist perspective is at variance with the dominant structuralist (behaviour reflects the structure of the mind) and functionalist (behaviour serves a purpose for the system) perspectives of the world of psychotherapy.

In the following discussion, I will consider first the deconstruction of narrative, second, the deconstruction of modern practices of power, and third, the deconstruction of discursive practices. However, I believe, with Michel Foucault (1980), that a domain of knowledge is a domain of power, and that a domain of power is a domain of knowledge. Thus, inasmuch as meaning relates to knowledge, and inasmuch as practices relate to power, I believe that meaning, structures and practices are inseparable in their constitutive aspects.

Narrative Meaning

The idea that it is the meaning which persons attribute to their experience that is constitutive of those persons' lives has encouraged social scientists to explore the nature of the frames that facilitate the interpretation of experience. Many of these social scientists have proposed that it is the narrative or story that provides the primary frame for this interpretation, for the activity of meaning-making; that it is

through the narratives or the stories that persons have about their own lives and the lives of others that they make sense of their experience. Not only do these stories determine the meaning that persons give to experience, it is argued, but these stories also largely determine which aspects of experience persons select out for expression. And, as well, inasmuch as action is prefigured on meaning-making, these stories determine real effects in terms of the shaping of persons' lives.

This perspective should not be confused with that which proposes that stories function as a reflection of life or as a mirror for life. Instead, the narrative metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories - that these stories are shaping of life, and that they have real, not imagined, effects - and that these stories provide the structure of life.

In the family therapy literature there are many examples of the conflating of the narrative metaphor and of various conversation/linguistic metaphors. As these metaphors are situated in distinctly different traditions of thought, and as some are at variance with others, I will here present some further thoughts about the narrative metaphor that I hope will adequately distinguish it.

Narrative Structure

Bruner (1986), in referring to texts, proposed that stories are composed of dual landscapes - a "landscape of action" and a "landscape of consciousness". The landscape of action is constituted of (a) events that are linked together in (b) particular sequences through the (c) temporal dimension - through past, present and future - and according to (d) specific plots. In a text, the landscape of action provides the reader with a perspective on the thematic unfolding of events across time.

The landscape of consciousness is significantly constituted by the interpretations of the characters in the story, and also by those of the reader as s/he enters, at the invitation of the writer, the consciousness of these characters. The landscape of consciousness features the meanings derived by characters and readers through "reflection" on the events and plots as they unfold through the landscape of action. Perceptions, thoughts, speculation, realizations and conclusions dominate this landscape, and many of these relate to: (a) the determination of the desires and the preferences of the characters, (b) the identification of their personal and relationship characteristics and qualities, (c) the clarification of their intentional states - for example, their motives and their purposes - and, to (d) the substantiation of the beliefs of these characters.

As these desires, qualities, intentional states and beliefs become sufficiently elaborated through the text, they coalesce into "commitments" that determine particular careers in life -"life-styles".

If we assume that there is an identity between the structure of texts and the structure of the stories or narratives that persons live by, and if we take as our interest the constitution of lives through stories, we might then consider the details of how persons live their lives through landscapes of action and landscapes of consciousness.

Determinacy

What is the origin of these stories or narratives that are constitutive of persons' lives? The stories that persons live by arc rarely, if ever, "radically" constructed - it is not a matter of them being made-up, "out of the blue", so to speak. Our culturally available and appropriate stories about personhood and about relationship have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions. Inevitably, there is a canonical dimension to the stories that persons live by.

Thus, these stories are inevitably framed by our dominant cultural knowledges. These knowledges are not about discoveries regarding the "nature" of persons and of relationships, but are constructed knowledges that are specifying of a particular strain of personhood and of relationship. For example, in regard to dominant knowledges of personhood, in the West these establish a highly individual and gender distinct specification for ways of being in the world.

Indeterminacy Within Determinacy

If it is the case that the stories that persons have about their lives circumscribe the meanings that they give to experience, as well as the aspects of experience that they select out for expression, and if it is the case that these meanings have particular and real effects in persons' lives, then we have a strong argument for determinacy. And this argument for determinacy is strengthened upon consideration of the extent to which such stories are canonical in that they are co-authored within a community of persons, and in that they are historically constructed within the context of specific institutions and social structures.

However, despite the fact that these stories contribute a certain determinacy to life, rarely do they handle all of the contingencies that arise in "life as lived" in anything like an accomplished way. Just as with texts, in reference to life as lived,

the stories that persons live by are full of gaps and inconsistencies, and, as well, these stories constantly run up against contradictions. It is the resolution of these gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions that contributes to a certain indeterminacy of life; it is these gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions that provoke persons to engage actively in the performance of unique meaning, or, as Bruner (1990) would have it, in "meaning-making".

Thus, when considering the proposition that life is constituted through an ongoing storying and re- storying of experience, we are considering a process of "indeterminacy within determinacy" - or to what Gertz (1986) concludes to be a "copying that originates".

The wrenching question, sour and disabused, that Lionel Trilling somewhere quotes an eighteenth-century aesthetician as asking - "How Comes It that we all start out Originals and end up Copies?" - finds ... an answer that is surprisingly reassuring: it is the copying that originates. (p.380)

Externalizing Conversations

For the deconstruction of the stories that persons live by, I have proposed the objectification of the problems for which persons seek therapy (for example, White 1984,1986,1989; White & Epston 1989). This objectification engages persons in externalizing conversations in relation to that which they find problematic, rather than internalizing conversations. This externalizing conversation generates what might be called a counter-language, or as David Epston has recently proposed, an "anti-language".

These externalizing conversations "exoticize the domestic" in that they encourage persons to identify the private stories and the cultural knowledges that they live by; those stories and knowledges that guide their lives and that speak to them of their identity. These externalizing conversations assist persons to unravel, across time, the constitution of their self and of their relationships.

Externalizing conversations are initiated by encouraging persons to provide an account of the effects of the problem on their lives. This can include its effects on their emotional states, familial and peer relationships, social and work spheres etc, and with a special emphasis on how it has affected their "view" of themselves and of their relationships. Then, persons are invited to map the influence that these views or perceptions have on their lives, including on their interactions with others. This is often followed by some investigation of how persons have been recruited into these views.

As persons become engaged in these externalizing conversations, their private stories cease to speak to them of their identity and of the truth of their relationships - these private stories are no longer transfixing of persons' lives. Persons experience a separation from, and an alienation in relation to, these stories. In the space established by this separation, persons are free to explore alternative and preferred knowledges of who they might be; alternative and preferred knowledges into which they might enter their lives.

Unique Outcomes and Alternative Stories

How are these alternative knowledges generated and/or resurrected? What are the points of entry to these other versions of who person's might be? As persons separate from the dominant or "totalizing" stories that are constitutive of their lives, it becomes more possible for them to orient themselves to aspects of their experience that contradict these knowledges. Such contradictions are ever present, and, as well, they are many and varied. Previously, following Goffman, I have referred to these contradictions as "unique outcomes" (White 1988a,1989; White & Epston 1989), and it is these that provide a gateway to what we might consider to be the alternative territories of a person's life.

For an event to comprise a unique outcome, it must be qualified as such by the persons to whose life the event relates. Following the identification of events that are candidates for a unique outcome status, it is important that persons be invited to evaluate these events; are these events judged to be significant, or to be irrelevant? do these events represent preferred out- comes, or do they not? do persons find these developments appealing? are persons attracted to some of the new possibilities that might accompany these events? If these events are judged to represent preferred outcomes, then persons can be encouraged to give an account of why they believe this to be the case.

When it is established that particular events qualify as unique outcomes in that they are judged to be both significant and preferred, the therapist can facilitate the generation of and/or resurrection of alternative stories by orienting him/herself to these unique outcomes as one might orient themselves to mysteries. These are mysteries that only persons can unravel as they respond to the therapist's curiosity about them. As persons take up the task of unravelling such mysteries, they immediately engage in story-telling and meaning- making.

To facilitate this process which I have called "re-authoring", the therapist can ask a variety of questions, including those that might be referred to as "landscape of action" questions and "landscape of consciousness" questions[12] . Landscape of

action questions encourage persons to situate unique outcomes in sequences of events that unfold across time according to particular plots. Landscape of consciousness questions encourage persons to reflect on and to determine the meaning of those developments that occur in the landscape of action.

Landscape of Action Questions

Landscape of action questions can be referenced to the past, present and future, and are effective in bringing forth alternative landscapes that stretch through these temporal domains. In the following discussion, due to considerations of space, I will focus mainly on those questions that resurrect and generate alternative historical landscapes; questions that are historicizing of "unique outcomes". However, some future oriented landscape of action questions will feature in some of the examples that I give.

Questions that historicize unique outcomes are particularly effective in bringing forth alternative landscapes of action. These questions bridge those preferred developments of the present with the past; they encourage persons to identify the history of unique outcomes by locating them within particular sequences of events that unfold through time. Often, these questions assist persons to plot the history of the alternative landscape of action to the extent that they reach back and predate the landscapes of action of the previously dominant and "problem-saturated" stories that persons have had about their lives.

Landscape of action questions can focus on both the recent history and the more distant history of unique outcomes. Those landscape of action questions that bring forth the recent history of the unique outcome mostly relate to its more immediate circumstances:

How did you get yourself ready to take this step? What preparations led up to it? Just prior to taking this step, did you nearly tum back? If so, how did you stop yourself from doing so? Looking back from this vantage point, what did you notice yourself doing that might have contributed to this achievement?

Could you give me some background to this? What were the circumstances surrounding this achievement? Did anyone else make a contribution? If so, would you describe this?

What were you thinking at the time? Have you been advising yourself differently? What did you tell yourself that pulled you through on this occasion?

What developments have occurred in other areas of your life that may relate to this? How do you think these developments prepared the way for you to take these

steps?

The therapist can encourage the participation of other persons in this generation/resurrection of alternative and preferred landscapes of action. Including members of the community of persons who have participated historically in the negotiation of, and distribution of, the dominant story of the person's life is particularly helpful. For example, other family members can make particularly significant and authenticating contributions to these alternative landscapes of action:

How do you think your parents managed to keep their act together in the face of this crisis?

What have you witnessed Harry doing recently that could throw some light 011 how he was able to take this step? _

What did you see Sally doing leading up to this achievement? How does this contribute to an understanding of how she got ready for it?

Would you describe to me the circumstances surrounding this development in your son's life? Did anyone else contribute to this, and if so, in what way?

The following questions provide examples of those that bring forth the more distant history of the unique outcome. These invite the identification of events and experiences that have a less immediate relation to the unique outcomes. As with those questions that bring forth the recent history of the unique outcome, it is helpful to engage, as co- authors, members of the community of persons who contributed historically to the negotiation and distribution of the dominant story that is repudiated in this re-authoring process.

What can you tell me about your history that would help me to understand how you managed to take this step?

Are you aware of any past achievements that might, in some way, provide the back-drop for this recent development?

What have you witnessed in your life up to now that could have given you at least some hint that this was a possibility for you?

I would like to get a better grasp of this development. What did you notice yourself doing, or thinking, as a younger person, that could have provided some vital clue that this development was on the horizon of your life?

Please think about your son's recent feat and reflect on his life as you have known

it. With hindsight, what do you recall him doing that could have foreshadowed this, that could have given you a lead on this?

It seems that what Mary and Joe have recently accomplished is a manifestation of some behind the scenes work that they have been doing to retrieve their relationship. Were you aware of any signs that this work was taking place? If so, what were these signs?

These examples provide just some of the options for engaging persons in the generation/resurrection of alternative landscapes of action, and I believe that it is not possible to exhaust the choices for this sort of interaction with persons. For example, questions can be introduced to encourage persons to bring forth the recent history and distant history of those events in history that have foreshadowed the current unique outcomes.

Landscape of Consciousness Questions

Landscape of Consciousness questions encourage persons to review the developments as they unfold through the alternative landscape of action[13], and to determine what these might reveal about: (a) the nature of their preferences and their desires, (b) the character of various personal and relationship qualities, (c) the constitution of their intentional states, (d) the composition of their preferred beliefs, and, lastly, (c) the nature of their commitments.

Landscape of consciousness questions encourage the articulation and the performance of these alternative preferences, desires, personal and relationship qualities, and intentional states and beliefs, and this culminates in a "re-vision" of personal commitment in life[14]. It is through the performance of meaning in the landscape of consciousness that: ... peoples' beliefs and desires become sufficiently coherent and well organized as to merit being called "commitments" or "ways of life' and such coherences are seen as "dispositions" that characterize persons. (Bruner 1990)

The following questions provide an example of just some vf the forms that landscape of consciousness questions might take. These invite persons to reflect on developments as they have unfolded in both the recent and the more distant history of the landscape of action.

Let's reflect for a moment on these recent developments. What new conclusions might you reach about your tastes; about what is appealing to you; about what you are attracted to?

What do these discoveries tell you about what you want for your life?

I understand that you are more aware of the background to this turning point in Mary's life. How does this effect the picture that you have of her as a person?

How would you describe the qualities that you experienced in your relationship at this earlier time, when you managed to support each other in the face of adversity?

What do these developments infomt you about what suits you as a person?

In more fully appreciating what went into this achievement, what conclusions might you reach about what Harry intends for his life?

It seems that we are both now more in touch with how you prepared yourself for this step. What does this reveal to you about your motives, or about the purposes you have for your life?

What does this history of stntggle suggest about what Jane believes to be important in life, about what she stands for?

As persons respond to landscape of action and landscape of consciousness questions, they engage in a reliving of experience, and their lives are "retold". Alternative knowledges of self and of relationships are generated and/or resurrected; alternative modes of life and thought become available for persons to enter into. Throughout this re-authoring dialogue, the therapist plays a central role in challenging any early return to the canonical that would suggest that the unique outcome is self-explanatory.

Experience of Experience Questions

Experience of experience questions (White 1988b) greatly facilitate the re-authoring of lives and relationships, and often they are more generative than those questions that encourage the person to reflect more directly on their life. These questions encourage persons to provide an account of what they believe or imagine to be another person's experience of them.

These experience of experience questions: (a) invite persons to reach back into their stock of lived experience and to express certain aspects that have been forgotten or neglected with the passage of time, and (b) recruit the imagination of persons in ways that are constitutive of alternative experiences of themselves.

Some examples of these experience of experience questions follow. In the examples, these questions are oriented first to alternative landscapes of action, and second to alternative landscapes of consciousness. In the third place, examples are

given of questions that encourage persons to bring forth the "intimate particularities" of future developments in these landscapes of action and landscapes of conscious- ness.

Of course, these questions are not asked in a barrage like fashion. Instead, these questions are raised within the context of dialogue, and each is sensitively attuned to the responses triggered by the previous question. (a) If I had been a spectator to your life when you were a younger person, what do you think I might have witnessed you doing then that might help me to understand how you were able to achieve what you have recently achieved?

What do you think this tells me about what you have wanted for your life, and about what you have been trying for in your life?

How do you think that knowing this has effected my view of you as a person?

What do you think this might reveal to me about what you value most?

If you managed to keep this knowledge about who you are close to you over the next week or two, how would it effect the shape of your life?

(b) Of all those persons who have known you, who would be least surprised that you have been able to take this step in challenging the problems influence in your life?

What might they have witnessed you doing, in times past, that would have made it possible for them to predict that you could take such a step at this point in your life?

What do you imagine this told them, at that time, about your capabilities?

What would they have assumed to be your purposes in taking this action at this point in your history?

How do you think this spoke to them of who you are, and about what you believe to be important?

Exactly what actions would you be committing yourself to if you were to more fully embrace this knowledge of who you are?

(c) I would like to understand the foundations upon which this achievement rests. Of all those persons who have known you, who would be best placed to supply some details about these foundations?

What clues did this provide them with as to which developments in your life were most desirable to you?

What conclusions might they have reached about your intentions in building up these foundations?

What could this have disclosed to them about the sort of life-style you are more suited to?

If you were to side more strongly with this other view of who you are, and of what your life has been about, what difference would this make to your life 011 a day-to-day basis?

These examples serve only as an introduction to some of the options for developing questions that encourage the re-authoring of lives according to preferred stories. Among the many other options is the construction of questions that might bring forth future developments in the landscape of consciousness. These questions encourage a reflection on future events in the alternative landscape of action. For example:

If you did witness yourself taking these steps, how might this confinn and extend on this prefe"ed view of who you are as a person?

These questions can then be followed-up by further landscape of action questions, and so on. For example: And what difference would the confinnation of this view make to how you lived your life?

Other Structures

In the shaping of suitable questions, it can be helpful for the therapist to refer to other structures in this work, including those derived from anthropology, drama and literature. For example, at times unique outcomes appear to mark turning points for which it is difficult to find any antecedents in distant history. Under these circumstances, persons can be encouraged to plot these unique outcomes into a "rite of passage" frame that structures transitions in life through the stages of separation, liminality, and reincorporation (van Gennep 1906).

Alternatively, under these circumstances, unique outcomes can be plotted into a "social drama" frame that structures transitions in life through the stages of steady state, breach, crisis, redress, and new steady state (Turner 1980).

In regard to the borrowing of structures from literature, as I have discovered that the re-vision of motive that accompanies the resurrection of alternative stories and

knowledges is particularly "liberating" for persons, I often refer to Burke's deconstruction of motive as a frame for this work. We shall use five termss as generating principle of our investigation. They are: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose.

In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he (sic) used (agency), and title purpose ... any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answer to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he (sic) did it (agency), and why (purpose). (Burke 1969, p.xv)

In relating experience of experience questions to alternative and historically situated motives, particular acts, scenes, agents, agency, and purposes, can be brought forth[16]. This contributes "dramatically" to the archaeology of alternative knowledges of personhood and of relationship. An example of the line of questioning that is informed by this structure follows: (a) Okay, so your Aunt Mavis might have been best placed to predict such an achievement. Give me an example of the sort of event, that she witnessed in your life, that would have enabled her to predict this achievement. (b) How might she have described the circumstances of the event? (c) Would she have been aware of others who might have contributed to the event? (d) If she had been asked to describe exactly how this was achieved, what do you imagine she would have said? (e) What would she have construed your purposes to be in making this achievement? What do you think she might have learned about what you intended for your life?

Discussion

At the risk of labouring the point, I want to emphasize that these landscape of action and landscape of consciousness questions are not simply questions about history. They are questions that historicize the unique outcome. And the re-authoring approach that I am describing here is not simply a process of "pointing out positives". Instead, this approach actively engages persons in un-raveling mysteries that the therapist can't solve.

When I am teaching this work, following Brunner (1986), I often suggest to therapist's that they envision an arch. The arch is a relatively recent development in history[17], and it owes its extraordinary load bearing performance to a specific and sequential arrangement of wedge-shaped stones. Each of these stones is

uniquely placed; each stone owes its position to the particular arrangement of stones on either side of it, and in turn makes possible the particular arrangement of stones on either side of it.

The landscape of action can be represented as an arch. And the unique outcome as can be represented as one of the wedge shaped stones, its existence understood to be contingent upon its place in a particular class and sequence of events that unfold through time while at the same time contributing to the particular arrangements of events, across time, on either side of it. Questions that contextualize unique outcomes contribute significantly to bringing forth details about the unique arrangement of events of which the unique outcome is but a part.

A second arch can be envisaged above the first. The landscape of consciousness can be represented by this, and it interacts back and forth with the first arch, the landscape of action, through reflection.

Perhaps the approach that I have described here on the deconstruction of the stories and knowledges that persons live by is not entirely dissimilar to Derrida's work on the deconstruction of texts (1981) [8] . Derrida's intention was to subvert texts and challenge the privileging of specific knowledges with methods that "deconstruct the opposition ... to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment". He achieved this by developing deconstructive methods that: (a) brought forth the hidden contradictions in texts, and rendering visible the repressed meanings - the "absent but implied" meanings, (b) gave prominence to those knowledges "on the other side", those considered to be secondary, derivative and worthless.

PRACTICES OF POWER

A good part of Michel Foucault's work is devoted to the analysis of the "practices of power" through which the modern "subject" is constituted (Foucault 1978,1984). He traced the history of the "art of the government of persons" from the seventeenth century, and detailed many of the practices of self and practices of relationship that persons are incited to enter their lives into. In that it is through these practices that persons shape their lives according to dominant specifications for being, they can be considered techniques of social control.

Constitutive Power

Foucault's conception was of a modern power that is constitutive or "positive" in its character and effects, not repressive or "negative"; not a power that is dependent upon prohibitions and restrictions (1980).

Rather than propose that the central mechanism of this modern form of power was containing or restricting, he proposed that its central mechanism was productive - persons' lives are actually constituted or made up through this form of power. According to Foucault, the practices of this form of power permeate and fabricate persons' lives at the deepest levels - including their gestures, desires, bodies, habits etc. - and he likened these practices to a form of "dressage" (Foucault 1979).

Local Politics

Foucault was intent on exposing the operations of power at the micro- level and at the periphery of society: in clinics, prisons, families etc. According to him, it was at these local sites that the practices of power were perfected; that it is because of this that power can have its global effects. And, he argued, it is at these local sites that the workings of power are most evident.

So, for Foucault, this modern system of power was decentered and "taken up", rather than centralized and exercised from the top down.

Therefore, he argued that efforts to transform power relations in a society must address these practices of power at the local level - at the level of the every-day, taken-for-granted social practices.

Techniques of Power

In tracing the history of the apparatuses and institutions through which these practices were perfected, Foucault (1979) identifies Bentham's Panopticon as the "ideal" model for this form of power - for the ... technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject. (Foucault 1988, p.18) I have discussed Foucault's analysis of this model elsewhere (White 1989). This model establishes a system of power in which:

- the source of power is invisible to those who experience it most intensely, persons are isolated and their experience of subjugation, - persons are subject to the "gaze" and to "normalizing judgement", - it is impossible for persons to determine when they are the subject of surveillance and scrutiny and when they are not, and therefore must assume this to always be the case, - persons are incited to perpetually evaluate themselves, to police themselves and to operate on their bodies and souls to forge them as docile, - power is autonomous to the extent that those participating in the subjugation of others are, in turn, the "instruments" of power.

Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon provides an account of how the mechanisms and the structures of this modern system of power actually recruited persons into collaborating in the subjugation of own lives and in the objectification of their own bodies; of how they became "willing" participants in the disciplining of, or policing of, their own lives. These mechanisms of this modern system of power recruit persons into what Foucault refers to as the ... technologies of the self, which pemtit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transfonn themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault 1988, p.18)

The Ruse

However, this collaboration is rarely a conscious phenomenon. The workings of this power are disguised or masked because it operates in relation to certain norms that are assigned a "truth" status. This is a power that is exercised in relation to certain knowledges that construct particular truths, and is designed to bring about particular and "correct" outcomes, like a life considered to be "fulfilled", "liberated", "rational", "differentiated", "individuated", "self- possessed", "self-contained", and so on.

The descriptions for these "desired" ways of being arc in fact illusionary. According to Foucault, they are all part of a ruse that disguises what is actually taking place - these dominant truths are actually specifying of persons' lives and of relationships; those correct outcomes are particular ways of being that are prescribed ways of being.

So, the practices of modern power, as detailed by Foucault, are particularly insidious and effective. They incite persons to embrace their own subjugation; to relate to their own

lives through techniques of power that are molding of these lives, including their bodies and their gestures, according to certain "truths". The ways of being informed by these truths are not seen, by these persons, as the effect of power, but instead as the effect of something like fulfillment, of liberation.

Discussion

This analysis of power is difficult for many persons to entertain for it suggests that many of the aspects of our individual modes of behaviour that we assume to be an expression of our free will, or that we assume to be transgressive, are not what they might at first appear. In fact, this analysis would suggest that many of our

modes of behaviour reflect our collaboration in the control or the policing of our own lives, as well as the lives of others; our collusion in the specification of lives according to the dominant knowledges of our culture.

In undertaking his analysis of the "technologies of power" and the "technologies of the self', Foucault was not proposing that these were the only faces of power. In fact, in relation to fields of power, he proposed the study of four technologies: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power, and technologies of the self (Foucault 1988).

Although have followed Foucault in emphasizing the techniques of a modern "positive" system of power in this paper, I believe that other analyses of power, including those that relate to Bourdieu's thoughts about the structure of social systems of power and the constitutive effects of these structures on persons' stances in life, are highly relevant in the consideration of the everyday situations that are confronted by therapists.

Other considerations of fields of power would include the extent to which some of the structures that represent the earlier system of sovereign power still exist, and the extent to which institutional inequalities - those of a structural nature and those that relate to an inequality of opportunities - dominate our culture.

In fact, in his analysis of Bentham's Panopticon, Foucault draws attention to a structure that is at the heart of its operations. Upon considering the implications of this structure in terms of inequality, I have elsewhere suggested that, in our culture, men are more often likely to be the "instruments" of the normalizing gaze, and women more often likely to be the subject of this gaze (White 1989). This point has also been made by other authors (e.g. Hare- Mustin 1990).

In therapy, the objectification of these familiar and taken-for-granted practices of power contributes very significantly to their deconstruction. This is achieved by engaging persons in externalizing conversations about these practices. As these practices of power are unmasked, it becomes possible for persons to take a position on them, and to counter the influence of these practices in their lives and relationships.

These externalizing conversations are initiated by encouraging persons to provide an account of the effects of these practices in their lives. In these conversations, special emphasis is given to what these practices ha\·e dictated to persons about their relationship with their own self, and about their relationships with others.

It is through these externalizing conversations that persons are able to: (a)

appreciate the degree to which these practices are constituting of their own lives as well as the lives of others, (b) identify those practices of self and of relationship that might be judged as impoverishing of their lives, as well as the lives of others, (c) acknowledge the extent to which they have been recruited into the policing of their own lives and, as well, the nature of their participation in the policing of the lives of others, and to (d) explore the nature of local, relational politics.

It is through these externalizing conversations that persons no longer experience these practices as representative of authentic ways of being with themselves and with others. They no longer experience being at one with these practices, and begin to sense a certain alienation in relation to them. Persons are then in a position to develop alternative and preferred practices of self and of relationship - counter-practices. In therapy, I have participated with persons in challenging various practices of power, including those that relate to:

(a) the technologies of the self - the subjugation of self through the discipline of bodies, souls, thoughts, and conduct according to specified ways of being (including the various operations that are shaping of bodies according to the gender specific knowledges),

(b) the technologies of power - the subjugation of others through techniques such as isolation and surveillance, and through perpetual evaluation and comparison.

And I have also participated with persons in the deconstruction of particular modes of life and thought by reviewing, with them, the constitutive effects of the specific situation of their lives in those fields of power that take the form of social structures. In response to this, persons are able to challenge these effects, as well as those structures that are considered to be inequitable.

Examples

Perhaps it would be timely to return briefly to the stories about Amy and Robert. Amy had been recruited into certain practices of the government of the self - "technologies of the self'. She had embraced these practices as a form of self-control, and as essential to the transformation of her life into an acceptable shape - one which spoke to her of fulfillment. She had construed her participation in activities in the subjugation of her own life as liberating activities.

Upon engaging Amy in an externalizing conversation about anorexia nervosa through the exploration of its real effects in her life, she began to identify the various practices of self-government - of the disciplines of the body - and the

specifications for self that were embodied in anorexia nervosa. Anorexia was no longer her saviour. The ruse was exposed, and the practices of power were unmasked. Instead of continuing to embrace these practices of the self, Amy experienced alienation in relation to them. Anorexia nervosa no longer spoke to her of her identity. This opened up space for Amy to enter into activities that further subverted the realities constructed by anorexia nervosa, and into an exploration of alternative and preferred practices of self and of relationship.

To Robert, the unexamined and unquestioned knowledges, practices or "technologies of power", structures and conditions that provided the context for his abusive behaviour were all part of a taken-for-granted mode of life and thought that he had considered to be reflective of the natural order of things. Upon entering an externalizing conversation about these knowledges, practices, structures and conditions, and in mapping the real effects of these upon his own life and upon the lives of others, he experienced a separation from this mode of life and thought - this no longer spoke to him of the "nature" of men's ways of being with women and children.

Then, via a unique outcome as a point of entry, Robert was able to engage in an "archeology" of, and the performance of, alternative and preferred practices of relationship. As well, he began to challenge the structures and conditions that are supportive of men's abusive behaviour.

KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES

The professional disciplines have been successful in the development of language practices and techniques that determine that it is those disciplines that have access to the "truth" of the world. These techniques encourage persons in the belief that the members of these disciplines have access to an objective and unbiased account of reality, and of human nature[19] _What this means is that certain speakers, those with training in certain special techniques - supposedly to do with the powers of the mind to make contact with reality - are privileged to speak with authority beyond the range of their personal experience. (Parker & Shotter 1990)

These language practices introduce ways of speaking and of writing that are considered to be rational, neutral and respectable, emphasizing notions of the authoritative account and the impersonal expert view. These practices disembody the perspective and the opinions of the speaker and the writer. The presentation of the knowledges of the speaker and writer is devoid of information that might give the respondent or the reader information about the conditions of the production of the expert view.

These practices of speaking and writing establish accounts of knowledges that are considered to be "global and unitary" (Foucault 1980), accounts that mask the historical ledged if accompanied by the struggles associated with their ascendancy, including the multiplicity of resistances to them. It is difficult for persons to challenge these global and unitary knowledges because the language practices that constitute them include built-in injunctions against questions that might be raised about their socio/political/historical contexts.

In denying the respondent/reader this critical information, they experience a certain "suspension". They do not have the information necessary to determine how they might "take" the views that are expressed, and this dramatically reduces the range of possible responses available to them. Respondents/readers can either subject themselves to the expert knowledge, or they can rail against it. Dialogue over different points of view is impossible.

For the members of the professional disciplines who are operating under the apprehension that they have recourse to objective "appropriate" deference to the warranted ways of speaking/writing.

Deconstructive Practice

Therapists can contribute to the deconstruction of expert knowledge by considering themselves to be "co- authors" of alternative and preferred knowledges and practices, and through a concerted effort to establish a context in which the persons who seek therapy are privileged as the primary authors of these knowledges and practices. Some of the "therapeutic" practices that are informed by this perspective follow. These by no means exhaust the possibilities, and David Epston and I have discussed other such therapeutic practices elsewhere (White & Epston 1989, Epston & White 1991).

Therapists can undermine the idea that they have privileged access to knowledge, critical reflection on their position is not an option. Thus they are able to avoid facing the moral and ethical implications of their knowledge practices.

A description which contains 110 critical reflection on the position from which it is articulated can have no other principle than the interests associated with the analysed relation that the researcher has with this object. (Bourdieu 1988, p.15)

The open, vague, temporary and changing nature of the world is rendered, by these truth discourses, closed, certain, fixed and permanent. Other ways of speaking/writing are rendered invisible, or, as they are considered to be inferior, are mostly excluded. These "inferior" ways of speaking/writing are only

acknowledging the truth by consistently encouraging persons to assist them in the quest for understanding. This can be achieved by giving persons notice of the extent to which the therapist's participation in therapy is dependent upon feedback from persons about their experience of the therapy. It is acknowledged that the person's experiences of therapy is essential to the guidance of the therapy, as this is the only way that a therapist can know what sort of therapeutic interaction is helpful and what is not.

This can be further emphasized if therapists engage persons in some inquiry as to why certain of the ideas that emerge during the interview interest those persons more than other ideas. What is it that persons find significant or helpful about the particular perspectives, realizations, conclusions etc? What preferred outcomes, for persons' lives, might accompany the particular perspectives, realizations, conclusions etc?

Therapists can challenge the idea that they have an expert view by continually encouraging persons to evaluate the real effects of the therapy in their lives and relationships, and to determine for themselves to what extent these effects are preferred effects and to what extent they are not. The feedback that arises from this evaluation assists therapists to squarely face the moral and ethical implications of their practices.

The therapist can call into question the idea that sjhe possesses an objective and unbiased account of reality, and undermine the possibility that persons will be subject to the imposition of ideas, by encouraging persons to interview her /him about the interview. In response to this, the therapist is able to deconstruct and thus embody her /his responses (including questions, comments, thoughts, and opinions) by situating these in the context of his/her personal experiences, imagination, and intentional states. This can be described as a condition of "transparency'[20] in the therapeutic system, and it contributes to a context in which persons are more able to decide, for themselves, how they might take these therapist responses.

If the therapist is working with a reflecting team[21] , at the end of the session this team can join with persons in interviewing the therapist about the interview. Apart from asking questions about the particular responses of the therapist, at this time team members can be invited to explore the therapist's thoughts about the actual process of the therapy across the interview.

The therapeutic practices of deconstruction and embodiment also hold for the responses of reflecting teams. Reflecting team members can be discouraged from

engaging in the time honoured structuralist and functionalist truth discourses of the psychotherapies, and encouraged to respond to those developments that are identified by family members as preferred developments, or to speculate about those developments that might be preferred' [2]. Following this, reflecting team members can interview each other about their reflections so that they might situate these in the context of their personal experience, imagination and intentional states. The options and choices available to persons is maximized through this personalizing of the knowledges of the members of the reflecting team.

The deconstruction of the responses of the members of the reflecting team can be structured around questions like: What was it that caught your attention? Why do you think this caught your attention so? Why did this strike you as so significant? How did you decide to comment on this here? What effect did you think this comment would have?[3] What was your intention in asking this question here?

This transparency of practice provides a challenge to the commonly accepted idea that for therapy to have its desired effects its workings need to be kept secret; the idea that if persons know what the therapist is up to then it won't work. On reviewing these practices with persons, I have learned that they often regard the embodiment of the therapist and reflecting team responses to be a highly significant factor in achieving the changes in their lives that they have valued most.

CONCLUSION

Those therapeutic practices that I refer to as "deconstructive" assist in establishing, for persons, a sense of "agency". This sense is derived from the experience of escaping "passengerhood" in life, and from the sense of being able play an active role in the shaping of one's own life - of possessing the capacity to influence developments in one's life according to one's purposes and to the extent of bringing about preferred outcomes. This sense of personal agency is established through the development of some awareness of the degree to which certain modes of life and thought shape our existence, and through the experience of some choice in relation to the modes of life and thought that we might live by.

Those therapeutic practices that I refer to as deconstructive assist persons to separate from those modes of life and thought that they judge to be impoverishing of their own lives and of the lives of others. And they provoke in therapists and in the persons who seek therapy, a curiosity in regard to those alternative versions of who these persons might be. This is not just any curiosity. It is a curiosity about how things might be otherwise, a curiosity about that which falls outside of the

totalizing stories that persons have about their lives, and outside of those dominant practices of self and of relationship.

An emphasis on curiosity in therapeutic practices is by no means new, and I would refer you to Gianfranco Cecchin's (1990) recasting of neutrality. I will leave you with one of Michel Foucault's delightful contributions on this subject: Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatized in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain conception of science. Curiosity, futility. The word, however, pleases me. To me it suggests something altogether different: it evokes "concern"; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential. (1989, p198)

Notes

1. I prefer the description "sole parent" over the description "single parent". In our culture, it appears that "single" has so many negative connotations, including of incompleteness, of being unmarried, of failure - of not having made the grade. However, at least to my mind, the word "sole" conjures up something entirely different. It carries a recognition of the extraordinary responsibility that these parents face and of the strength necessary to achieve what they achieve. And, as well, a second meaning is not hard to discern - "soul". Soul is about essence, and for persons to refer to themselves as "soul parents" is for them to recognize the "heartfulness" that they provide, that their children depend upon to "see them through".

2. The work undertaken here did include exploration of the possibility that the children may have been abused by their father. The findings disconfirmed this as a possibility.

3. In part, this work is premised on the narrative metaphor which brings with it a specific non-essentialist account of authenticity. According to this metaphor, ordinarily a person achieves a sense of authenticity when (a) they perform particular claims about their lives, claims that relate to particular self-narratives, and when (b) this performance is witnessed by themselves and others. This would suggest that there is a range of possible authenticities that persons might experience, and that this range is determined by the available stock of stories that persons have about their lives.

4. David Epston, of Auckland, New Zealand, has joined with a number of persons who have sought therapy for anorexia nervosa, in establishing the "The Anti-Anorexia League". The aims of this league are to unmask the 'voice' of anorexia nervosa, and to identify, document, and circulate knowledges and practices that are counter to those knowledges and practices upon which the anorexia nervosa depends.

5. Initial steps in fieldwork should not be overly ambitious. Questions like this contribute to more humble beginnings and to increased possibilities in terms of the circulation and the authentication of alternative knowledges of self.

6. I would refer readers to Alan Jenkin's book, "Invitations to Responsibility" (1990) for an

excellent discussion of this and other aspects of work with men who abuse others.

7. The counseling of family members in relation to the abuse and other issues was undertaken concurrently in a different context.

8. I do not believe it is ever sufficient for men to take entire responsibility for perpetrating abuse, to identify the experience of those abused, to get in touch with the short term and possible long term effects of the abuse, to develop a sincere apology, to work on ways of repairing what might be repaired, and to challenge the attitudes that justify such behavi0ur and the conditions and techniques of power that make abuse possible.

If that is where it ends, although the man may experience genuine remorse, he is likely to re-offend because he has no other knowledges of men's ways of being to live by. For there to be any semblance of security that this will not occur, I believe that it is essential that these men be engaged in the identification and the performance of alternative knowledges of men's ways of being.

10. Escape from secrecy meetings are held weekly in the first place, and gradually move to a monthly basis over a period of two years. At each of these meetings, events of the past week or so are reviewed. Events which reflect a reappearance of any of those attitudes, strategies, conditions, and structures that provided the context for past abuse can be identified and challenged.

Different family members take turns at minute-taking for these meetings and in the posting of these minutes to the therapist (frequently with the assistance of the representatives). The family member whose turn it is to take this responsibility is encouraged to append their confidential comments to these minutes. If the therapist does not receive the minutes of a meeting on schedule, sjhe immediately follows this up. From time to time the therapist joins these meetings to review progress.

It is not possible to over-emphasise the importance of local accountabilityin this work. State intervention can be highly effective in bringing about the immediate cessation of abuse, but local accountability structures are essential to the establishment of secure contexts.

11. For an excellent discussion of the significance of secrecy in structuring a context for abuse, I would refer readers to Amanda Kamsler & Lesley Laing's "Putting an end to secrecy" (1990).

12. Elsewhere I have referred to landscape of action questions as "unique account" questions, and to landscape of consciousness questions as "unique redescription" questions (White 1988a).

13. Of course, the order of these questions can be reversed. Developments in the landscape of consciousness can be reviewed for what they might reveal about preferred developments in the landscape of consciousness. For example, "What did you see yourself doing that led you to this conclusion about your nature?" "What else have you witnessed yourself doing that reflects this belief?"

14. The re-vision of intentional states is often begun ahead of the introduction of these landscape of consciousness questions with the institution of externalizingconversations in relation to the problem. This is achieved through questions like: "What does this problem have you doing that is against your better judgement/what you intend

9. These nominated by the child and the non-offending spouse, and they can be relatives who do not have a history of abusive behaviour, or persons known to them in the community.

15. Daphne Hewson of the Macquarie University, Sydney, working from the perspectives of both narrative theory and social-<:egnitive psychology, has pioneered the development of prediction questions as a means of bringing forth the history of alternative stories.

16. What's in a word? Answer- a world! And I believe that, for therapists, the dramatic terms "act", "scene", "agents", "agency", and "purpose", introduce a different world to that world introduced by the terms "what, where, who, how, and why". The terms act and scene impart a sense of the constructed and thematic nature of the world, the terms agent and agency invoke ideas about specific "contributions" and a "know-how" that is related to intentional states, and the term purpose is suggestive of particular intentional states as explanatory notions.

17. Debra Milinsky of Berkeley, who has a strong interest in the history of such matters, informs me that the Etruscans can be most fairly credited for the development of the modern above-ground arch.

18. To my knowledge, there are a number of family therapists now undertaking a study of Derrida's work, and exploring the implications of his ideas in terms of therapeutic practices. Ron Findlay of St Kilda, Victoria, recently presented some of his thoughts on Derrida and therapy at a meeting at Dulwich Centre.

19. Feminist thinkers recognize these language practices as distinctly patriarchal, and seek to challenge them with an ethic of care, within an emphasis on context. For example, see Carol Gilligan's "In a Different Voice" (1982).

20. When discussing with David Epston how I might best depict this deconstruction of the therapist responses, he suggested the term "transparency".

21. For an introduction to the concept of the reflecting team, see Andersen 1987.

22. As with therapist re-authoring practices, reflecting team members orient themselves to unique outcomes as one might orient them self to mysteries. Thus, when team members make comments on unique outcomes, this is followed by questions and perceptions from within the team that engage the lived experience and imagination of family members in the unraveling of these mysteries. In this way, family members are privileged as Geertz. C. 1985: "Making experiences, authoring selves.· In Turner, V. & Bruner, E. {Eds.), The Anthropology of Experience. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

23. This question was suggested by Stephen Madigan during his visit to Dulwich Centre through the "Down Under Family Therapy Scholarship".

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