

# Glossary of Terms: Five Narrative Therapeutic Practices

*Definitional ceremonies and outsider witnessing* – Often in narrative practice significant others are invited in to stand as ‘outsider witnesses’ to the person’s preferred developments. In response to the person’s ‘telling’ of these developments, the witnesses are invited, in a ‘re-telling’ process, to reflect on what struck a chord for them, and to connect resonant themes with their own lives. The therapist carefully structures this witnessing as a kind of ceremony, in which talk is directed towards supporting the person’s agentic stories, values, behaviours, and experiences. The ceremony can facilitate the emergence of new ideas and themes for further re-authoring and re-membering conversations, but its primary purpose is to begin a process of thickening and grounding the person’s preferred ways of being in communal life and spaces (for further reading, see White, 2007, Chapter 4).

*Externalization* – Externalization is based on the idea that personal problems are the product of the internalization of the prescriptions and expectations of external discourse and power dynamics (although the term ‘internalization’ might be contentious in that Foucault tended to speak of social processes as inscribed ‘on’ the body, rather than internalized ‘into’ it). It refers to the conversational practice of separating the person from the problem, which is thereby externalized. In practice, this involves speaking about the problem as external to the person, and as exerting some kind of influence on him or her (e.g., the claim ‘I am anorexic’ might lead the therapist to ask questions such as: ‘How does anorexia persuade you to treat your body?’). In the process, the problem and its specifications are delinked from the person’s sense of self. The space that opens up between person and problem gives the person room to reconsider his or her relationship to the problem, and to reflect on his or her identity and life experience separately from the ‘problem-saturated stories’ promoted by the internalized discourse (see White, 2007, Chapter 1, and White and Epston, 1990, Chapter 2).

*Re-authoring* – This conversational practice involves the development of a personal history of those behaviours, thoughts, interactions, or other experiences which run counter to, or seem out of phase with, problem-saturated stories and the non-preferred thoughts, behaviours, and experiences they sponsor. The therapist asks questions that move back and forth between the ‘landscape of action’ (actual historical events and happenings in the person’s life) and the ‘landscape of identity’ (what these events suggest about the person’s identity, sense of agency, ethics, values, and commitments), in an attempt to narratively thicken, and to foster a sense of historical depth and personal congruence in relation to preferred personal developments (see White, 2007, Chapter 2).

*Re-membering* – The stories of preferred developments can be thickened by linking them up with others in the person’s life. This may involve conversations

about who should be told about an important personal realization, who might have already noticed it, who might support it, and in what ways. It also may involve discussing the mutual influences between the person and these others, so that an appreciation is gained not just of the others' support, but of the person's contributions to these others' lives. This bidirectional influence is important to articulate, as it helps promote a sense of mutual personal agency and of a mutually supportive community. The term 're-membering' is used because the person is seen as becoming a 'member' of an enabling community, which may have been forgotten or not fully recognized (see White, 2007, Chapter 3).

*Unique outcomes* – Narrative therapists assume that there will always be times in the person's life in which he or she subverts or resists the problem and its supporting narratives. When the person sees value in these out-of-phase behaviours or experiences, they may be referred to as unique outcomes. These outcomes, which are often initially slight and barely noticed, then become the subject of numerous other narrative practices. For example, they may emerge out of externalizing conversations, and then be developed and narratively thickened in re-authoring, re-membering, and outsider-witnessing dialogues (see White, 2007, Chapter 5).

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