

AFTA SPRINGER BRIEFS IN FAMILY THERAPY

Victoria Dickerson *Editor*

Poststructural and Narrative Thinking in Family Therapy

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AFTA SpringerBriefs in Family Therapy

A Publication of the American Family Therapy Academy

Founded in 1977, the **American Family Therapy Academy** is a non-profit organization of leading family therapy teachers, clinicians, program directors, policymakers, researchers, and social scientists dedicated to advancing systemic thinking and practices for families in their social context.

Vision

AFTA envisions a just world by transforming social contexts that promote health, safety, and well-being of all families and communities.

Mission

AFTA's mission is developing, researching, teaching, and disseminating progressive, just family therapy and family-centered practices and policies.

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Foreword

The *AFTA SpringerBriefs in Family Therapy* is an official publication of the American Family Therapy Academy. Each volume focuses on the practice and policy implications of innovative systemic research and theory in family therapy and allied fields. Our goal is to make information about families and systemic practices in societal contexts widely accessible in a reader-friendly, conversational, and practical style. We have asked the authors to make their personal context, location, and experience visible in their writing. AFTA's core commitment to equality, social responsibility, and justice are represented in each volume.

Vicki Dickerson has edited a volume that makes complex theoretical ideas associated with poststructural thinking and narrative therapy alive and personal. The authors help readers see the effects of dominant cultural discourses in people's lives and share richly detailed examples of the creative and innovative ways they apply narrative principles in family therapy. They invite us to reflect on the nuances of practice; how therapists can be influential while privileging client preferences and values, how to bear witness, remember, and structure questions that help clients notice what is possible and craft the alternative stories they prefer.

I hope you enjoy these chapters as much as I did. I especially appreciate the generosity of the authors in making their thinking and practices so visible and accessible and thank them for stimulating my deep appreciation for the transformative power of narrative work.

Portland, OR

Carmen Knudson-Martin
Series Editor
Lewis & Clark College

Acknowledgments

This book began as an inspiration drawn on a series of presentations at the Therapeutic Conversations Conference in Vancouver, Canada, in 2014. It occurred to me that the offerings I encountered there could benefit from a wider audience. Thus was set in motion an invitation to several of my colleagues and friends to communicate their remarkable work in writing. This *SpringerBrief* is one outcome of that endeavor.

I am continually grateful to AFTA for being my professional home for over 20 years. I am likewise appreciative of my narrative community, many of whom are also AFTA members. In both groups, I have found others who share my philosophy and values, colleagues who have become friends, persons I would otherwise not have known. The values we all hold dear include a commitment to social justice, a belief in the possibilities of change for and investment in families, and a direction toward bettering the field of family therapy.

Thanks then, of course, to the authors of this book on *Poststructural and Narrative Thinking in Family Therapy*. The material is original and published here for the first time. The authors are all practicing clinicians and teachers of narrative therapy. How fortunate we are to have them share their ideas and their experience with us.

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About the Editor

Victoria Dickerson Ph.D. has been involved with narrative ideas for over 25 years and has been active in writing numerous articles, book chapters, and two books in that period of time. She is active with the American Family Therapy Academy, having been Vice-President, board member, and committee chair over the past 20 years. She has a private practice and is the Social Media/Communications Strategist for the Family Process Institute. She lives in Aptos, California with her dog Rio and her cat Tigresa. She is the editor of this *SpringerBrief* and recently also edited a special section on narrative and poststructural ideas for the journal *Family Process*.

Contributors

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Colin James Sanders Ph.D. has taught with the Master of Counselling Program with City University of Seattle in Vancouver, Canada, since 1998, and currently is Director of the British Columbia Master of Counselling Program. Colin taught with the Vancouver School of Narrative Therapy (VSNT) from 1993 to 2013. Colin has written several book chapters, journal articles, and a dissertation relating to his theoretical perspectives and therapeutic practices over the years, in addition to articles and interviews pertaining to poetry and poetics. He lives on B.C.'s "Sunshine Coast" with his partner Gail, and their two cats. Gail and Colin have three grandsons, with Colin's children, Maya and Adrian.

John Stillman LCSW is a co-founder and clinical social worker at Caspersen Therapy and Training Center in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, where he practices narrative therapy with children, adolescents, and adults. As Director of Caspersen Training Center, he provides narrative therapy training to professionals from multiple disciplines. In 2002, he was a member of the first diplomate program taught by Michael White at the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, Australia, and is an international narrative therapy trainer. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with his wife and two sons, and dog, and raises chickens and keeps bees.

What Is Narrative Therapy? Poststructural and Narrative Thinking in Family Therapy Practice

Victoria Dickerson

Abstract The introductory chapter to this book on “Poststructural and Narrative Thinking in Family Therapy Practice” gives a brief description of narrative therapy as well as a rendition of what has become possible in the furthering of narrative ideas and practices. The work of narrative theorists and practitioners has a wide reach from the Southern Hemisphere to countries across the globe; the selections in this book not only emphasize concepts that originated with Michael White but also expand his thinking to new possibilities. The emphasis on meaning, positioning, and understanding problems as created by a cultural understanding cuts across all the chapters. It may seem that a therapist may not have a solid foot on which to stand, but then, no one really does. So, from a narrative/poststructural perspective, the work is to co-create an agreed upon place to co-research possibilities for future-preferred performances—a stance of both protest and wonder.

Introduction

Inevitably the question arises how a movement would have progressed if the creator had lived or had continued on as its leader. The passing of Michael White unexpectedly in 2008 left many of those outside of the narrative therapy community raising that question. There were predictions that his innovative approach would lose momentum and lack the creativity and continuous development that Michael brought to the work. Michael’s voracious reading and ongoing adaptation of the narrative metaphor invigorated it and all those who were learning and teaching and putting his ideas into practice (Denborough 2009). Would that kind of dedication and passion continue when his presence was no longer among us?

In the numerous psychologies that have come before—Freud, Jung, Rogers, Beck, to name a few—the work they originated has continued and morphed to a number of viable approaches and integrative therapies. Does the narrative metaphor

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