

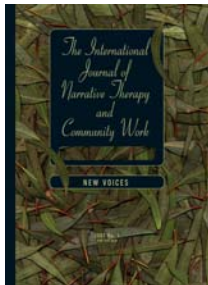


Dulwich Centre
Publications

Dear reader,

Most of the papers that can be downloaded from the Narrative Therapy Library and Bookshop were originally published in the **International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work**. We recommend this peer-reviewed journal to practitioners who wish to stay in touch with the latest ideas and developments in narrative therapy. This journal offers hopeful and creative ideas for counsellors, social workers, teachers, nurses, psychologists, and community workers.

In each issue, practitioners from a range of different countries discuss the ideas and practices that are inspiring them in their work, the dilemmas they are grappling with, and the issues most dear to their hearts. Their writings are easy-to-read while remaining rigorous and thoughtful. The first section of each issue revolves around a particular theme, while the second consists of a collection of practice-based papers on various topics. The journal is produced four times a year. If you wish to stay in touch with the latest developments in narrative practice, we hope you will subscribe and become a part of our community of readers!



To subscribe

If you wish to subscribe to this journal, please contact your local distributor:

North America: Narrative Books (USA) kenwoodtherapycenter@mac.com

UK: Narrative Books (UK) mark@hayward.flyer.co.uk

Australia & elsewhere: Dulwich Centre Publications:
dcp@dulwichcentre.com.au

Ask about current special offers for new subscribers!

Narrative Therapy Library and Bookshop

Back issues of the **International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work** are available for purchase via: www.narrativetherapylibrary.com

This website makes it possible to research, browse, and purchase writings about narrative therapy. It contains an extensive bibliography about narrative therapy and community work which can be searched via author, title, or keyword.

www.narrativetherapylibrary.com

Email: support@narrativetherapylibrary.com

Dulwich Centre website:
www.dulwichcentre.com.au

Copyright

The following material is copyright © Dulwich Centre Publications. Except as permitted under the *Australian Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission. All enquiries should be made to the copyright owner at: Dulwich Centre Publications, Hutt St PO Box 7192, Adelaide, SA, Australia, 5000; email dcp@dulwichcentre.com.au

chapter 3

Folk psychology and narrative practice

<i>Introduction</i>	60
Part One: Folk psychology	61
Paul	61
Folk psychology	66
The new psychologies	68
Revival of the internal state psychologies	72
Meaning, narrative and the reinstatement of folk psychology	73
Jill's family	77
Part Two: Personal agency & intentional states	85
The production of multi-intentioned lives	85
The production of joined lives	87
The production of multiple authenticities	89
The production of inhabited lives	91
Ricky	93
Part Three: History and culture	98
Power / Knowledge	100
Indeterminacy within determinacy	101
Narrative as a vehicle of culture	104
Larry and his family	106
Summary	114

Introduction

In the first part of this paper I link many of the practices of narrative therapy to an historical tradition of understanding life and identity that is at times referred to as 'folk psychology'. This tradition, which was largely displaced by the modern psychologies, began to be reinstated when the social sciences went through an 'interpretive turn' in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I discuss the extent to which many of the practices of narrative inquiry can be located within the context of this interpretive turn, and within the tradition of folk psychology. In the second part of this paper I clarify some of the proposals for therapeutic practice that are shaped by this tradition of folk psychology. Finally, in the third part, I focus on considerations of history and culture, and on the implications of these considerations for therapeutic practice. To begin these explorations, I will describe a therapeutic conversation that I had with Paul, who consulted me about his work as a counsellor.

Part One

Folk psychology

Paul*

Paul consulted me about some concerns that he had about his work. He was a counsellor in a local agency, working mostly with heterosexual couples. Although there was much that he enjoyed about his work, in recent times he had become increasingly uncomfortable about some of his responses to the expressions of the male partners of these couple relationships. These were responses of anxiety and uncertainty, and Paul had reached the conclusion that this had to do with deep-seated fears and insecurities that were the outcome of his 'unresolved issues'. This spectre of unresolved issues weighed heavily on him, spinning him into uncertainty, and provoking dread. As well, the fact of the presence of these unresolved issues had Paul questioning his fitness to be working with people.

Paul: So that is where I am at with this fear thing. Sometimes it's more than fear.

I'm shaking inside, virtually terrified. And I have been having a lot of questions about what I am doing in this work. I have even thought that maybe it is a sick thing. You know, that I am in this for the wrong reasons, that I have some weird motive. You know, for the motive of trying to work through the things that are unresolved, to do this for myself through my work. This has got to be pretty bad, you know.

M: Would you say a little more about this motive that ...

Paul: Well, it's probably because I haven't sorted things out with my father, that I am, and this is without realising it too, that I am doing this through my work. Which I reckon is pretty screwed up.

M: You have had this idea for a while?

* All names are pseudonyms.

Paul: Yeah.

M: Has it helped a lot?

Paul: Nope. Not so far. In fact, not one little bit [laughs] But then, I don't know what the answer is.

M: Could we go back a step or two? Do you have a sense of what it is that you are responding to in these men when you feel this apprehension most? What is it that you are experiencing at the time in your conversations with these men? Do you have any thoughts about what it is that you witness, that contributes to this fear and anxiety?

Paul: Just little things really. Nothing much. It's pretty silly really. Sometimes I think it is just my imagination.

M: Like?

Paul: Like a look, hmm ... or a way of sitting or, let me see ... certain words or a tone of voice, and ... maybe a gesture. Like I said, just little things really. Lots of really silly little things can get me going, that can trigger it. You know, it's like ... it's like as if I am always on the alert.

M: On the alert? Tell me this. You said unresolved issues, and you mentioned your father, so I am making a guess. What would expressions like these have alerted you to at earlier times in your life?

Paul: Well ... yeah, that's it. Of something brewing in my father, of a mood coming on ... Probably trouble, lots of trouble. Of manipulation too ... yeah, he was really into that. Yeah, there would be things that would have alerted me to danger.

M: Your mother too?

Paul: You mean, alerted me to danger from her?

M: No. I mean did she also have a sensitivity to these early-warning signs?

Paul: Yeah. I think we got together on this and helped each other out. We could see things coming.

M: And what sort of actions did you take in response to these early-warning signs, in response to these cues?

Paul: Well, we couldn't do much really. My mum could distract him sometimes. And so could I. You know, I always worried so much about my mum. When I think about it, I guess that knowing how to read these cues did help us to get out of harm's way at times. But, it wasn't enough ... [trails off]

M: I take it that you and your mother validated this sense for each other. This sense that you had of the potential for harm. You joined with each other in developing this sensitivity to these cues. And you also supported each other in the limited actions that were available to you both.

Paul: We would work together on it. Yeah. But ... [tears welling, and chest heaving] ... there I go again [brushing away the tears].

M: Would you mind saying a little about those tears?

Paul: It's okay. Just thinking about my mum you know, and about, well, what she went through and how hard she tried. And, and, about how unfair it was and about what she achieved despite all of this. And about our connection. Other things too.

M: What would she think about the work experiences that you are consulting me over? What is your guess about how she would be responding if she was present and hearing what I am hearing?

Paul: I think that she would feel for me a lot, and that she would be worried for me [now openly crying].

M: If I could ask her for her thoughts about why you had chosen to work in this area, what do you think she would say?

Paul: Well, she was mostly respectful of my decisions, not always though [now grinning through tears]. Sometimes she would get really mad at me. Maybe she'd say: 'Are you stark raving mad? What in the hell are you doing this to yourself for, after all that we went through?'

M: If she did see your choice of work as a significant decision, one not taken lightly, then what do you reckon she would say?

Paul: Yeah. Actually, I really think she would you know. She would probably say that it was because I wanted everyone to have a fair go. She would probably say that I knew what it was all about in lots of ways. She would probably under-stand that I just couldn't leave it.

M: So she might connect the fact of your working in this area with a purpose?

Paul: I reckon she would. She would probably say something about what I stood for, back then you know, although I wished that I'd been able to do more, I just ... I do want everyone to have a fair go that's true, and no-one should have to live under a cloud like this.

M: Could it be that these are the sort of purposes that you and your mother's life were joined in?

Paul: For sure. For sure. But she never had a chance.

M: What do you reckon it would have been like for your mum to know that these purposes live on in your work in the way that they do?

Paul: [crying again] I reckon it would have meant heaps to her. Just heaps. And hey, the surprising thing is that I hadn't really thought much about this.

M: What is your guess about how she would feel about her own life, just knowing this?

Paul: [still crying] She wouldn't feel empty. She wouldn't feel that all the hard work had been for nothing.

As this conversation evolved further there was an opportunity to evoke the presence of Paul's mother (who was deceased). Later, the theme of sensitivity to cues returned to the centre of the conversation.

M: Picking up on this sensitivity to cues that you and your mother helped one another develop. Would you say that there was a skill in this?

Paul: Well, I have never really thought about that. Till now I have just seen it as a liability.

M: What would you say now?

Paul: Yeah. Now I would definitely say that.

M: Say what? That it is a skill?

Paul: Yeah. Although I haven't thought of it in this way before. Hey!

M: What?

Paul: I really like thinking about this.

M: Could I check something with you? I understand, from all that you have said, that the insecurities, fears and unresolved issues that you have talked of are, well, that they are part of a bundle of things. That these things speak of a sensitivity to certain cues about danger and potential for harm – of skills in reading these cues. That they speak of insider knowledges about the effects of intimidation and disrespect and abuse. That they speak about a valuing of and belief in other ways of being in life, of the sort that were reflected in your connection with your mother. And that they speak of a purpose that has been present through the history of your life, about contributing to everyone having a fair go, that you are joined with your mother in. I wanted to check this understanding out with you.

Paul: That's great! I can relate to all of that, and it feels so good [grinning again].

M: What is the good feeling? Could you say something about this?

Paul: Relief ... relief ... because this isn't all so bad is it, after all. I mean, I had been feeling like I was a fake counsellor with the insecurities and all of those unresolved issues. But this isn't so bad, is it? [now laughing]

M: I was thinking something similar. In fact I was thinking about what your work would look like if everything that has been bundled up in this anxiety and fear was more explicitly present in your work with the couples that are consulting you.

Paul: I can't imagine. But I would put myself up for a conversation about that.

The ensuing conversation centred on this exploration. In it, Paul determined that he could more explicitly take up, into his work, the sensitivity

that he had to these cues, as well as these insider knowledges about the practices and consequences of intimidation and disrespect. He developed some specific ideas about how he might give expression to this sensitivity and to these knowledges, and about how this could open space for conversations about that which usually cannot be spoken of. In this conversation Paul also settled on some ideas about alternative avenues for the expression of what he had previously referred to as his insecurities. He practiced some of these ideas in the context of our meetings with me playing the part of the male partners of some of the couples that had been consulting him. For example, he would try out preludes to inquiries addressing practices of intimidation such as: 'Right now I would like to share with you the sort of questions that I would be asking you if it wasn't for my apprehension about how you might respond to them. I would appreciate it if you would reflect on these questions, and then tell me about whether or not this apprehension would be valid if I was to ask you these questions'.

Paul also thought of options for addressing the sort of circumstances that would make it difficult to proceed with these therapeutic conversations, and other options for openly negotiating the sort of circumstances that would make progress possible. I had two subsequent meetings with Paul, in which he caught me up with some really exciting developments in his work in addressing the power relations of gender with heterosexual couples. In one of these meetings he also informed me that he had found himself more able to provide an account of his work to friends in terms of his purposes without feeling embarrassed. He then joked that he longed for some more unresolved issues that we might turn upside down in our conversations with each other, and hoped that I would be able to detect a few of these. I suggested that he go down the street to get some of these, and bring them back with him next time. We both laughed.

Folk psychology

Many aspects of this account of my conversation with Paul are shaped by questions and reflections that are informed by what I refer to as narrative practices. Invariably I find that the people who consult me relate to these practices quite instantaneously, and this provides the basis for many wonderful

adventures in the context of therapeutic conversations. I believe that the familiarity that people have with this sort of therapeutic inquiry has to do with the fact that many of the practices of narrative therapy are closely linked to a particular tradition of understanding life and identity that is deeply historical. At times this centuries old tradition is referred to as 'folk psychology' (Bruner 1990).

All cultures have as one of their most powerful constitutive instruments a folk psychology, a set of more or less connected, more or less normative descriptions about how human beings 'tick', what our own and other minds are like, what one can expect situated action to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on. ... Coined in derision by the new cognitive scientists for its hospitality toward such intentional states as beliefs, desires, and meanings, the expression of 'folk psychology' could not be more appropriate ... (pp. 35-36)

According to this definition, we routinely employ folk psychology as we make our way through everyday life. We put this folk psychology into service in our efforts to understand our own lives and in making sense of the actions of others. Folk psychology equips us with a range of notions about what makes people 'tick', and provides a foundation for our responses to the actions of others – our responses to the actions of others are premised on these understandings about what makes them tick, and by our conclusions about the nature of these actions. Folk psychology also comes to the fore in our efforts to make out just what it is that is going on in the world. Among other achievements, Bruner (1990) illustrates the way that folk psychology shapes our endeavour to come to terms with the unexpected in life, provides a basis for our efforts to address obstacles and crises, and makes it possible for us to come to terms with a range of predicaments and dilemmas that confront us in everyday life.

What are the features of this folk psychology? Perhaps first and foremost, it is distinguished by the notion of 'personal agency'. It casts people as active mediators, negotiators, and as representatives of their own lives, doing so separately and in unison with others. It is a psychology that is about people living their lives out according to certain intentions and purposes, in the pursuit of what matters to them. It is a psychology that is about people going about the business of satisfying certain wants and achieving sought after goals. It is a psychology that foregrounds matters of values and beliefs, and one that

associates these values and beliefs with commitments to ways of life that characterise people. This emphasis on personal agency, on the significance that is assigned to notions of purpose, and on the weight that is given to notions of beliefs, values, and commitments, is a reflection of this folk psychology's theory of mind. In its appreciation of what it is that informs people's expressions of life, this tradition of folk psychology invokes 'mind'.¹

In regard to traditions of understanding human life, folk psychology is one of many psychologies that are now available to people for these purposes. The last century or two has seen burgeoning developments in these traditions of human understanding, and many of these developments have had the effect of displacing, in some arenas, the tradition of folk psychology that I have been drawing out here. Others have changed the shape of some strains of folk psychology – folk psychology has not remained invariant, and has taken in many of the modern psychological notions that have been manufactured in this era of extraordinary expansion in the psychologies. However, in the face of these developments, the emphasis on the significance of personal agency and on intentional states is still strongly featured in the great majority of folk psychological accounts of human action.

The new psychologies

Although folk psychology has continued to enjoy a degree of popular success, it hasn't fared all that well in the arena of the professional psychologies. It is lowly ranked and marginalised by these psychologies. It is considered to be naïve in its conceptions of life and identity, mired in the biases of local culture, and non-scientific in the priority that it gives to the notions of human agency and intentional states. In the domain of the professional psychologies, folk psychology is considered not up to the sophistication and rigour required of a modern psychology for the development of adequate or, for that matter, even reasonable, understandings of human expression.

There have been many developments that have significantly impinged on the status of folk psychology in this way. The nineteenth century saw the bringing together, into a system of professional psychology, a number of 'modern' and interlinked developments of the preceding century or two. These included:

1. The development of humanist notions of the presence of a human 'nature' that is considered to be the foundation of personal existence, and that is understood to provide the source of human expression.
2. The evolution of the conception of a 'self' as an essence that is understood to occupy the centre of personal identity. Although this idea of a self is a relatively novel idea in the history of the world's cultures, it has been a hugely successful idea, and is today quite taken for granted in the west.
3. The progressive development, from the seventeenth century on, of a new system of social control in which the normalising judgement of people's lives has steadily displaced moral judgement.²

This new professional psychology was dismissive of the capacity of folk psychology to provide an adequately reasoned and rational explanation of human action. It de-emphasised the relevance of personal agency and intentional states. In the stead of these intentional state notions it substituted a notion of 'internal states' that were considered to be universal to the human condition.³ Human expression was now interpreted as a surface manifestation of these internal states – a manifestation of unconscious motives, instincts, drives, traits, dispositions and so on. Various intrapsychic mechanisms (who hasn't heard of defence mechanisms) were constructed to provide an account of how these internal states were transformed into human expression. The development of these intrapsychic mechanisms provided the foundation of a new category of mind, the 'unconscious mind', and this quickly displaced the 'mind' of folk psychology.

Not all psychologies that construct intrapsychic mechanisms are founded on these internal state notions. For example, some fascinating developments in the exploration of mind were initiated during this era by psychologists of the ilk of William James (1890, 1892, 1902).⁴ Although these developments featured various premises about what might be called intrapsychic processes, they did not construct internal state notions. This Jamesian tradition of understanding human life has been significantly renewed over the last decade or two. For example, see Russell Meares *Intimacy and Alienation* (2000).

In contrast to the 'intentional state' notions of folk psychology, and the psychologies influenced by James, notions of the internal state psychologies were increasingly taken up and applied to the identification of and treatment of a

whole range of human maladies, the real causes of which were now considered inaccessible to ordinary human consciousness. These causes could only be discovered and known through archaeological processes guided by those equipped with the knowledge and skills in establishing the conditions under which true insight might be revealed. In many circles, these claims to the identification of an underlying and universal structure to human expression were heralded as a breakthrough in the scientific understanding of life and identity. Apart from anything else, these understandings of the new psychologies were considered to be beyond the culturally tainted understandings that are a characteristic of folk psychology. It was widely accepted that these developments would lay the foundations of a truly cross-cultural psychology.

Despite the early success of these internal state psychologies, they were soon faced with a significant challenge. During the period of World War One a new psychology emerged, one that consolidated itself in the 1920s and that became the dominant paradigm in professional psychology over the next two or three decades. This new psychology was a radical behaviourism that was inspired by the era of positivist science and by the extraordinary success of machine mechanics during the period encompassing the world wars. Radical behaviourism was dismissive of the traditions of psychology that preceded it, considering them irrational. This new psychology made concerted efforts to erase any notions of mind – folk conceptions of mind and the unconscious mind of internal state psychologies – in understandings of human action. In the domain of the professional disciplines it was largely successful in this objective (if not in popular imagination), for a time establishing virtual hegemony. The laboratory had become the context for human inquiry and for advancement in the psychology of what was now human ‘behaviour’, not human action.

In acknowledging the general success of radical behaviourism in its ambitions for professional psychology, I am not suggesting that it went unchallenged. There were many other developments in the psychologies that were questioning of the claims of radical behaviourism, but these were assigned little legitimacy and few avenues of expression.

Then came the so called ‘cognitive revolution’ of the 1950s, which initially endeavoured to erect meaning as a central tenant in psychology. It was in the context of this development that ‘meaning’ was accorded a priority in the understanding of human action. According to this, it was people’s constructions

of meaning that shaped their actions. An appreciation of how people went about making meaning out of their experiences of the world was considered the proper focus of a human psychology. Although this cognitive revolution successfully challenged the hegemony of the positivist behavioural traditions, as well as the personality theories of the internal state psychologies, unfortunately many of its early initiatives to install meaning as a central concept in psychology were subsequently derailed.⁵

Very soon, in what was no longer the era of machine mechanics in technology but the information era, this cognitive focus turned away from the production of meaning and onto 'information'. This shaped inquiry not into processes that people engage with in the construction of meaning but into the processing of information, not into the shape that these social constructions give to human expression but into the computation of information, and not into studies of the significance of constructions of meaning in regard to identity formation but into studies regarding precision in control inputs. As an outcome of these developments, notions of human agency and of intentional states were again rendered irrelevant to an adequate understanding of life and identity.

This brief account that I have given of the history of the development of traditions for understanding human action over the past century is partial. In the professional disciplines there have been many other developments, some of them relatively peripheral, and others that have, for a time, rivalled some of the more mainstream ideas. For example, most people who work in the family therapy field would be aware of the very significant influence of the 'new functionalism' of the 1950s, the legacy of which is so visible in many of the assumptions of 'systems theory' and in the practices of family therapy of recent decades. And I am sure that most people who work in this field would be aware of the spectacular success of cognitive behaviour therapy over the last decade or two. Since it is not possible for me in the space of this paper to draw an overview of developments such as these, I have had to be content to provide an account of a few of the specific, major, and historical mainstream developments that have played a significant role in displacing the relevance attributed to the mind of folk psychology in explanations of human action and expression.

Revival of the internal state psychologies

I came to my social work training in the wake of these developments. At this time, nothing much was settled. As a student studying psychology in 1967, I remember well being introduced to the claims of behaviourism and of information theory, to the debate surrounding these different representations of human action, and to some of the controversy associated with this debate. I was introduced to several versions of the internal state psychologies, including those that located these internal states in the 'family', not just the individual, and that provided the foundation for the manufacture of a new range of family pathologies and relationship dysfunctions. I was also introduced to the new functionalism in systems theory which also had the family as its primary focus. The only thing that did seem settled in the context of all of these claims and counter claims was this: In any consideration of human action and identity, notions of human agency and intentional states were irrelevant and inconsequential.

In the context of this climate, I am sure that readers could imagine, or perhaps even recall, the sort of reception provoked by the raising of unpopular lines of inquiry through questions like: 'And what about student participation in the anti-Vietnam war movement? Could this really be adequately explained away in the terms of unresolved family of origin issues? What if this was understood to be action that was principled, and therefore value and belief driven?'

In any case, whatever debate was taking place in the professional disciplines at this time, this was soon to be overshadowed by the phenomenal rise of the internal-state 'popular psychologies' in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These popular psychologies were not so much a resurgence of folk psychology, but an amalgam of:

- specific developments of the professional psychologies,
- aspects of the personal liberation philosophies that were the vogue of the 1960s,
- elements of the new consumer culture of the 1970s,
- bits of the structuralist developmental psychologies of Piaget and Erickson,
- pieces of Eastern spiritual and mystical traditions,
- facets of the new functionalism, and more.

What unified most of these popular psychologies was the status given to the self – the notion of ‘essential self’ was assigned an unquestioned status, even in the face of some extraordinary contradictions that this notion at times aroused in the realm of ideas and practice. It was a taken-for-granted fact that this was a self to be found at the centre of identity and that it existed independently of efforts to describe it.

This was the era of the great self revival. These popular psychologies were almost entirely ‘self psychologies’. There was a self to be discovered at the core of personhood, one that was composed of certain essences that are of human nature. Life was considered to be either a direct expression of these essences, or, more often, a manifestation of the repression of, or distortion of, these essences. Strongly associated with this emphasis on the self was the catharsis injunction. At this time this injunction was the foremost of all psychological injunctions. Cathartic happenings were everywhere to behold, virtually pandemic. In fact, in some circles in the early 1970s, so all encompassing were the outbreaks of catharsis that it became virtually impossible to find social spaces untouched by this phenomenon in some way. These self psychologies were linked to this catharsis injunction through a powerful ethical obligation to discover the ‘truth’ of who one was and to seek to live a life that was an accurate and authentic expression of this truth.

Meaning, narrative and the reinstatement of folk psychology

In here describing the emergence of popular psychology, I am not suggesting that this idea about self as an essence was new – in fact it is a centuries old idea that significantly informed the internal state psychologies of the nineteenth century. And the quest for ‘the truth of who we are’ wasn’t new either – it had been a major preoccupation of philosophical inquiry for several centuries. These developments of the 1960s and 1970s in popular psychology represented a resurgence and reinvigoration of some long-standing traditions of thought and practice. In recent times, these traditions have been enormously successful in capturing the popular imagination, and have undoubtedly influenced contemporary folk psychological understandings of life in many ways. However,

many of these influences do not sit at all comfortably with those strains of folk psychology that emphasise human agency and intentional states, strains that remain ever present. These strains have remained highly visible in many domains of cultural life, including in the drama of much contemporary theatre and literature, especially the novel. As well, there have been a number of initiatives in recent decades to reinstate this tradition of folk psychology as a tradition relevant to inquiry in the human sciences and social sciences.

In fact, at the very time of the resurgence of internal state notions in the popular psychologies, some of the social sciences were going through what has been referred to as an 'interpretive turn' (Geertz 1973, 1983). It was in the context of this interpretive turn that meaning was placed firmly at the centre of social inquiry. This development was perhaps most visible in the emergence of the 'new' cultural anthropology. This was a form of inquiry based on the idea that people respond to each other in terms of their understandings of each others' actions, in terms of their own theories about what they and others are up to – that people respond to each other in terms of their own psychology. This premise placed the focus of inquiry firmly on meaning – on the constructions and categories of meaning that characterised communities of people. It brought the focus of inquiry to the significance of the meanings that people attributed to experiences of life. It sponsored studies into the life shaping effects of these meanings, and their role in the construction of people's identities.

With meaning at the centre, this new cultural anthropology took the focus of inquiry to the social construction of people's realities. These were realities that were not radically derived through one's independent construction of the events of one's life. These realities were not the outcome of some privileged access to the world as it is. They were not arrived at through some objective grasp of the nature of things. Rather, people's realities were understood to be historical and social products, negotiated in and between communities of people and distributed throughout these communities. This was the case for identity as much as for any other construction; identity was understood to be a phenomenon that was dispersed in communities of people, its traces to be found everywhere, including in:

- socially negotiated self narratives,
- the impressions and the imagination of others,

- the performance of drama,
- dance, in play, in song and in poetics,
- ritual, ceremony and symbol,
- attire and in habits of life, and
- personal and public documentation, dispersed through the inscriptions entered into community stories, into personal diaries, into correspondences in the form of letters and cards, into public files in the form of profiles, assessments and reports, and in the longstanding tradition of autobiography.

With meaning-making now at the heart of social inquiry, the very processes by which people rendered their experiences of their lives sensible to themselves and to each other began to receive significant attention. This focus was the outcome of understandings that meaning does not pre-exist the interpretation of experience, and that all meanings are linguistic and social achievements. This was also the outcome of the understanding that people give meaning to their experiences of life by taking these into frames that render them sensible or intelligible. The question that was raised in this inquiry was: 'What sort of frames of intelligibility are employed by people and by communities of people in their interpretive acts?'

The outcome of this exploration was a deepening appreciation of the extent to which people routinely construct meaning by trafficking in stories about their own and each others' lives, an appreciation that in turn lead to an understanding of the profoundly significant part that narrative structures play in providing a principle frame of intelligibility for everyday-life experience. People make sense of the world by taking their experiences of life into narrative frames, by locating these experiences in the familiar stories of their lives. In taking these experiences of life into narrative frames they become situated in sequences of events that are unfolding through time according to particular themes.

This development also reinstated the mind of folk psychology in understandings of people's acts of living. There is a homologous relationship between folk psychology notions of mind and the traditional structure of narrative. In the tradition of story-making and story-telling, agents are implicated in actions that are shaped by their intentional states and these actions have the objective of achieving certain goals. In the terms of this tradition of story telling,

it is understood that the means employed in these strivings are influenced by and are revealing of what people believe, value, hope for and dream of. Taken together, these beliefs, values, hopes, and dreams come to represent what people's lives are about in general terms, and, in more specific terms, what they are committed to in terms how they wish to live their lives. The practices of life embraced by people in the pursuit of these sought after ends are seen to reflect their preferred ways of being in the world. In considerations of acts of life, the mind was back. And it was the mind of folk psychology, not a version of mind that invoked notions of internal states, of rational conception, of objective perception, of formal logic, or of the computation of information.

Before long this interpretive turn was gathering momentum in the social sciences, radically altering the shape of practices of inquiry into a whole range of social phenomena (for example, see Clifford 1988; Geertz 1973 1983; M. Rosaldo 1984; R. Rosaldo 1993; Turner & Bruner 1986). It also began to touch the human sciences (for example see Gergen & Gergen 1984; Spence 1982), and by the 1980s it had set off, in the social psychologies, numerous explorations into identity formation and human action. However, these developments in some of the human sciences did not much touch mainstream psychological and counselling practices over this time.

I believe that many of my own explorations of narrative therapy can be located within the context of this interpretive turn, and within this tradition of folk psychology. Many of the practices of this therapy routinely evoke notions of the personal agency and contribute to the rich description of a range of intentional states. These practices have the potential to bring forth the mindedness of folk psychology even in circumstances in which people's actions are routinely perceived to be discontinuous with what is known about them, and, on account of this, constructed as mindless or pathological or crazy. Practices that reinstate 'mindedness' also can have the effect of restoring people's cherished understandings and preferred identity claims, and can contribute to a range of options for people to respond to untoward events in ways that are in keeping with these preferred claims. I believe that the story of Jill and her family is illustrative of some of these practices.

Jill's family

I am meeting with Anne and David, and their son and daughter, Sam and Belinda for the first time. They have come to talk about a tragic event in their family – the death of their eldest daughter, Jill, through a fatal overdose that was not an accident, some three years ago. Things had gone okay in Jill's life for much of her childhood, but had then unravelled somewhat in her later years. Being from a relatively remote country region, she had gone away to school at twelve years of age, and things didn't work out all that well for her there. She struggled with peer abuse and with feelings of acute loneliness, but did not confide much of this to her parents. According to them, she eventually fell in with the wrong crowd, and seemed to embrace values that were totally at variance with those that she had grown up with, and which they could not understand.

The fact that she had been such a 'strong and adventurous and funny little kid' before things went so totally off the track had given Anne and David the sense that they had never really known Jill in her later years. Or was it that they hadn't really known her in her earlier years? It was all so confusing for them. Whichever the case, Anne and David felt badly about this. And Jill's distancing from them in the period leading up to her suicide had been very painful, particularly for Anne, who had such a strong sense of having failed Jill in her time of greatest need. Sam had also taken it very hard, as he felt that, over this time, there had been some opportunities to talk with Jill that he hadn't taken up.

Had it all been for nothing? It had become all just too sad and painful to think about, let alone to talk to each other about, and, as an outcome of this, the memory of Jill's existence was a rapidly diminishing sense for the members of this family. And no one in this family wanted to be on these terms with their memories of Jill.

Anne: So, I guess that this brings you up to the present, and why we decided to make this appointment. So where do we go? [throws arms into the air in an expression of despair]

M: Is it okay for me to ask some questions about the circumstances surrounding Jill's suicide?

Anne: Yeah. That's okay. We expected that you would want some of the details, didn't we [turning to David].

David: Yeah. We have been preparing ourselves for this.

M: [glancing at Sam and Belinda]

Sam: Yeah. It's okay. [turning to Belinda] Isn't it sis.

Belinda: [nods]

M: I have the sense from what you have been telling me that Jill was strongly resolved to do this. To take her own life. I was thinking about all the thought that she must have put into it, and about the preparations that were ...

Anne: That's true. Yes.

David: [nods]

M: Were these sort of actions in character for Jill?

Anne: Well, I don't know. I don't think that she really prepared for much at all really. I'm just thinking about how everything went off the rails, you know.

M: What about occasions upon which she was strongly resolved to do something big or difficult or daunting, that she followed through on? Can you think of any?

Anne: Well ... I ... [looks to David] Can you?

David: This has me thinking of other times. Yeah. When she was younger, she was really plucky. She really was a plucky little kid. Wasn't she?

Anne: That's true.

David: Do you remember that time we were at the beach. She must have been four years old, and it was time to go, and she was carrying all of those toys and her hat and her clothes and trying to eat a sandwich at the same time as she was trying to get up those sand hills. And you knew she wouldn't let anyone help. And along came a woman who scowled at us. One of those telling off looks. She tried to pick things up for Jill. You remember.

Anne: Yeah. Yeah. [smiling] Jill shouted: 'It's my life!' And she was only four years old! Can you believe that? She was only four years old! And what did she do? She just chucked everything back down the hill again, the sandwich and all, and then went tumbling after them, trying to grab them all up again as she went, much to this woman's horror. [Anne is now laughing, along with David]

David: There she was standing at the bottom, all covered in sandwich and sand, and grinning from ear to ear.

Belinda: [laughing] Yeah, I've heard that story before.

Sam: I can think of lots of others just like that one. [also laughing]

M: So when thinking about the strength of her resolve, it doesn't totally surprise you? The way that she took her life, I mean.

Anne: Well, actually no. I guess not. Not really. But I reckon she had lost this for a while.

David: Yeah, for sure.

M: So, it sort of fits with the plucky person she was. And anything else?

Anne: Well I don't know what this has got to do with it. But she always kept trying at things when others would give up. When she was younger that is.

Belinda: Yeah. But also when she was older. I remember how hard it was for her with all of the teasing she went through. It would have been better if she'd let us do something about it, but she wouldn't have it. But she sure didn't give up trying to tackle it. She went against it, didn't she? She didn't just accept this. She had these ideas about what was right and fair, about what was okay and what wasn't.

Sam: Yeah, that's sure true in one way, but ...

David: But then she got into some bad things and did some things that really were really scary and not okay, that caused other people a lot of pain and heartache. So, I don't know ... It just doesn't make sense, does it?

M: I wonder how this fits in. If it does fit in, that is.

David: What do you mean?

M: Belinda said something about where Jill stood on what was right and what wasn't, on what was okay and what wasn't okay. If Jill had witnessed herself doing things that went against these values, how would this be for her?

David: Actually, I reckon this would have been difficult for her. She wouldn't have been at all happy with herself.

M: Do you have any thoughts about whether or not this could relate to the decisions that Jill was making about her life prior to her death?

Anne: I didn't think about this, but maybe there is something in it. I reckon that she went against so many of her principles, and in lots of ways she did this. So, maybe there is some connection, that this was in a funny way about her principles. It could have been, it really could have.

M: I want to check to see if I am getting your meaning. Are you saying that there may have been something about taking her life that was principled? Not in the way that anyone would have wished, but ...

David: Yeah. I guess ... like Anne said, in funny sort of way. I guess that is what we are saying [sighs].

M: [turning to Anne, who had echoed David's sigh] Anne, is that where are you with this?

Anne: Yeah. This is something I can see. But I am really surprised to hear myself admitting this. Shocked even.

M: You both sighed. Could I ask what these sighs are about?

Anne: It's a strange sense of relief really. I mean there would have been a lot of other ways for her to do something. But this is something to hold onto, and ... well, I am desperate for that, totally desperate for that.

M: David?

David: For me too. Some relief I guess.

M: Going back to the circumstances of her death, I understand that she distanced from you in the period leading up to this. And that this was very hard for all of you.

Anne: [starts crying]

M: Would you say something about those tears? Would you help me understand what they are about?

Anne: [pause] I was thinking about my connection with Jill. I thought that we had always been so close. But I must have been wrong. [pause] I can't help but feel that I not only failed to understand, but that I failed her.

M: Tell me. How did you reach this conclusion?

Anne: Because she didn't come to me in what must have been her time of greatest need. I'm sure that I failed her [sobbing] [pause]. Even though the special relationship that we once had was gone, well ... anyway, clearly she didn't think that she could rely on me or that I had anything to offer.

M: Did anyone else here also think that there was a special connection between Anne and Jill?

Belinda: Yeah. Sure. Sure there was. She was always sending mum cards and things, [turning to Sam] wasn't she?

Sam: Yeah. If she was going to tell anyone anything, it was mum she would tell.

M: So what's your sense of how she regarded her connection with your mum?

David: She just treasured it, I know it. That's so clear to me as well. To all of us [Belinda and Sam nod in agreement].

M: Okay. So, in the light of this, what sense do you make out of this distancing from Anne in the period leading up to her death? Would this distance have made it more or less possible for Jill to take her life?

David: I don't know if this is right but I think that I've got an answer for that. I don't reckon that there is anyway that Jill could have followed through on this decision to end her life if she had been close to Anne at the time, and I reckon that Jill knew this. I'm not saying things were perfect. I know that there were some hard times and some differences, you know the usual sort of thing ... But she just treasured her relationship with her mother.

M: So, there could have been a purpose to this distancing from Anne, and from the rest of you? That ...

David: Yeah. Now that I think about it, I'm sure of it.

Sam: I can see it too.

Anne: [now sobbing]

David: [holding her in his arms, also crying]

M: In some way – and I know this might sound like a strange way of putting it – from what you are saying it is my understanding that this distancing may have been a testimony to Jill's connection with Anne? Can I check this understanding with you?

Sam: [also crying] Yeah, I can see this too

Belinda: [also crying] Me too.

M: [also tearful] You have given me a strong sense of what your tears are about. But I would like to ask a couple of questions about what's happening for you? Is that okay?

Anne: It is okay.

M: I know that you have had lots of tears. These tears that you are having now, are these the same tears? Or are they different tears?

Anne: For me they are different.

M: Okay, so they are different tears for you. Are they taking you to the same place though, or to a different place. To where you have been before, or are they journeying you to somewhere else?

Anne: It is to a different place.

M: Would you be prepared to tell me about this, or would you prefer not to?

Anne: It is to a place where ... let's see ... I still feel very sad. But it is different somehow. How is it different? [pause] Well ... these tears are not taking me down that well and into the void, into the nothingness that I feel that I have been drowning in. It is easier ... these tears that is, and it is with some new thoughts, taking me into a ... yes ... a lighter place. [pause] I am sure that I will never lose this sadness, but if I can hold on to what I am feeling now,

I know that I am not going to be so overwhelmed. And yes [pause]. Of course, there are lots of good memories.

M: I was just ...

Anne: There is something else ... yeah ... I've got something back that I thought I had lost. And I didn't expect this, I really didn't.

M: What's your guess about how Jill would be responding to this, responding to this development?

Anne: Well ...

Belinda: She would want this for mum. [turning to Anne] Mum, she would want this for you so much, I just know she would [turning to Sam] Wouldn't she Sam?

Sam: Yeah, and for us too.

M: Do you mean that she wouldn't want the fact of her death to take away from ...

Belinda: Her connection with all of us.

Sam: Yeah.

M: Would it be okay if I asked some questions that could have the effect of evoking Jill's presence here? Because I would like to get a sense of the words that she might use to say all of this, and a sense of the way that she would say it. I had some other ideas for our conversation as well. I am curious to know more about how your lives are different for having had Jill as daughter and as a sister. Because it is my guess that this has changed you all in some way, that there are some ways that you think and that you are in this world that are a testimony to her life. Would these directions fit for you, or do you have some other ideas about where it might be best for us to go now?

The family members wanted to follow up both of these lines of inquiry, and this provided a basis for some extraordinary conversations over the course of three or four meetings. Following this Anne and David called a gathering of extended family and friends for the purposes of honouring Jill's life and the legacy of her life. In the context of this ceremony, Anne, David, Sam and Belinda talked openly of Jill's suicide, rendering this and the events surrounding

it sensible to all present in terms of what they understood she had lived for, in terms of what they understood she had stood for in her life, and in terms of the significance of her relationships with the members of her family. In this ceremony, the conclusions it appeared Jill had reached that called for her suicide were acknowledged. Even though her death would always be powerfully lamented, there was now some acknowledgement of the fact that Jill's suicide did fit with many of the things that they knew of her, and that it wasn't mindless or crazy. Anne, David, Sam and Belinda successfully renegotiated the terms of their memories of Jill. The facts of her existence, and the significance of this to their lives, were experiences that could now be readily called upon by them all.

I believe that this account of my conversations with Jill's family illustrates the sort of options that become available to people when space is created for the generation of the 'mindedness' of folk psychology. It was in the context of these conversations, through explorations that were deriving of notions of personal agency and intentional states, that Jill's actions were rendered mindful. These were explorations that were consistent with a reinstatement of the 'mind' of the folk psychology traditions that I have been describing in this paper.

Part Two

Personal agency and intentional states

In several places in this paper I have made reference to the significance that is attributed to notions of personal agency and intentional states in the context of narrative explorations of human action and identity formation. At this juncture I will make a number of clarifications about what is being proposed in this. I believe that this is appropriate because this emphasis on the significance of these notions of personal agency and intentional states is often construed as a proposal for traditions of understanding that do not fit at all well with the folk psychology tradition that I have been describing. In attending to these clarifications I will draw attention to the part that therapeutic practices shaped by this folk psychology tradition can play in the production of ‘multi-intentioned’ lives, of ‘joined’ lives, of ‘multiple authenticities’, and of ‘inhabited’ lives.

The production of multi-intentioned lives

At times the emphasis given to notions of personal agency and intentional states in narrative practices is read as a proposal for:

1. strictly rational understandings of life,
2. the privileging of contemporary ideas about individual and autonomous thought and action,
3. a renewal of the internal state psychologies in which these intentional states are re-cast as a phenomena that are intrinsic to people’s lives, or for
4. the revival of highly deterministic cause/effect accounts of human action.

However, this is not what is being proposed. Rather, this ‘take’ on personal agency and intentional states is to propose that, in response to a person’s expressions of life, there is a range of opportunities for people to engage with each other in the negotiation and renegotiation of the sort of identity conclusions that are informed by a tradition of folk psychology. It is in this

tradition that notions of personal agency and intentional states are attributed to and implicated in people's acts of living. These notions of personal agency and intentional states are present in those conclusions about people's actions that are shaped by categories of identity that feature purposes, values, beliefs, hopes, dreams, visions and commitments to ways of living. These categories of identity can be likened to 'filing cabinets' of the mind, into which people routinely file and cross reference a range of identity conclusions about their own and each other's lives.

These identity conclusions are not independently and autonomously manufactured, but are socially negotiated and renegotiated in communities of people. And they are not singular. These identity conclusions exist within the context of a multiplicity – as an outcome of the ongoing social negotiation of these identity conclusions, people's lives become multi-intentioned. This emphasis on the significance of the social negotiation of people's identity conclusions is not reproducing of internal state notions. These identity conclusions are not taken to be a reflection of phenomena that are intrinsic to people's lives that are manifested in their actions. Rather, what is being proposed is that it is these conclusions themselves that have consequences for people's lives and relationships. People's acts of living, including their responses to each other, are shaped by the identity conclusions that are filed into the identity categories of the mind, which are circumscribed by contemporary culture's favoured notions of identity. These identity conclusions significantly constitute people's existence.

For the purposes of further clarification, I will here contrast the opportunities that I believe folk psychology offers for the renegotiation of identity conclusions with those associated with the internal state psychologies. The categories of identity associated with notions of personal agency and intentional states are distinct in relation to those of the internal state psychologies categories of 'motives', 'drives', 'needs', 'attributes', 'traits', and so on. In the context of the internal state psychologies, human expression is understood to be a surface manifestation of some essence or force or element that resides at the centre of identity, or to be a manifestation of a distortion or disturbance or imbalance in these forces. In the context of people's difficulties in life, these expressions are invariably considered to be expressions of pathology, deficit or dysfunction. It is upon the basis of such conclusions that many of the

knowledges of the professional disciplines, and the systems of analyses that are constructed through these knowledges, are called forth. It is proposed that through recourse to these systems of analyses the pathologies, disorders and dysfunctions of people's lives can be identified and definitively known, and that these then can be subject to 'treatments of choice'.

In contrast, I believe that the intentional states of folk psychology are radically open to the sort of renegotiations that have the potential to throw people's expressions of life into a multiplicity of different lights. When it comes to people's difficulties in life, in the context of these intentional state understandings, human action is not indicative of disturbances of the internal states. Rather, these difficulties raise options for people to traffick in conceptions of personal agency and intentional states notions, and in this there are options for the attribution of alternative purposes not previously appreciated, for the restoration of cherished understandings and preferred identity claims (as in the story of my work with Jill's family), and for the elaboration of moral commitments that diverge from those that have been previously acknowledged. In the context of these understandings nothing is settled – considerations of life are taken into the subjunctive, a great deal is open to renegotiation, diversity is emphasised, and people's lives become multi-purposed and multi-layered.

The production of joined lives

Externalising conversations are often, but not always, featured in the practices of narrative therapy. In response to the problems of their lives, it is not uncommon for people to form highly negative conclusions about their own and each other's identity, and about the identity of their relationships. It is in these circumstances that externalising conversations open options for people to redefine or revise their relationships with the problems of their lives, and to so break their lives from these highly negative identity conclusions. In this redefinition of one's relationship with problems, the negative identity conclusions that invariably invoke some internal state of some sort – usually associated with some account of deficit, pathology, or dysfunction – no longer speak to people of the totality of who they are. It is in the context of these conversations that people derive a sense that their identity is not at one with the problems of their lives. Amongst other things, this opens space for yet

other conversations that contribute to the generation of alternative stories of people's lives, and to the renegotiation of identity conclusions. People invariably respond to these conversations by engaging in the performance of some of the preferred claims about their lives that are associated with these alternative identity conclusions.

I have always regarded these alternative identity conclusions that are derived in these conversations to be socially negotiated in communities of people, and to be products of history and culture. I raise this point here because, despite the care that I have taken in my writing and teaching to consistently emphasise the social basis of these alternative identity conclusions, it is sometimes assumed that these externalising conversations are associated with the proposal of an autonomous self that is being freed from the oppression of the problem. I believe that the vigour of this assumption is a reflection of the pervasiveness of western culture's taken-for-granted understandings that construct a self at the centre of personhood.

I believe that the proposal of an autonomous self has been strongly supported in the development of the internal state psychologies. If it is so that the proposal of the autonomous self is associated with modern developments in the cellularisation of life (and this is argued quite convincingly by many historians of thought), the internal state categories of identity contribute to developments in the sub-cellularisation of life. According to Foucault (1973, 1979), the proposal of the autonomous self seems closely associated with the development of modern systems of social control in which people are separated from each other by being allocated precise locations in a range of continuums of health and tables of performance – locations that specify one's distance from the socially constructed and desirable norms regarding the healthy and fully functioning individual. It would appear that the proposal of internal state categories of identity take the cellularisation a step further – the autonomous individual is separated into relatively autonomous internal states that life becomes an expression of. As an outcome of this development, people are alone in their 'motives', isolated in their 'deficits', and vulnerable in their 'psychological needs'.

In contrast, I believe externalising conversations that contribute to options for people to separate from the sort of negative identity conclusions that invoke accounts of deficit, pathology and dysfunction, and re-authoring conversations that provide opportunities for people to generate new identity conclusions that

feature folk psychological notions of personal agency and intentional states, have the potential to overturn this cellularisation of life. Rather than contributing to the sort of internal state conclusions that are potentially isolating of people from each other, these conversations contribute to the development of identity conclusions that provide people with a sense of their lives being joined with the lives of others around shared themes that are characterised by a range of purposes, values, beliefs, hopes, dreams, visions, commitments, and so on (in this respect, consider how transporting the therapeutic conversation was for Paul – from being isolated in his deficits to becoming joined with his mother’s life around shared purposes and skills).

In summary, therapeutic conversations that provide options for people to traffick in intentional state notions raise new possibilities for the joining of identities, provide an antidote to the normalising judgement that is so intimately associated with the development of the autonomous self, and contribute to the de-cellularisation of life.

The production of multiple authenticities

In discussing the processes of therapy, I have from time to time made reference to dominant and alternative stories, and frequently contrasted these (for example, see White 1989, 1992). There have been many occasions in which others have taken this distinction into humanist renderings. These are renderings that substitute ‘dominant story’ with ‘oppressive’ or ‘false story’, and that substitute ‘alternative story’ with ‘true’ or ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ story. In these renderings the alternative stories of people’s lives are accorded a naturalistic status in much the same vein that this status is attributed to the identity categories of the internal state psychologies. By this account it is understood that the conversations of narrative therapy are libratory conversations – it is considered that these conversations make it possible for people to overthrow the oppressive stories of their lives, and provide a context for the discovery and unveiling of their true or authentic stories. At times these renderings of the dominant- story/alternative-story distinction endure, despite the fact that this is contrary to what I have proposed, and the fact that many of the ideas associated with narrative therapy raise very specific questions about

such renderings.

Rather than contrast stories as oppressive and authentic or as false and true, I have been interested in the constitutive or shaping effects of all stories. Stories about life and identity are not equal to each other in their constitutive effects. It is clearly apparent that some stories sponsor a broader range of options for action in life than do others. For example, I am sure that everyone would appreciate the fact that the deficit-centred stories of people's lives sponsor a particularly narrow range of options for action. In addition to my interest in the constitutive or shaping effects of all stories, I have been interested in conversational processes that are richly describing of those stories of people's lives that open more options for action in the world rather than fewer. It is in the context of these conversations that people not only experience their lives as multi-storied, but clearly become more narratively resourced. It is in the context of becoming more narratively resourced that people are able to attribute significance to a range of experiences of life that would otherwise be neglected.

In calling into question the rendering of the dominant story/alternative story distinction that establishes the juxtaposition of oppressive and real or authentic stories, and that casts therapeutic conversations as libratory, what becomes of the notion of authenticity? Rather than understanding authenticity to be a phenomenon that is discovered as an outcome of some private and individual achievement in which the 'truth' of a person's identity is revealed, or as an outcome of the identification of their 'true' story, within the context of the tradition of thought associated with narrative therapy, authenticity is regarded as a public and social achievement in which a person's preferred identity claims are acknowledged. It is understood that people are dependent upon social processes of acknowledgement for the 'authentication' of their preferred identity claims; that, as an outcome of this social acknowledgement, people experience being 'at one' with these preferred claims.

Preferred claims about people's identities are embedded in the alternative stories of their lives, and therapeutic conversations that are structured by the 'definitional ceremony' metaphor (Myerhoff 1982, 1986) present a range of options for the rich description of these stories.⁶ These are conversations that engage people as outsider witnesses in the telling and retelling of the stories of each others' lives. It is in the context of these tellings and retellings that people experience themselves being at one with the preferred claims about their

identities. Therapeutic practices that are shaped by this understanding contribute to the development of circumstances under which a range of preferred identity claims can be acknowledged, under which there are options for people to experience 'multiple authenticities'.

The outsider witnesses that contribute to retellings of the stories of people's lives that are powerfully authenticating of their preferred identity claims can be drawn from these people's families and wider kinship networks, from their friendship networks, from the professional disciplines, from the local community, from lists or registers of people who have previously sought therapeutic consultation and who have volunteered to contribute to the therapist's work with those who follow in their footsteps, and from elsewhere.⁷ Jill's family called together friends and extended family members to a ceremony that was honouring of Jill's life and actions. This ceremony was structured around a series of tellings and retellings of the stories of Jill's life. These tellings and retellings were powerfully authenticating of the preferred identity claims about the lives and relationships of the members of this family, and of their sense of Jill's ongoing presence in their lives.

The production of inhabited lives

There appears to be intimate link between narrative structures and the fantastic capacity that people have for reflexive engagements with life. This reflexivity is a capacity to achieve distance in relation to the immediacy of life. It is witnessed in our ability to stand out of the flow of lived experience, sometimes only momentarily, and to review the events of our lives from other vantage points. It is largely in the reading of our lives as lived through the structure of narrative that we are afforded the purchase to stand back from our lives. This reading of our lives through narrative structures provides the opportunity for us to render meaningful that which previously wasn't, and to re-conceive of that which has already been rendered meaningful. This generation and regeneration of meaning allows for a sense of narrative authority, and for an experience of living that people describe as akin to stepping in and out of the flow of life.

This generation and regeneration of meaning also occurs across time. Our

reflexive capacity provides us with new alternatives for what to make out of:

1. the past in response to any new meanings that are assigned to our experiences of the present,
2. the present in response to any new meanings that are assigned to our experiences of the past,
3. the future in response to any new meanings that are assigned to our experiences of the past and/or the present, and
4. the past and/or the present in response to any new meanings assigned to proposed or hypothetical futures.

An example: Those therapeutic conversations which are tracing of the history of a unique outcome or exception through the trajectory of a person's life often introduce options for a creative re-engagement with one's past. This is a re-engagement that provides possibilities for the identification of purposes that were not previously fully grasped, of commitments not previously felt, and of moral considerations that were previously unconsidered. In turn, it is through these recountings that people arrive at new understandings of current predicaments and dilemmas, of why events took the turn that they did, and of what these might mean for the future of their lives. All this occurs in the backwards and forwards movement of therapeutic conversations.

When in the past I have described various options that therapeutic conversations can provide for these reflexive re-engagements with life, at times it has been assumed by others that narrative practices deal with abstractions of life, rather than life itself – that this contributes to a certain therapist detachment in therapeutic practice, and requires the people who consult therapists to participate in therapeutic conversations in a detached fashion that takes them away from more direct expressions of their experiences of life. However, detachment is not synonymous with the sort of distance that provides opportunities for the reflexive engagements with life that I have described in the above paragraphs. The distance that is achieved in the reading of life through narrative structures is one that provides people with wonderful opportunities for a more significant and dramatic engagement with their own lives. It is a distance that opens possibilities for people to explore new options in self regulation, and in the habitation of their

own bodies. It is a distance that presents options for people to more fully inhabit their lives, as the following account of my conversations with Ricky illustrates.

Ricky

Ricky consulted me over a personal crisis following a recent relationship break-up. This break-up had occurred eleven months before our first consultation. At the time, Peter, Ricky's partner of seven years, suddenly announced his intention to depart from the relationship, declaring that he had never really loved Ricky. He then listed his complaints and dissatisfactions with Ricky, about which he had never previously spoken of, or even hinted about. Peter's parting comment was that Ricky and relationships don't go together. Ricky was shattered: 'Is there anywhere that one can go from here when so racked with self-doubt, with one's sense of ability to judge the intentions of others in tatters, and with one's trust in ruins? Is there anywhere that one can go from here with all of this baggage, quite apart from the loss that one is experiencing?' Ricky concluded that his ability to trust had been damaged beyond repair, and he began to stand back from his social network. A friend had responded to this by talking Ricky into seeing me.

Ricky: So, there you are. All of this was shattering. Apart from everything else, it has taken away my trust. It is a fear of trusting. I have this inability to trust, and ... well, you know ... I think it has damaged me. And I don't know if I could ever learn to trust again.

M: Would you say a little more about this. About this sense of a loss of trust, or an inability to trust?

Ricky: It is like, well ... like I just feel that I can't fully trust anymore, and what's life going to be like for me, because I am not getting over this. I feel like I am stuck with this deficit.

M: Is this something that has become evident to you in your connections with others? Has it been noticed by any of your friends?

Ricky: Yeah. That's how I got to here, seeing you. Only the other day I was talking to a friend who felt that I was being a bit guarded. And they said, this

friend, that is, said: 'You have a problem with trust. You should see someone about this.'

M: And so here you are. I understand that Peter's announcement and his subsequent actions were quite unexpected at the time. Looking back, are you aware of anything that might have prepared you for what was to come.

Ricky: I suppose, but you know what they say about hindsight.

M: It is always easy to be wise ...

Ricky: Yeah. It is always easy to be wise after the event, isn't it.

M: Tell me about some of that wisdom of hindsight.

Ricky: Well, of course, I should have seen it coming, shouldn't I. And I have been giving myself a hard time over this, haven't I.

M: Are you telling me that there are some things that you are conscious of now, or aware of now, that you were not before?

Ricky: You could say that. Yeah, I guess that would be right. At least I hope that is right. Well, a wish, maybe. Perhaps even that's a bit strong.

M: If faced with similar circumstances today, and being aware of what you are now aware of, perhaps even to the extent of being able to predict such a turn of events, do you think that you would be investing so much trust in a relationship? Would this be appropriate?

Ricky: No. No, it wouldn't. I would withhold it. But then, I didn't see I coming then, so how could I do this? Well, I really don't know, do I?

M: Let's just speculate. If you did see something like this coming, what would you be doing with this trust? What sort of attitude would you be having towards this trust?

Ricky: I am not sure what you mean.

M: Would withholding trust in such a circumstance suggest that you were putting a high value on your trust or a low value on it, respecting it more or less, preserving it or being reckless with it, or holding it back or ... Or

perhaps none of these, but something else maybe?

Ricky: Well, thinking about it like that, I would say the other ones. The first ones. I would say that I would be being respectful of my trust, that I would be valuing it more.

M: You said that you had become guarded in your present day-to-day connections with people, so I have the sense that you haven't just continued to live your life as you had previously lived it, and that you haven't cast your trust about freely in an attempt to recreate the life that you had. In the light of what we have just been talking about, what are your thoughts about what this says about your position on trust?

Ricky: Let's see. Well, I can only think that I am, well, let's see, maybe cherishing this trust now. Do you think that I am cherishing this trust more? [pause] Yeah, I guess that is it.

M: Okay. Does this mean that you now wouldn't make this trust so available to others in certain circumstances, or that ...

Ricky: Yeah. Look, I didn't think that I would hear myself saying this, but I guess that is what I am saying.

M: Why didn't you think that you would hear yourself saying this?

Ricky: Because it is nothing that I would have put to words before. There really is a shift here, but I really hadn't stood back from it and given much thought to this until now. I mean until right this minute.

M: Do you have any thoughts about why you have been cherishing this trust more? And about what it might say about other developments in your life?

Ricky: I suppose it is about a ... [pause] Yeah, more of a determination to be respected. Yeah, that's probably it. And perhaps I'm not going to let it be taken for granted. My trust, that is. I've had enough of that, I have.

M: Anything else that this might reflect? Like ...

Ricky: Well, like what?

M: What's your guess about what this says about your purposes, or about what

you value?

Ricky: Maybe it is that I don't intend to give up on how I want to live my life.

M: On how you want to live your life? Tell me, of all the people who have known you, can you think of anyone who might have appreciated these things about you? Who might have appreciated this determination, or who might have acknowledged the choices that you made about how you wanted to live your life?

Ricky: Well ...

Ricky identified two figures of his history who he believed had appreciated him in these terms – an ex-lover and an aunt. I encouraged him to provide accounts of what it was that these figures might have witnessed that could have contributed to this appreciation of him. The accounts given by Ricky established a basis for yet further explorations about what it was he had intended for his life. Following this meeting, Ricky contacted this ex-lover and his aunt, told them about our conversation, and shared with them his conclusions about how their acknowledgement of him had contributed to his life. For our third meeting, at Ricky's invitation, we were joined by these two people.

Apart from other things, these conversations provided a foundation for establishing a clear account of the circumstances under which Ricky would be prepared to offer trust in his connections with others, and the circumstances under which this trust would not be available. He subsequently met again with the friend that he had mentioned early in our first conversation. In this meeting, Ricky described the circumstances that he understood were favourable and unfavourable to his trusting of others, and informed this friend that in any act in which he extended this trust he was presenting a gift that was offered provisionally. This led to some significantly new and positive developments in this connection. Ricky no longer had a sense of having 'a problem with trust'.

This brief description of my conversations with Ricky provides an account of the way that narrative structures can provide a foundation for reflexive engagements with life. Upon being encouraged to speculate about his likely responses should he have been conscious of what he hadn't been

conscious of in his relationship with Peter, Ricky concluded that he would have withheld trust. This conclusion provided the basis for a flurry of meaning-making activity in which Ricky's responses to the day-to-day events of his life were redefined, in which specific developments in his relationship to trust were named, and in which what this reflected about his intentions for his life were determined and richly described.

In these therapeutic conversations, the structure of narrative provided Ricky with purchase to stand back from life and to re-conceive of that which had already been rendered meaningful. This provided a frame for a regeneration of meaning in which constructions of integrity displaced constructions of deficit. It was from the distance achieved in this reflexive engagement that Ricky was able to discern the circumstances under which this trust would be available to others. And the subsequent performance of this discernment in his conversation with his friend is an example of the way that the distance achieved through reflexive engagements provide possibilities for people to more fully inhabit some of the domains of their own lives. Amongst other things, these are possibilities in the regulation of their own actions in response to the actions of others.

In the next and final section of this paper, I will turn to considerations of history and culture.

Part Three

History and culture

To argue that culture is socially and historically constructed, that narrative is a primary, in humans perhaps the primary mode of knowing, that we assemble the selves we live in out of materials lying about in the society around us and develop a theory of mind to comprehend the selves of others, that we do not act directly on the world but on beliefs we hold about the world, that from birth on we are all active, impassioned meaning makers in search of plausible stories, and that mind cannot in any sense be regarded as natural or naked, with culture thought of as an add-on – such a view amounts to rather more than a midcourse correction. (Geertz 2000, p.196).

In various places in this paper I have addressed the notion that life is a social phenomenon. For example, I have reviewed how constructions of life and identity are socially negotiated in communities of people, and I have drawn attention to the central role that processes of social acknowledgement play in the authentication of people's identity claims. But life is also a social phenomenon in that it is the outcome of people's engagements with specific modes of thought and life that are cultural and historical. These modes of thought and life compose life.

Our understandings of life and identity are not arrived at in an historical and cultural vacuum. Whether these understandings pertain to our sense of personal identity, to our accounts of other people's actions, to what one might do to change the way things are, or whatever, they are all informed by specific ways of thinking that are based on a stock of cultural knowledges. Not only are these knowledges historical and cultural products, but so too are the skills that are evident in our ways of living, in our acts of life. I am using the word 'skills' in an unconventional sense – these are those skills that are represented in all of those little everyday acts of life that have to do with the making of a 'living',

with getting through the day, with the forging of an identity, and with the fabricating of relationships. It is only through such a definition of skills that we can conceive of what might be referred to as practical 'insider know-how', that we can come to fully appreciate this know-how in the lives of the people who consult us, and that we can join with people in the co-researching of what might be described as 'local knowledge'.

These skills are shaped by cultural modes of living that include specific practices of relationship – for example, those practices that constitute relations of power – and specific practices of self-formation, at times referred to as 'technologies of the self' or 'disciplines of the self' (Foucault 1979). These practices of relationship and practices of self formation are linked to cultural knowledges of life and identity in relationships of mutual dependency.

Over many years of writing and teaching, following Foucault I have drawn attention to the relationship between these knowledges and cultural practices, and to their constitutive role in expressions of life (for example see White & Epston 1989). And I have also described and illustrated the relevance of these considerations to the practice of therapy. However, at times these considerations pertaining to the relationship between knowledge and practice or knowledge and power ('power' on account of the fact that many of these practices constitute relations of power) have, in my view, been misinterpreted. For example:

- 1) When I am describing the relations of mutual dependency of these knowledges and practices, it is at times assumed that what is being proposed is a new version of that familiar refrain: power is knowledge and knowledge is power.
- 2) When drawing attention to the constitutive role of cultural knowledges and cultural practices in the formation of life and identity, it is at times assumed that I am proposing a direct causal relationship between these knowledges and practices and people's expressions of living – that people's expressions of living are directly determined by these knowledges and practices.
- 3) When describing and illustrating the relevance of these considerations to a therapeutic practice that brings into focus to the stories of people's lives, it is at times assumed that I am conflating the idea of narrative with these cultural knowledges and practices, serving to obscure many things, including the power relations of local culture.

In order to further emphasise the significance of this understanding that life is a social phenomenon that is constituted through specific modes of life and thought that are historical and cultural, and to further clarify these considerations pertaining to knowledge and practice, I will address these three relatively common misinterpretations in turn.

Power / Knowledge

Contrary to interpretations that substitute knowledge with power and power with knowledge, attempts to describe the relations of mutual dependency between these culturally informed knowledges on the one hand, and these practices of relationship and techniques of the self on the other, do not lend themselves at all well to the familiar refrain 'knowledge is power and power is knowledge'. In explorations of these practices of relationship and techniques of self, our attention is drawn to relational practices, and to a 'know-how', that is manifest in skilful practice of life. Although these practices and skills are linked to and supported by certain cultural constructs, they are not in themselves constructs. When I meet with men who are referred to me for engaging in abusive actions, these actions are shaped by a technology of power, which is a practical know-how that is shaped by specific skills. These skills make possible the overpowering of whoever happens to be the subject of these actions (usually women and children), the isolation of this subject from others, the destruction of this subject's trust in their own perception of events, the assignment of culpability for the abuse to the subject, and so on. Although these actual relational practices are linked to and supported by knowledges that construct, amongst other things, male supremacy and entitlement, they are not one and the same.

Another example: When I am engaged in therapeutic conversations with people who are struggling with anorexia nervosa and bulimia (usually, but not always, women) I am introduced to concepts of identity and to constructions of the body that are informed by knowledges of life that are of contemporary culture. I am also introduced to a history of relational practices, which, amongst other things, include various operations of power that these people have been subject to. As well, I am introduced to a range of techniques of the self that include self evaluation, the precise documentation of inputs and outputs (of all

manner of things from calories through to one's thoughts), the rigorous policing of one's life that makes possible the achievement of 'life as ritual', and so on. Again, although these relational practices and techniques of self formation are linked to and find their support in cultural knowledges that construct life and identity, they cannot be reduced to these knowledges. Rather these practices are linked to cultural knowledges through relations of mutual dependency. This consideration is highly relevant to therapeutic conversations, for it calls attention to the importance of not only addressing people's constructions of their own and each others' identities, but also to the importance of addressing the very practices of relationship and techniques of self that accompany these constructions.

Indeterminacy within determinacy

In regard to these observations about the constitutive role of cultural knowledges and practices in the formation of life, what about those conclusions that assume that what is being proposed is a direct causal relationship between these knowledges and practices on the one hand, and people's expressions of life on the other? Attention to the constitutive role of cultural knowledges and cultural practices in the formation of life and identity is not necessarily associated with an assumption that life and identity are strictly determined by cultural modes of life and thought – attention to these considerations is not necessarily associated with the proposal that there is a one-to-one relationship between these cultural knowledges and practices on the one hand, and life as it is lived on the other. In fact, I have always assumed that this is not the case – that in constructing their lives and identities, people do not passively reproduce these cultural knowledges and practices. I have never considered these knowledges of life and practices of living to be 'inputs' that are directly reproduced as 'outputs' in people's acts of life. Rather, considerations of the constitutive role of cultural knowledges and practices have provoked my interest in questions like:

- *How do people engage with these cultural modes of life and thought?*
- *How do these cultural forces that are composed of knowledges of life and practices of living find their way into people's minds and into their expressions of life?*

- *How is it that people pull the materials of culture together to form an identity, to make a life?*
- *If expressions of life are versions of these knowledges and practices, how are these versions achieved?*

It is questions like these that have led me to further explorations of meaning making. For it is so clearly apparent that in engaging with these cultural modes of life and thought, in pulling together the materials of culture into a life, people are performing acts of meaning – the recomposition of these modes of life and thought requires acts in the discernment of meaning. And I believe that it is also apparent that this discernment of meaning is an achievement, one that is often hard-won. So, it is my fascination with these questions that has powerfully reinforced my interest in the activity of meaning making, and in the structures, frames and circumstances that facilitate this.

Some twenty years ago this interest in the discernment of meaning took me to the work of Gregory Bateson (1972, 1979), who described two principal mechanisms at work in this achievement. He proposed that all responses in the ‘world of the living’ are founded on the drawing of distinctions around contrasting descriptions of the experiences of life – according to Bateson, it is this ‘double description’ that provides a basis for the drawing of distinctions in the world, that establishes conditions for the discernment of meaning. Bateson also described the conditions that were required to establish, in people’s minds, a receiving context for ‘news of difference’. This receiving context was a network of presuppositions that provided a frame for the receipt of news of difference, one that would render this news sensible or comprehensible. Bateson often referred to these receiving frames as ‘restraints of redundancy’, and, according to him, it was these restraints that made it possible for people to respond selectively to their experiences of the world – for people to ‘pluck the new from the random’. I have always understood the network of presuppositions that form the basis of these restraints of redundancy to be culturally informed, and the meanings that these restraints give to the events of the world to be carriers of culture.

More recently, considerations that are aroused by these questions have taken me to the work of Jacques Derrida (1978) who, like Bateson, proposes a relational understanding of all meanings. In focussing on texts, Derrida strongly challenged the idea of ‘presence’ – that is, the idea that meanings inhere in

whatever it is that is being described and are 'present' within people's consciousness – and asserted that all descriptions are arrived at through a process of discernment. In his textual analyses, Derrida sought to demonstrate that all description is achieved in response to other contrasting descriptions that are absent from but implicit in the text. Although I have not considered people's lives to be texts, I do believe people's expressions of living to be based on a foundation of discernment, which is a meaning-making achievement. And I have explored ways in which these absent but implicit descriptions might be excavated through the deconstruction or unpacking of the stories of people's lives (White 2000).

While the ideas of Bateson and Derrida provide some account of how people assemble their lives out of 'materials lying about in the society' through the activity of meaning making, it is those propositions about the centrality of the structure of narrative in this achievement that have more significantly shaped my explorations. According to these propositions, it is narrative structures that provide people with the receiving frames that make it possible for them to attribute meaning to the events of the world – the structure of narrative provides a principal frame of intelligibility through which people engage in the activity of making sense of their experiences of life. In structures of narrative, events are linked together in unfolding sequences through time according to a theme or a plot. These structures also provide the basis for people to derive a range of conclusions about what these events might say about their own intentional states, and the intentional states of others – including purposes, values, beliefs, hopes, dreams, and commitments in life. The mind of folk psychology is invoked by these means. These structures of narrative, and the specific narratives that are formed in the context of these, are not strictly determining of the meanings that people give to their experiences of life. Rather, they contribute to conditions of indeterminacy⁸ within determinacy (White 1991). This indeterminacy within determinacy provides a vexing and challenging conundrum.

The extent to which persons are self-interpretive – they are not passive in their response to lived experience, but active in ascribing meaning to this – leads us to a second consideration of the significance of agency and the subject in the constitutionalist account of identity ... As the interpretation of experience according to narrative is an achievement, then so is identity. There are always contingencies thrown up in life for which a

person's dominant self narrative is not tailor-made. These must be managed. As well, there are many gaps in personal narratives. Such gaps are the outcome of the degree to which ambiguity and uncertainty feature in all stories. In the living of, or in the performance of, self-narrative, these gaps must be filled. And there are always dilemmas to be resolved in the performance of self-narrative: dilemmas that arise from the extent to which inconsistencies and contradictions are a feature of all stories.
(White 1992, p.41)

To summarise, to propose life to be a direct reproduction of the knowledges and practices of culture excludes considerations of how these knowledges and practices find their ways into people's minds and into their expressions of life, of how it is that people pull the materials of culture together to form an identity and a life, and of the processes by which these cultural knowledges and practices are reworked in people's expressions of living. To propose life to be a direct reproduction of culture renders invisible the specific achievement of meaning-making, along with a range of experiences associated with this. This includes the complexities of the social negotiations that provide the basis of this achievement, as well as all of the personal exertions, compromises, struggles and dilemmas associated with the production of meaning.

Narrative as a vehicle of culture

I have briefly reviewed some considerations relating to the activity of meaning making, to the structure of narrative, and to the constituting role of cultural knowledges and practices. I have proposed that in this constituting role, these knowledges and practices are not strictly determining of life. It is my understanding that the narratives of people's lives are not radically constructed – not derived in a social, cultural and political vacuum – but are shaped by these knowledges and practices that are cultural and historical. It is also my understanding that these narratives are carriers of culture – they are a vehicle for these knowledges and practices. Embedded in these narratives are knowledges of life that sponsor particular ways of living, and that are associated with specific practices of relationship and techniques of self formation.

This understanding of narrative as a cultural vehicle is featured in therapeutic conversations that are unpacking of the stories of people's lives and identities. Not only does this unpacking contribute to the deconstruction of the negative identity conclusions associated with these stories, but it also renders more visible the modes of life and thought that are carried in them – that is, through the unpacking of the stories of people's lives, the extent to which these are the bearers of historical and cultural ways of being in the world and thinking about the world becomes more explicitly known. These therapeutic practices bring the world into therapy in the sense that many routine and unquestioned understandings about life and ways of living become visible as cultural and historical products, and these are no longer accepted as certainties about life or truths about human nature and identity. In this way, what might be termed 'the politics of people's experiences' are made visible and contestable.

The understanding of narrative as a cultural vehicle is also featured in the re-authoring conversations of narrative therapy. In these conversations people do not radically construct alternative stories of their lives and claims about their identities. The alternative identity claims and stories of life that are derived in these conversations are the bearers of other ways of being in the world, and other ways of thinking about the world, that are also cultural and historical. On account of this consideration, these re-authoring conversations are not just about drawing out the alternative stories of people's lives. In addition they also provide a context for the identification of and the rich description of the knowledges of life and practices of living that are associated with these stories. Thus, it is not just those therapeutic conversations that are unpacking of the stories of people's lives and identities that bring the world into therapy. Re-authoring conversations achieve this as well.

This appreciation of the cultural and historical character of these other knowledges and practices has the effect of expanding therapeutic inquiry into the broader realms of living, providing people with new possibilities for drawing on and seeing through culture and history in their efforts to address their predicaments and their concerns. This gives people a basis for the development of some familiarity with ways of thinking and with practices of relationship that were previously little known, for options in self-formation previously unseen, and for the recognition of problem-solving skills not previously acknowledged or available.

The following account of my meetings with Larry and his family provides an example of the sort of possibilities that can become available when the cultural and historical aspects of the alternative stories of people's lives are considered.

Larry and his family

I am meeting with Larry and his parents, Imelda and Eric. I am hearing that Larry, now thirteen years of age, has been a longstanding source of concern to his parents. He has also been a source of concern to the police, to his school teachers and to the parents of other children. Imelda and Eric are particularly worried about Larry's frequent tantrums, his general aggression, and his risky actions. He has already come to the attention of several social service agencies, and has at times been considered 'uncontrollable'. From all accounts Larry has been unmoved by the many efforts so far initiated to encourage him to reform his ways.

Imelda and Eric decided to seek further consultation following a recent crisis. In a 'fit of anger' Larry had held a knife to his mother's throat. This was the 'last straw' for Imelda. In response, she packed her bags and left the family home, vowing never to go back. She stayed with a cousin for a couple of days, and then returned, stating that she would give things one last try. Consulting me was part of the terms of this one last try.

In the early part of my consultation with this family I heard about how angry Larry gets towards his mother, and I learn that it is not at all unusual for him to threaten her at these times. In response to this I seek information about the specificity of his actions when angry:

M: Okay, so I am hearing about how angry you get towards your mother. I'm curious. Do you ever get this angry towards your father?

Larry: Yeah.

M: Would you say more angry, less angry, or about the same?

Larry: Same.

M: So, have you ever held a knife to your father's throat?

Eric: [shakes his head]

Larry: No.

M: Would you ever consider it?

Larry: No

Eric: [shakes his head]

The fact that Larry would raise a knife to his mother's throat when angry with her but not follow suit with his father when angry with him had me speculating about the gender politics expressed in his actions. It is not unusual for sons to advocate for the power relations of gender in their interactions with their mothers. On account of this speculation, I was curious to know about Eric's position on Larry's actions:

M: Larry, do you know what your father thought about this?

Larry: What?

M: What he thought about you holding a knife to your mother. Was he for it or against it?

Eric: [takes a quick breath, registering surprise at my question]

Larry: Against it I s'pose.

M: How did you know that?

Larry: [shrugs his shoulders] Just do.

M: [to Eric] Is that right?

Eric: I am surprised you would ask this question. Of course I was against it!

M: [to Imelda] Is this something that you would have known? That Eric was against this?

Imelda: Of course I did. I wouldn't have stayed if I hadn't known this.

M: Have you always known this about Eric, that he would be opposed to Larry threatening you?

Imelda: Eric isn't always that tuned in to what is happening, and we have had words about this. But in the end I do get his attention, and he's always been respectful.

M: [to Eric] Is this something that you would relate to?

Eric: Yeah. Imelda's right about this. It is true that I have let her down at times, but I feel I have done my best to respect her as woman. It's a principle with me.

M: Is your respect here specific, or is it a general principle in your interactions with women?

Eric: I would like to believe that it is general. What do you think Imelda?

Imelda: Yeah. I reckon it is a general thing. He doesn't treat women bad.

M: [to Eric] I guess that you have witnessed men's disrespect of women.

Eric: Sure have. Why, even at work there has been some harassment. I never want any part of it. I won't join in.

M: Does anyone in your workplace know how you feel about this? Would anyone there know what your position is on this?

Eric: [shrugs] I guess so.

M: Right now I am curious about what has provided you with a foundation for this principle of respect, about how you have managed to hang on to this, and about whether you have found this difficult at times. I was also curious to know about what hanging onto this says about the sort of values and beliefs that might be important to you. What are your thoughts about this?

It was with this question that I initiated a line of enquiry that I hoped would provide a framework for Eric to more richly describe these other ways of being for men in relation to women. However, despite the fact that Eric was clearly interested in these questions, his responses were quite sparse. In the context of our conversation, the knowledges and practices associated with these ways of being remained thinly known. But I did learn that Eric's father, Kevin, would have also disapproved of Larry's threatening of his mother, and that he would support what Eric had been saying about respect.

Larry's abusive actions towards Imelda had been the focal point of our initial conversation, and I had a strong appreciation of the importance of Larry assuming full responsibility for these actions. However, while such considerations about a person's responsibility for perpetrating abusive actions are paramount, so too are considerations about who might best assume responsibility for addressing such actions – about whom it might be appropriate to engage in acts of redress. And this is a different consideration. It was my understanding that Larry's abusive actions were shaped by knowledges that contribute to a particular constructions of men's and women's identities, and by practices of power that are associated with these knowledges. I did not believe that Larry was a primary author of these knowledges and practices – they are out there, at large, in our communities. On account of this, I believed that it would not be appropriate for me to establish a context in which it was required of Larry that he take sole responsibility for initiating acts of redress. Rather, as these knowledges and practices have been developed and finely honed in men's culture, I believed that in these circumstances it would be more appropriate for a community of men to join with Larry in this initiative.

It was with these considerations in mind that I began to ask questions about Larry's evident surprise at much that he was now hearing from Eric. The responses to these questions determined that Larry was open to further explorations of men's ways of being in relation to women, and the option of a separate meeting with Larry, Eric, and Kevin was suggested. The purpose of this meeting would be to put Larry more in touch with his father and grandfather's position on matters of men's relationships with women, to generate some proposals for steps that Larry might take to mend what might be mended, and to assist Larry in explorations of other ways of being in the world as a young man. As part of the plan, if Larry wished he could invite another young man to the meeting to be a support person for him (he eventually chose his cousin, Peter), and it was agreed that all proposals arising from the meeting would be taken back to Imelda to give feedback on. Eric liked the idea, and thought that Kevin would be more than happy to play this part. Larry said that this was okay by him because 'it takes the heat off'. Imelda was very relieved to hear this plan, as, for so long, she 'had born the brunt of responsibility for stopping Larry's abuse'. This meeting took place two weeks later, and the following transcript is taken from a point mid-way through:

M: So, Kevin, that is how your name came up. Eric implicated you in his ability to resist these disrespectful ways of relating to women. Does this strike a chord for you? Do you have a sense that you might have contributed to such a foundation? Or are you surprised to hear this?

Kevin: Well, I can't recall it ever being discussed, but I do strongly believe that women are to be respected, and I haven't liked what Larry says and does at times. [turning to Larry] You know that, don't you son? [turning back to me] But I don't know how much it is okay for me to interfere.

M: Eric, you talked with me about your father's respect of women. From what you have seen, how does that translate into action? What does your father do that is a demonstration of this respect?

Eric: Well, he does listen to women. He doesn't put down their ideas, and he doesn't raise his voice when he disagrees with my mother, or when he is feeling frustrated. And I have seen him frustrated.

M: What has this meant to you?

Eric: Well, I guess he has been a good example for me in lot's of ways.

M: [turning to Kevin] What is it like for you to hear this?

Kevin: A bit of a surprise really!

M: What is it like for you to be implicated in Eric's actions in this way?

Kevin: Well, let me see. I've also got lots of shortcomings. But I would have to say that it is pleasing, because we all want a good life for everybody. It isn't anything that I really knew, because it is nothing that we have talked about. To be honest, I would also have to say that this is something that I probably don't think about enough.

M: [addressing Kevin and Eric] Would you now have a go at talking to Larry about two things. First, would you have a go at catching him up on what this says about what you both value and what you believe, and on your understandings about what responsibilities are to be honoured in men's relationships with women. And second, would you have a go at catching him up on your ideas about how this can be put into practice in men's

relationships with women. This second point is important. It is one thing to know something, it is another thing to have the skills to act on this knowledge.

Kevin: That's a lot. But we will give it a try.

Eric: Yeah, we could do that.

M: And maybe I could help to break it up a bit by asking you some more questions as we go along?

Eric: Yeah. That would definitely help a lot.

Over the course of the ensuing conversation, other ways of being for men in relation to women were drawn out. This included knowledges that differently shape gender constructions, and, as well, a range of practical examples about how to put these knowledges to work. At points during this conversation I encouraged Larry and his cousin, Peter, to engage in a retelling of what they were hearing. It was apparent that both Larry and Peter were genuinely surprised over much of this, and by what it was that Eric and Kevin were respecting in each other. At this juncture, I introduced some questions about the broader contexts of these ways of being as men:

M: Kevin, I would like to know about how you got introduced to these ways of being a man in relation to women. Would it be okay with you if I asked some questions about this?

Kevin: Fine, fine. Go ahead. Maybe I'll learn a few things [chuckles].

M: Earlier in our conversation Eric was telling me that you can make yourself available to things that are hard for you to hear. When you think of this ability, who else do you think of ?

Kevin: Let me see now. The first thing that comes to mind is an uncle of mine who was a youth leader in a boys' club when I was young. He had a position of authority, and I remember some of the blokes that were in this position were pretty strong about the correct line, like little dictators. But my uncle wasn't like this. You could still have an opinion around him. And he could cope with hearing things that were hard to hear. Everyone just knew this

about him. And I can remember him taking advice from my aunt. Which, I know now, at the time, I know wasn't that usual [meaning that it was unusual to witness men in these positions taking advice from their women partners].

M: Do you know how he achieved this?

Kevin: Never asked him. But it might have had to do with the fact that he came from a family with a 'background'.

M: A background?

Kevin: Well, his family was different. I remember something about Quakers, but don't have a lot of details.

M: Did your father have this background too?

Kevin: No, when it comes to patience and understanding, he wasn't too flash. This uncle was his brother-in-law.

M: [turning to Eric and Larry] Did you know this about Kevin's uncle?

Eric: No way.

M: What about you Larry?

Larry: Nope

M: Peter?

Peter: Me neither.

M: Kevin, could you tell us some stories about your uncle. I would like to know what you saw in his actions. This way we might get some clearer ideas about what he thought about things, and about how he went about things. For example, about what he knew to do in responding to what was difficult. About what he knew about respecting women. And about the ways that he held himself open to other people's opinions when these other people weren't male friends, or men with authority.

Kevin: Sure, let's do it.

In the ensuing conversation, many particularities of the knowledges and practices of living that characterised this uncle's ways of being were described.

I met with Kevin, Eric, Larry and Peter on two further occasions, and then on three more occasions with Eric, Larry and Imelda, pursuing further this inquiry into alternative ways of being for men in relation to women. In these meetings, these ways of being became more richly known to all of the members of this family, and it became evident that these were becoming more influential in guiding Larry's actions. It was also evident that Eric was becoming more proactive in addressing some of the gender politics expressed in his workplace. Imelda happily provided feedback on a range of proposals for how Larry might respond to her in a variety of circumstances, including those in which he experienced frustration, and on proposals for the steps that he might take to mend what might be mended in his relationship with her.

It was established that any future concerns about Larry's relationship with Imelda could be referred back to this committee of men who would take the responsibility of joining with him in the development of further proposals for addressing these concerns, and of supporting him in initiating actions based on these proposals. I would be available to join this committee of men if this was found to be necessary. It wasn't. Subsequently, on two occasions when Larry was having difficulty in figuring out how to respond to Imelda's concerns, the committee was reconvened, and a range of options caucused on. Larry experienced no difficulties in taking up some of those options deemed most appropriate.

In this work with Larry and his family, I understood the claims about Eric's preferred ways of being in the world as a man to be associated with knowledges of life and practices of relationship that were cultural and historical. This consideration shaped an inquiry that provided a basis for the development of a familiarity with ways of thinking and with practices of relationship that were previously little known, of options in self-formation previously unseen, and for the recognition of problem-solving skills not previously acknowledged or relatively available.

Summary

At the outset of this paper I proposed that the familiarity that people have with narrative inquiry, and their responsiveness to this inquiry, has to do with the fact that many of the practices of this inquiry are closely linked to a particular tradition of understanding life and identity that is deeply historical. Following Bruner (1990), I referred to this tradition as 'folk psychology'. This is a tradition of understanding that is distinguished by the notions of personal agency and intentional states, and is one that was displaced over the period of the development of the modern psychologies.

This folk psychological tradition of understanding life and identity was reinstated in the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly through the 'interpretive turn' in cultural anthropology. This reinstatement of folk psychology was accompanied by renewed interest in the activity of making meaning, and in the structures of narrative. This activity and these structures are the primary focus of many of the practices of narrative therapy that bring forth the mind of folk psychology.

In clarifying some of the proposals for therapeutic practice that are shaped by this tradition of folk psychology, I discussed the production of 'multi-intentioned' lives, of 'joined' lives, of 'multiple authenticities', and of 'inhabited' lives. I then discussed some of the implications of the acknowledgement that personal and community narratives are historical and cultural products, and the carriers of specific knowledges of life and practices of living that shape people's ways of being in the world.

At different points in this paper I included transcripts of therapeutic conversations along with brief summaries of my conversations with Paul in regard to the unpacking of 'unresolved issues'; with Jill's family in relation to rendering her suicide sensible; with Ricky about his relationship with trust; and with Larry and his family over addressing the power relations of gender. Through the inclusion of these stories it was my intention to illustrate some of the ways in which the practices of narrative therapy are shaped by notions of personal agency and intentional states, and, on account of this, strongly linked to a particular historical tradition of human understanding referred to as 'folk psychology'.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank David Epston for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Notes

1. For a fuller account of the constituents of folk psychology, see Jerome Bruner's *Acts of Meaning* (1990).
2. I have a longstanding interest in Foucault's (1973, 1979) analysis of the significance of this development in the shaping of modern psychological understandings and practices. According to this analysis, in the context of this normalising judgment, people are assigned a precise location in relation to norms about life that are chiefly constructed in the modern disciplines. This normalising judgement also provides certain incitements for people to operate on their own lives in specific ways in order to close the gap between these assigned locations and these norms. In as much as this assignment of a precise location in relation to these norms is cellularising or individualising of life, the introduction of the idea of internal states that shape human expression contributes to the sub-cellularisation of life. According to this analysis of modern power, the sub-cellularisation of life that is achieved through the construction of internal states contributes yet further to mechanisms of social control. This sub-cellularisation provides further opportunities for people to engage in the normalising judgement of their own and each others' lives. And it has the effect of inciting people to operate on their own and each others' lives in efforts to reproduce the psychological norms that have been constructed through the history of the professional disciplines.
3. In contrasting internal and intentional states I am following Jerome Bruner (1990). Other contrasts work equally well. For example there are the essentialist/non essentialist, structuralist/non structuralist, and the naturalistic/constitutionalist distinctions.
4. The Jamesian tradition was displaced following Freud's Clark University lectures in 1908. It is interesting to speculate as Beels (2001) does on what would have happened to the early twentieth century's psychologies if this had not occurred and had not captured the professional and public imagination.
5. Jerome Bruner (1990), a figure who contributed significantly to this cognitive revolution, provides an interesting account of this history and the outcome of this development.

6. For discussion of this definitional ceremony metaphor and of its relevance to therapeutic practice, see White (1995, 1997, 1999).
7. Over the past two decades David Epston and I have explored many possibilities for recruiting audiences to the preferred developments of people's lives. We have never considered these explorations to be peripheral to our consultations. Rather we have viewed them as highly significant to the authentication of the identity claims associated with these preferred developments, and to the endurance of these developments. Engaging with the work of the cultural anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff (1982, 1986) in the latter part of the 1980s contributed further to our understanding of the processes associated with the audience's contribution to the authentication of the preferred developments and identity claims of people's lives (for example, see White & Epston 1989). Our acquaintance with Barbara Myerhoff's notion of the definitional ceremony also contributed to further developments and refinements in what we came to call (following Myerhoff) 'outsider-witness' practices. These retellings are invariably quite transformative in their effects.
8. I have borrowed this term and its sense from Wolfgang Iser (1978) and Jerome Bruner (1986).

References

- Bateson, G. 1972: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York: Ballantine.
- Bateson, G. 1979: *Mind and Nature: A necessary unity*. New York: Dutton.
- Beels, C. 2001: *A Different Story: The rise of narrative in psychotherapy*. Phoenix, Arizona: Zeig, Tucker & Theissen.
- Bruner, J. 1986: *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. 1990: *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, J. 1988: *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth century ethnography, literature and art*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Derrida, J. 1978: *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. 1973: *The Birth of the Clinic: An archaeology of medical perception*. London: Tavistock.
- Foucault, M. 1979: *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*. Middlesex: Peregrine Books.

- Foucault, M. 1980: *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Geertz, C. 1973: *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geertz, C. 1983: *Local Knowledge: Further essays on interpretive anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geertz, C. 2000: *Available Light: Anthropological reflections on philosophical topics*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Gergen, M.M. & Gergen, K.J. 1984: 'The social construction of narrative accounts.' In Gergen, K.J. & Gergen, M.M. (eds): *Historical Social Psychology*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.
- Iser, W. 1978: *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- James, W. 1890: *Principles of Psychology*, Vol.I and II. New York: Holt.
- James, W. 1892: *Psychology: Brief course*. London: Macmillan.
- James, W. 1902: *Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Longmans.
- Mearns, R. 2000: *Intimacy and Alienation: Memory, trauma and personal being*. London: Routledge.
- Myerhoff, B. 1982: 'Life history among the elderly: Performance, visibility and remembering.' In Ruby, J. (ed): *A Crack in The Mirror: Reflexive perspectives in anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Myerhoff, B. 1986: 'Life not death in Venice: Its second life.' In Turner, V. & Bruner, E. (eds): *The Anthropology of Experience*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Rosaldo, M. 1984: 'Toward an anthropology of self and feeling.' In Shweder, R.A. & Le Vine, R.A. (eds): *Culture Theory: Essays on mind, self, and emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosaldo, R. 1993: *Culture and Truth: The remaking of social analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Spence, D. 1982: *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and interpretation in psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
- Turner, V. & Bruner, E. (eds) 1986: *The Anthropology of Experience*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press
- White, M. 1991: 'Deconstruction and therapy.' *Dulwich Centre Newsletter*, No.3. Reprinted in Epston, D. & White, M. 1992: *Experience, Contradiction, Narrative & Imagination: Selected papers of David Epston & Michael White, 1989-1991*.

- Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications. Reprinted in Gilligan, S. (ed) 1993: *Therapeutic Conversations*. New York: W.W.Norton.
- White, M. 1992: 'Men's culture, the men's movement, and the constitution of men's lives.' *Dulwich Centre Newsletter*, Nos.3&4. Reprinted in McLean, C., Carey, M. & White, C. (eds) 1993: *Men's Ways of Being*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- White, M. 1995: 'Reflecting teamwork as definitional ceremony.' In White, M.: *Re-Authoring Lives*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. 1997: 'Definitional ceremony.' In White, M.: *Narratives of Therapists' Lives*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. 1999: 'Reflecting-team work as definitional ceremony revisited.' *Gecko*, Vol.2. Reprinted in White, M. 2000: *Reflections on Narrative Practice*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. 2000: 'Re-engaging with history: The absent but implicit.' In White, M.: *Reflections on Narrative Practice: Essays & interviews*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. & Epston, D. 1989: *Literate Means to Therapeutic Ends*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications. Republished as White, M. & Epston, D. 1990: *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. New York: W.W.Norton.