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Editorial

Dear Reader

This edition is a mosaic of stories on love, loss and legacy.

We live in times of growing uncertainty and hatred depending on where we are located in terms of geography, gender, race, religion, class, caste and more. I hope this edition speaks to you and, through you, reaches others who are experiencing profound loss or injustice.

We have introduced family narrative therapy as a theme in this issue. One of the moving stories (Abdul Ghaffar Stanikzai et al.) is that of an Afghan family navigating the complex grief of losing their loved one and their homeland. Their experiences spark reflection on how a nation's rich cultural heritage can be totalised in the wake of decades of war and conflict. Yet, even in their pain, we witness tangible and intangible legacies of resilience, hospitality and enduring love.

Families, too, can face this “unstorying” due to the effects of historical trauma and hard times. We hear stories of the powerful counter-narratives when there is a commitment to do things differently (Shannon McIntosh) and inviting wonderfulness that families can draw on during these times and as a result of adversity (Tamara Wilson). KJ Wiseheart's co-created animation work with a neurodivergent person and her family shows us how we can innovatively document apparently small moments that contain “acts of brilliance”.

The peer-reviewed articles bring in diverse contexts from working with young people, critiquing our practices and weaving in spirituality with narrative ethics. Angela On Kee Tsun's article unpacks ideas of underachievement in young people and the construction of failure identities in Hong Kong. I resonate with this theme as I work with young people in India who are up against similar normative expectations. Angela explores how young people can resist the “eye of success” and surveillance and through co-research can take agentic turns towards their preferred futures. Mercy Shumbamhini describes work with a young person and their family in Zimbabwe. Her work highlights how we can break the silence around substance use and co-create paths of healing and hope with those in the margins, in this case integrating religious practices.

Ash Husband strives to democratise access to narrative therapy supervision through “Reflective Conversation Cards” in an effort to remain accountable to the people we work with. Rewa Murphy critiques the practice of extensive collection of documents kept in clinics and the effects of these on clients. And how, ironically, these very “fat files” can propagate a “thin story”.

Katrina Karlapina Power and Jesse Size consider the ongoing impacts and pain of invasion and colonisation for First Nations persons, especially in light of the Australian Referendum on a Voice to Parliament. Their paper provides a call for spiritual care practitioners to attend to the effects of colonisation as well as an illustration of spiritual care conversations that bring comfort, hope and connection. Maya Sen examines the structural roots of everyday problems and social injustices, critiquing the dominance of Eurocentric approaches in mental health. These systems, controlled by those in positions of privilege, obscure the larger social and structural dimensions of mental health experiences in India. Her work invites us to decolonise our practices by responding in ways that are contextual, collective and non-pathologising.

Spiritual care and chaplaincy can be understood as joining people in the “betwixt and between” – a liminal space between stages of life. Jesse Size explores facing one’s fears head-on and the powerful metaphor of a “big-ass mirror”.

Both audio works in this edition are a treat. The first, a classic paper by Michael White, “Fear busting and monster taming: An approach to the fears of young children” (1985), is read by Hamilton Kennedy. The second, “Cultivating queer joy: A letter-writing campaign” by Aaron Patey, playfully pokes holes in oppressive narratives, demonstrating how insider knowledge can help us endure, resist and thrive despite harsh conditions.

The videos in this issue bring forth diverse themes. Belial B’Zarr and Frankie Hanman-Siegersma explore collaboration with trans people, drag performers and queer communities in the face of alt-right violence. Their “mischief” work embodies a relentless pursuit of exploration – authentic, fun and perhaps a little unhinged. Through these stories, we witness the power of finding joy in activism, refusing to let oppression “eat our soul”, and building solidarity so that we can help each other rise. “We are all we have. We are all we need.”

Annonciata Niyibizi Muhayimana’s “The Ingata of Life” from Rwanda invites us to explore metaphors that are often overlooked and dismissed, and urges us to collectivise and document local knowledges. Meanwhile, Libby Olsen’s video delves into how creative arts, visual storytelling, fashion and narrative practice can dismantle dominant discourses on gender and support preferred stories within the queer community.

It is a pleasure to bring back conversations on epistemic justice and researching delusions, with Hamilton Kennedy, interviewed by David Denborough. They draw our attention to the ethics of knowing and the significance of solidarity, care and reciprocal trust.

May these stories inspire reflection, lingering conversations and collective action.

“We are all we have and we are all we need.”

In solidarity
Shelja Sen

ABOUT THE EDITOR



Shelja Sen is narrative therapist, writer and co-founder of Children First, New Delhi. Her latest book is Reclaim Your Life and she is also a columnist with a national newspaper, Indian Express. Shelja has worked as a narrative practitioner and teacher for over 20 years in various contexts in the UK and India. She is an international faculty member at Dulwich Centre Foundation, Adelaide, and a clinical tutor at The University of Melbourne, Australia. Shelja is a curator of the unique skills, expertise and know-how of the children, young people and families she has the honour of working with, and is committed to building innovative, culturally aligned, ethical practices using a feminist intersectional lens.

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