

## Reflecting on Re-authoring Conversations

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Re-authoring as a term in itself elicits this feeling of empowerment within me - it makes me feel as though I am reclaiming agency in spaces of my life and it only makes me think of what then happens to my clients. These resources made me think of a particular client with whom I have been working for around 2 years now. From the youtube video on danger of a single story by Adichie - I was thinking of what would happen if I only heard single stories of my clients and never tuned in to these beautiful story lines of their lives. This client of mine would just be a 'cross - dresser' as the medical personnel who referred them to me said. She would not be a woman trapped in a man's body - who knew it since before she could walk or talk and has memories of being a little girl inside an assigned boy's body since the age of 3. She wouldn't be a brilliant film maker who is documenting her whole journey - so that she can make an informative movie for other transwomen who will find help through her. In my journey with her - in the first session I positioned myself as a curious listener - wanting to know more about her story and heard it all - but towards the end of the session when she said that she has been told by many that this is 'abnormal' I felt the need to take the position of inquiry - and together we questioned the dominant discourse of who decided this is abnormal - who holds the microphone when they talk about gender identities and why is there just a single story about it .

This inquiry was influenced by Foucault's (1980) words:

*There can be no possible exercise of power without certain economical discourses of truth which operate through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. ( p.73)*

At some point in this conversation - I did feel that my positioning traversed and was a little more centered/influential because I wanted to emphasize on how gender identity is never 'abnormal' no matter how many people tell her otherwise.

What helped with being okay with this positioning was understanding my own cis-heterosexual privilege and acknowledging how my client fit into the term 'DISGRACEFULL' as Dr. Sen (2018) writes:

*Disability, Intellect, Sexuality, Gender, Race/Religion, Age, Culture, Education, Finances, Useful contacts (I was told recently, 'you are nothing without your contacts'), so yes, Useful contacts, Looks and, finally, Language. Together, it is—DISGRACEFULL! This acronym defines the dominant discourse.*

That is where we started the journey of all of the times she spoke of not feeling like it is wrong but really enjoying herself and celebrating her gender - we spoke of whose presence she was able to safely be herself in, and she spoke of how as a kid, in her own home she would dress up in her mother's and sister's clothing secretly and we explored what steps helped in getting her to do that - she spoke of how she understood that she would be reprimanded if found out, but she still wanted to experience it. She spoke of numerous times she has done this over the years - until recently when she decided she did not want to hide anymore and we explored what led to this

turning point in her life. We then discussed what her hopes and dreams for the future looked like and what values she held that made her come out to the family and decide to be in therapy. In our conversations, we decided that therapy can be the starting point for her to live through these values and work on future hopes and actions (White, 2003b; Carey & Russell, 2003).

Time Period	Landscape of Identity	Landscape of Action
Remote history Age 0-3 years	“I think before understanding the nuances of gender - I already knew mine. I valued my choice before I understood what choice is”	“My sister used to dress me up in her clothes and I never protested - but when I would be dressed by my mother in assigned male like clothes, I would cry a lot’
Remote history Age 3 - 6 years	“I wanted all the toys - I did not want to be put inside a gender box - I wanted to play with both barbie dolls and beyblades” Value - autonomy	“I would see sides of the bed my dad slept in vs the side my mum slept in and I would nap on my mum’s side - telling myself I am sleeping on the girl side of the bed”
Distant History Age 6 - 17	“I started understanding that I need to hide some practices but not stop them” Value - autonomy, self identity	“I would sneakily wear my sister’s clothes and make up and sometimes my mum’s saree”
Recent History Age 17-21	“I started gradually telling my family about this and dressed up around them” Value - being herself and not hiding who she is	“I came out to my mother and sister about who I am and I told them that I want to take therapy to explore this more”
Present	“Reading more, learning more about this space, attending sessions - I have my own name and pronoun” Value - achieving what she had known before she knew gender	“Through therapy I decided that I could be whoever I want for this one hour so I chose a name, a pronoun and gradually felt like this is who I want to be for all the hours of my life - so I started bringing my family into the therapy sessions - I started vocal training, HRT and I had a coming out party with my close friends and family”
Future	“Making a documentary of my journey for all other transwomen who can access this for free” Value - a sense of belonging to the community and helping other members	Started documenting parts of her journey, started journaling and working on a script of pre and post procedures in the journal. Reached out to support groups and other public forums of transwomen communities. Active planning of surgeries and procedures in therapy.

**Table 1. Landscape of Identity and Landscape of Action Table which explored her journey (influenced by the work of Sen, 2019)**

A lot of my work with this client involved exploring “*notions of ‘intentional states of identity’ which contrast with notions of ‘internal states of identity’*” (White 2001b).” And in each story - I looked for unique/sparkling outcomes and explored them further to understand what values, beliefs and hopes these moments held for her. We also eventually held a coming out ceremony - which she termed as a “Renaissance” party - and she came out to close family and friends with her new chosen name - which meant ‘a celestial being’. This came from the hope that once close friends and family knew - she would have a support system to rely on, when she comes out to the world. It also resonated with Dr. Sen’s (2018) idea of how ‘*a story is not a story until it has an audience*’. Additionally, we also identified community forums, online support groups and other transwomen events that she could go to - so that she finds community support. My work with her also involved sessions with her family so that they could be outsider witnesses to her journey through the years of therapy and they expressed pride and joy. We explored ideas for her party together to have her close friends too as outsider witnesses who became a part of definitional ceremonies (White 1995, 1999; Carey & Russell, 2003). Working on the family’s notions towards her gender and sexual identity, along with accessing other community based resources helped the therapy session move from the neoliberal individualistic ideas and our therapy space involved collectivistic community based integration work (Sen, 2019). Two years ago sessions with her had a single story of a person referred to as a ‘crossdresser with an abnormal fetish’ by health professionals - the present space is multi-storied with her choosing her own name, pronouns, and exploring how she could start the journey of being who she always knew she was. Telling, and retelling this story - through our sessions, through the family and other collective gatherings, through community support groups and soon to come documentaries, today we have this woman - who is proud of herself and is committing to the process of sharing her stories with the world, so that other individuals with similar challenges can find some help and meaning with their stories.

## References

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