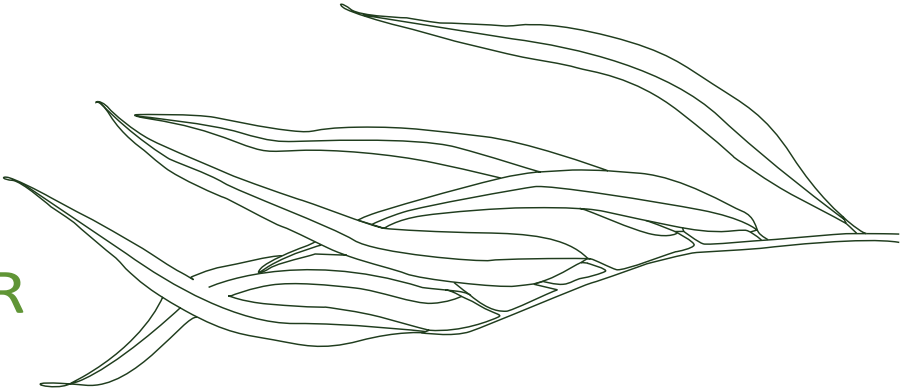




DEAR READER

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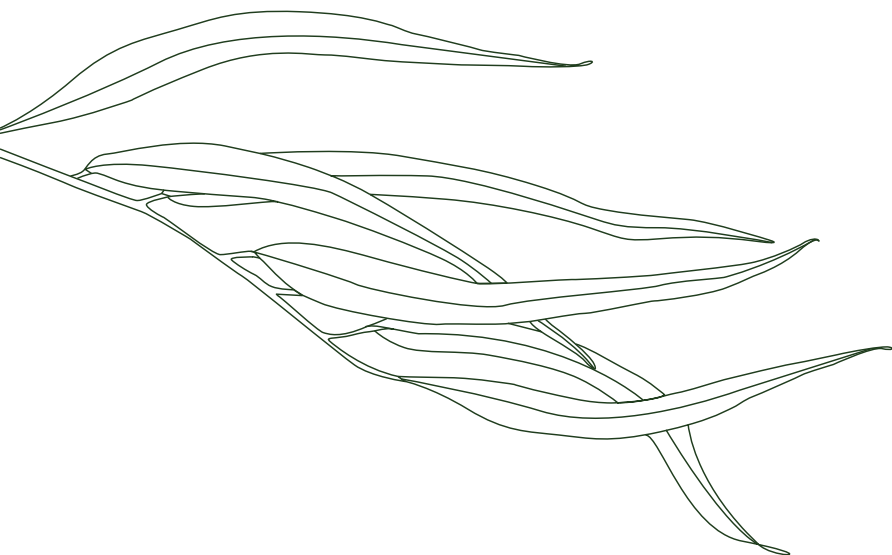
The Michael White Archive: New learnings from White's therapeutic practice in the realms of abuse and trauma

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5. NARRATIVE PRACTICE AND MEMORY

Domain II: Narrative practice and memory

Exploring memory within the context of narrative practice has become especially important to me as a result of my therapeutic engagements with people who have experiences of childhood sexual abuse. I began my work in the childhood sexual abuse counselling team at Uniting Communities in Adelaide at the same time as I began my PhD research and this Domain has been particularly influenced by my therapeutic work with survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Thus, I noticed that difficulties with memory was a common theme that was appearing in my work, which led me to search for anything in the video archive that might be helpful on this topic.

Links to practice: The injustice of foggy memories

As mentioned above, in my therapeutic practice, I kept noticing that people regularly mentioned difficult encounters with memory when they spoke about experiences of sexual abuse. For example, some talked about how memories of the abuse would not leave them alone even when they slept. Others talked about not being able to recall the details of the abuse but knowing that the abuse had happened nonetheless – an experience that we began referring to as ‘the injustice of foggy memories’. Others spoke about the importance of having their memories validated, even if they didn’t want them to be true, because it meant that they could trust their mind and their memory. Others talked about their memories of the abuse having been crystal-clear, but after disclosing these experiences of abuse and not being believed, the memories became foggy and hard to trust. It was as if the disbelief of the people they disclosed to permeated their

memories and took away the clarity and certainty. A woman consulting me named Carol Pearl described her encounters with traumatic memories in the following way:

It seeped through everything like an old sludge. It was like a memory of feeling – it didn't have a thought attached to it.

It was like putting my hand in the black sludge – like having to dive into something you can't see. (C. Pearl, personal communication, February 5, 2019)

When I consulted Carol about these words that I had written down from our session together, she wanted to add more context to the second quote by reflecting on the conversation we were having at that time:

I remembered us talking about being told by others to 'just be yourself', and how it required going 'within', getting to know our 'true selves' ... delving into how we feel on the inside, and a metaphor I used was about having to dive into a deep tank of water. In that, it would be scary ... like how you would have to hold your breath to get to the bottom, maybe even go through an underground tunnel to another place ... But for a trauma victim to do this, it would be like the tank was full of black sludge or septic. You couldn't bring yourself to even think about diving into something you can't see ... [It's] not so easy to know yourself, to be yourself, when this is what you have to do to even 'know yourself' (C. Pearl, personal communication, January 23, 2021)

As demonstrated in these quotes from Carol, considerations relating to the ways in which memories of abuse appear, or do not appear, in people's lives has been an important topic in my therapeutic conversations and in practice meetings with my colleagues. For example, in one practice meeting I shared the phrase 'the injustice of foggy memories', and this led to a discussion about how unjust it seems to be to not only subject someone to abuse, but to also leave them with no clear memory of what they had been subjected to – to leave them without a lived experience from which to make meaning. Or, as my colleague Pshko Marden said, 'It's like you're only given one piece of the puzzle' (P. Marden, personal communication, August 14, 2019). This had me thinking about the effects of these 'not-remembered' experiences, and made me wonder how people respond to the effects of abuse when they do not even have memories of what occurred. This is where the concept of 'foggy memories' as a sort of injustice came into my mind.

On this topic, another colleague of mine, Mark Byrne, shared the following question from one of his therapeutic encounters: 'Do you have a preference for these memories

of abuse to be confirmed or disconfirmed?’ (M. Byrne, personal communication, August 14, 2019). Mark asked this question in response to a person consulting him who was in the process of trying to make sense of their ‘foggy memories’ of abuse. This person, in an attempt to remember what had happened, was planning to return to the place where the abuse had occurred. This question from Mark made me think about what can happen if there are experiences that happened to us that are not available to us in the form of memory. It also made me think about the importance in narrative practice of memories and of experiences being storied into the narratives of our lives.

Links to narrative literature

This discussion with my colleagues reminded me of something that Michael White wrote about in relation to the ways in which ‘traumatic memory’ can exist outside of time. Drawing on the work of Russell Meares (2000) White (2006c) wrote the following:

Because dissociated memories stand outside of and are independent of people’s lives, they are timeless memories; these memories are apart from the storylines of people’s lives which are constituted of experiences linked in sequences across time according to specific themes. Being located on the outside of the dimension of time, these traumatic memories have no beginning and no end. When traumatic memories are beyond time in this way, there is always the potential for particular circumstances to trigger the re-living of these memories in real time. These traumatic memories are re-lived as present experience and the outcome is re-traumatisation. (M. White, 2006c, p. 79)

Although Michael White did not often utilise the term ‘dissociation’ in the way it is often utilised in psychiatry, he did use the terms ‘dissociated memories’, ‘half memories’, and ‘uncoupling of consciousness’ to refer to experiences in the present when traumatic memories are relived. In relation to this, White (2006c) explained that these experiences often contributed to a ‘dismantling of a familiar sense of self that has a continuity across time’ (2006c, p. 75). Thus, White argued that the ‘primary therapeutic task in addressing the effects of trauma on people’s lives is to provide a context for the development or redevelopment of the sort of personal reality that gives rise to the sense of self that is often referred to as “myself”’ (2006c, p. 77). I understand these comments from White to suggest that, as narrative therapists, our primary goal should be to realign these ‘timeless’ or ‘dissociated’ memories into some sort of narrative that people can make sense of and give meaning to.

It is with these concepts in mind that I have selected the following extracts from the Michael White Archive. As you engage with these extracts, please note that each of them could likely be included under a multitude of different headings or themes, and each example could also be included or linked to other Domains. However, it is my hope that by organising them in this way, they might facilitate some fruitful discussions that link Michael White's work with people who have experiences of abuse/trauma with your own experiences as narrative practitioners.

Examples from the video archive: Renee

Having to keep memories 'real'

- Refusing to deny or 'take back' disclosure of abuse/violence
- An unwillingness to pretend things did not happen
- How important it is for experiences of abuse/violence to be believed and affirmed – that they 'are real'.

In consulting the Michael White Archive with these considerations about memory in mind, I came across the following exchange between White and a young woman named Renee. In this session, Renee was speaking about the comparison and minimisation that she experienced from her friends who thought she should by now be 'over' the sexual assault she had been subjected to. This exchange between Renee and White reminded me of conversations that I've had with my colleagues about 'foggy memories', and the importance – for some people – of having these memories be clear, validated or 'real'.

MW: And also ... you haven't accepted minimisation? You haven't somehow fallen for these comparisons that aren't real, is that right? [Renee nods] You've actually not ... and my guess is that's been really important? [R nods] ...What is your guess about what would have happened if you had fallen for the minimisation of this...?

Renee (R): It would have meant the things that had happened to me are not real, these things that have happened in the attack somehow may not be real. And I know they are. So, I'd not been able to deal ... I know this is one of the reasons I've been to see a psychiatric nurse just to have a consultation ... and she said to me I've got to remember that these things that happened to me are real and the way I'm going to get through this is by working through them and dealing with the things. My friends are doing what they know best, which isn't much, but doing what they think helps them because they have only ever had to ... They have only had little things to compare things with before ... [M: yeah] They can't know what such a thing that's happened to me. And I've got to

deal with my problems before I am going to get better, really ... And I want to get better. I don't believe I will get better, but I want to get better ...

MW: So, if you had fallen for the minimisation, you would have really got separated from what is real?

R: Yes.

MW: Okay, and so...

R: Yes, these things that happened are real and I have to keep it real, sort of thing ... It's not very nice dealing with these problems, but it was not a very nice thing that happened to me...

Opening space for memories to be recalled and challenging practices of secrecy: Pre-session discussion

The following discussions took place in 1980s while Michael White was teaching a workshop to a team of practitioners. In most of these comments, White was responding to questions from practitioners about his work with people who had perpetrated acts of violence and abuse. It is also important to note that the following comments from White took place prior to his live consultation with the family who had come to consult him (Jake, Chelsea, and Lacey), which will be described after this. White also met with this group of practitioners in the middle of and after this therapeutic session with Jake and his family. Before the midway consultation occurred, White told the family that he was going to consult his colleagues who had been watching in another room, and said that he would bring back reflections from his colleagues. As this video is from White's early work (it was recorded in the late 1980s), it appears that this was prior to the development of outsider witnessing practices. Rather, the structure aligned more with a reflecting team framework, as described by Tom Andersen (1991).

MW: What I would usually do is see the parents together, in the first interview. I would never see the children together with the parents. If the perpetrator is accepting responsibility for the acts, then that gives us somewhere to go immediately. If they're not, then I try to find ways of opening space for them to take responsibility for it. That's the beginning as far I can see ... The other issues are the other issues you probably very much fit with what you do here anyway ... and that is the relationship between the other parent, usually the mother, and the child concerned needs to be repaired in some way, as quickly as possible. Um, and secrecy needs to be externalised and challenged in any possible way ... and only when the, only when the perpetrator has actually accepted responsibility for the abuse, and only when they've been able to identify the experience that the victim would have undergone ... that's not with the victims present... only then would I be prepared to sit down with the whole family.

Practitioner: Right, we don't work with families together until Dad is ready, and the child is ready for an apology session, which Dad takes all the responsibility [MW: Yeah] for the abuse happening, and then after that, we'll move on to... but I had the kids come today because I wasn't sure how you were, with who you would want to see so we just had the whole family come to be on the safe side, but basically that's the way we work ...

MW: Yeah, I guess I'd do something very similar ... the father would have to confess, give an apology, talk about his understanding of the young person's experience, the fear, everything else that goes with that ... With how terrified it might've been for them or maybe not terrified but how he sees that as exploitive, in terms that he can describe to the young person concerned.

Practitioner: [inaudible]

M: Yeah, well ... look, I've worked with men who, it takes me a number of sessions before they will, they will recall any sexual abuse. That's not uncommon ... I was just working with a man at the moment who was referred by the parole board, who's been in jail for a year for sexual abuse and the first three meetings he was adamant that he hadn't been guilty, and um ... you know, he was very persuasive. He talked about how his stepdaughter had always wanted him out of the way and this was her way of doing it. I just kept opening space for him and he eventually disclosed it, and there was something to do then, there was somewhere to go with it ... Sometimes I'll say to these men, 'sometimes it's very difficult for men to recall these incidents because they don't really feel like they're themselves at the time, and you may have a great deal of difficulty recalling this' ... and that sort of stuff ... or you know sometimes things that really oppose men putting their cards on table is that they fear certain consequences in terms of their marriage: 'If you were guilty of this and you did recall it, suddenly, it suddenly sprung into light, you suddenly recovered from your amnesia, what do you think might happen to your relationship? How do you think your wife would cope with that? Do you think she'd reject you and that would be the end of the relationship, or what?' ... and then you can talk to the woman and hear a bit about what her response would be.

[...]

As long as there has been some act of sexual abuse and it's denied by the perpetrator, then there's really no future for him and the young person concerned in the relationship with each other ... so I might also talk about that when I'm opening space ... If in fact the cards aren't on the table, then they'll weigh very heavily on the future of all of you, of this family, and so in some way I encourage ... I might ask this man, where can they do some thinking? They might say, 'walking on the beach', so I might say, 'look, go for a walk on the beach and you might be surprised that you might recall something you haven't recalled before' ... They might get a shock and most of them wind up getting a shock – they suddenly can recall something that they hadn't before, and I can respond to that as their first step of breaking down the secrecy lifestyle ... and we all know how destructive secrecy lifestyles are in these families, for the victim and for everybody else

[...]

Practitioner: What direction do you go if you think the mother is the ... doesn't believe the child or says she's not sure the child is telling the truth?

MW: I just do what I've been suggesting, I open space for the man to disclose it. you know, 99% of cases where there are accusations, you know ... You know despite how convincing the denial I've seen, you can be pretty sure that the events took place, so I just keep opening space. I'd say, 'Look, you might find that your husband suddenly recalls something' ... Other ways of opening space, you know, 'Well, maybe your daughter or stepdaughter actually misconstrued something ... has—' whatever term they use for it, what term does this family use for it? sexual abuse or ... you used a word [consulting his notes] [audience member: molest] "molest". Okay, 'Maybe something happened that was mistaken for molestation, what could that possibly be?' And the man might tell you something, and it's really the tip of iceberg but that's all you need to start to open the door a bit. So there's lots of ways to go about opening up space, and I preserve with it ... I was seeing a man, and I had seen him for about four sessions and I had someone visiting me from Sydney and this person said, 'Look, give up. You're wasting your time'. And I said, 'Well, I don't think I am'. And um, you know, within another week, this person had actually owned up to their sexual abuse ... so it's worth opening space for these men ... It's very hard for them to disclose it, to take responsibility for it, and so on, but if they do, then I can respond to that.

Therapeutic session/live consultation: Jake, Lacey and Chelsea

The following comments from White were made in the context of his work with a man named Jake (pseudonym) who had been accused of sexually abusing his young niece, Lacey (pseudonym). Lacey had disclosed the abuse to her aunt Chelsea (pseudonym), and thus, the family was seeking counselling. In this session, Jake did not admit to these acts of abuse, and he denied that he had any memory of them occurring. In response to Jake's denial, Michael spent quite a lot of time 'opening space' for Jake to remember what Lacey had disclosed. What strikes me as significant in these comments from White is that he never provided Jake with an 'out', as he refused to side with the perspective that Lacey 'made this all up'. However, he also did not jump to conclusions and accuse Jake. Instead, White just continued to open space for Jake to recall the act of abuse and he stressed the potential negative effects on Lacey, and the family's future together, if he did not recall the acts of abuse. Following this, White stressed the potential effects that Jake's lack of recollection might have on Lacey's sense of self and her memory, and how this could lead to a 'double' sort of traumatising. It is also important to note that this therapeutic encounter took place in the 1980s, and thus, it reflects a very early example of Michael White's therapeutic practice.

MW: Right, and you don't actually recall any of these events in relation to Lacey? You don't recall touching her?

Jake (J): No, it's like... like I said... [starts retelling his story again] ...

MW: Okay. See, one of the difficulties is that you don't recall what happened ... um ... okay, now that's one of the difficulties that makes it very hard for us to help deal with issue, does that make sense? Because you can't actually recall what happened [Jake: I guess, um...] And that's not uncommon...

J: I'm not really ashamed of my nighttime behaviours ... I mean, if she never would've been sleeping in my bed ... I just, I'm not sick...

MW: No, no, no ... I wasn't—

J: There are far worse things that have happened in the past with her, it just chews me up inside. I hate to think ...

MW: So you feel pretty furious about...?

J: That's putting it mildly, yes ... like I told Lacey, for what I did was wrong, but to try and explain how it actually happened, she can only comprehend so much of it [MW: Yeah] Where I told her if justice could be done to me, then I'd allow her ... whatever it means...

MW: Yeah, yeah ... See, one of the— one of these, um ... one of the things that's difficult is that these things often happen when the man concerned is not really being themselves. I mean it's like a lapse or something [J: umhm] and because of that, it's very difficult for them to recall it. Very, very difficult for them to recall it because they really, you know, weren't being themselves at the time, okay? It's like cut off in a different world somewhere. It's often like a secret to themselves ... You know, it's often like a secret ... does that make sense to you?

J: Yeah... But like with my past, I've talked to Chelsea [Jake's partner and Lacey's aunt] and told her she can ask me questions while I'm asleep, [MW: yeah] and I'll answer truthfully ... Like when I accidentally told Chelsea about a 'skeleton from my past' when I was in a sleep state...

MW: Were there things that Chelsea actually told you that you wouldn't have recalled yourself?

J: Oh God yes.

MW: There were? Did Chelsea actually tell you things you couldn't even recall yourself, I mean things that you've described...?

J: Well, some things that have happened I can recall because it's like a dream.

MW: Right, but some other things she's told you that ... that you ...

J: That I swear to God, no, I've never done these things.

MW: Okay, alright ... Okay... so ... it does seem that in a way there are some parts of your life that are a bit of a secret to you? [J: Yeah] Would you say that's possible?

J: Yeah ... Well, she knows everything that I do, but it's more through my sleep [MW: Yeah, yeah], yeah as far as ...

MW: Right ... Okay. Well, I guess the thing is that it's possible that there are parts of your life that are a secret to you and um ... you know, it's just a possibility. I mean obviously what's quite clear is that at the moment you can't recall the events that have been related by your niece, you can't recall them ... and according to Chelsea there are other, you know, things that are in fact almost a secret to you, things that you've experienced in your life, that are almost a secret to you yourself, that you've disclosed while you're asleep and so on, does that make sense?

J: Umhmm [unclear whether Jake is agreeing or not with Michael here]

MW: Now, um ... one of the difficulties is that does mean that the situation is a bit risky for the future, does that make sense? I mean if ...

J: I've thought of that too. [MW: Yeah, I mean it does] Between my own kids ... [MW: Yeah, yeah] and anybody else in general.

MW: Exactly, yeah ... and um ... it does mean that, um ... we can be a bit insecure about the future ...

J: That's nothing that I haven't admitted to myself.

MW: Okay, so you've thought about that as well?

J: Sure.

MW: And um ... Have you ever actually really had to recall something that is back in your mind somewhere, and you've just had to recall it for some reason, and have you ever come up with any methods for doing that? Like ... do you know of any methods?

J: Word associations ...

MW: Word associations? Okay...

J: Is that what you mean?

MW: Well, I don't know ... I mean some people...

J: You're talking of going back to bring something up to associate with.

MW: Yeah, I mean some people find that they can actually recall things that they couldn't otherwise recall if they go for a walk on the beach alone or something, they can suddenly have a flash of memory, just suddenly a flash, and they can seize hold of that and they can recall things they couldn't otherwise recall.

J: Well, I've done that, but I don't know if this is the same terms ... Yes, I've walked certain places, and something will flash in that I'm trying to think of [MW: Yeah] because of my past, I don't recall ...

MW: Well, where has that worked the best for you? I mean what have you ... where has that worked the best? I mean ...

J: Depends on what part of my life and my past you're talking that you would want to know ... Like with my grandmother, I can walk out and around her place [MW: Okay] and recall more.

MW: Okay, so that's helpful ... Alright... if there was a chance that you could recall what happened on that evening, what would you have to do? What would you have set up to trigger, trigger off some recall? I mean what would you have to do?

J: What evening are you pointing for? You've lost me there.

Chelsea (C): With Lace.

MW: With Lacey.

J: Oh! What would I have to do to try and remember what happened?

MW: If there was a chance that somehow we could, you could trigger off some recall of that, some recollection of that, how could you set up—

J: Well, I dreamt of her [Chelsea] that night ... because when she's away from me, I don't sleep much, or when we're mad at each other I don't sleep much either, but as far as what you're pointing for ... ahhh ...

MW: What I'm going to do is just suggest that you talk a little bit to see if there's a way of structuring a situation that would be most likely to trigger off some recollection of what happened ... I think, I think that that's very important, obviously. I mean, if you can find a way of triggering off some recollection of what happened, then obviously that's going to be pretty helpful in terms of the future ... because all the cards are going to be on the table, and they're not going to be weighing anyone down, and we can look at doing what's necessary to ensure this sort of thing doesn't happen again ... okay? We can't do that without getting some sort of recollection of that from you, does that make sense? It's just not possible.

J: Yeah, I'm just trying to picture what to do ...

MW: So, could you talk a bit about that whilst I go and talk with colleagues to see what they're thinking. Maybe they've got some ideas that might be helpful as well.

J: Sure.

MW: But it's not at all unusual ... a) for a person to have secrets from themselves, b) for a person to have lapses and not recall what happened during the lapse ... That's not at all uncommon.

J: I don't know about secrets from myself. I mean, yeah, my childhood, I can tell you parts of it ...

- MW: Well, would you, would you just talk about how that might be possible to set something up so that it's possible that you might actually recall what happened on that evening, okay would you do that?
- J: [looks to Chelsea]
- C: Sure, I guess we can try. I mean, we've talked before, we've discussed this matter so many times ...
- MW: Yeah, yeah ... and you haven't been successful in managing to bring that information to the consciousness ...

Double traumatisation: Possible effects if the perpetrator of abuse does not recall or acknowledge that the events took place

Following on from the transcript above, White spoke about the potential effects on Lacey, and her sense of self, if Jake did not recall and/or acknowledge the abuse that Lacey remembered having taken place.

- MW: Can I, can I tell you some other reasons why it's critical that Jake does find some way of triggering some recollection to this? At the moment, Jake has been unable to recall what happened. Lacey experienced something happening, okay ... and um ... you have some understanding, or empathy with what Lacey may have gone through, whatever, you know, you've been a bit traumatised yourself, and if ... if in fact Lacey was traumatised, and yet she was the only person that could recall what happened, and in fact the other person who was involved in the traumatisation cannot recall it, then that's doubly complicated. Because Lacey may start to mistrust her own experience, mistrust her own memory, mistrust her own feelings and thoughts, and that can have a devastating effect on her future. So, it's not just the trauma she experienced, it's also the fact that at the moment she can't trust her own memory, she can't trust her own thoughts, she can't even trust her own feelings in relation to the event, okay? Because the facts have not been established, does that make sense? So, it's got a doubly destructive effect on her future, and that's why it's very, very important. So, I wonder whether you just spend some time talking about how you might actually structure a situation that would be most favourable for you to perhaps recall things? And you might think about in the past what you've done that's helped you recall things ... I'd like to leave that for you to talk about for a while, whilst I go and have a talk with my colleagues ... How does that sound?
- J: Sounds okay.
- MW: I'll be back in just a little while, and I'll take down any thoughts that come back from the group and I'll let you have them, okay?

At this point in the interview, White took a break from his conversation with Jake and Chelsea to consult with the practitioners who were watching his conversation from another room. The details of his conversation with the practitioners in the workshop are

described below. But first, I wanted to share something that White said to Jake and Chelsea when he returned to speak with them, after meeting with the group of practitioners. I have included this here because it speaks to the ‘double traumatisation’ that can occur when memories of abuse/trauma are not believed or acknowledged.

MW: See, we’re quite clear about the sort of values that you think are important, you know ... you know in your family, we’re quite clear about that ... um and we didn’t expect that today would shake lose any of these memories, and make them available to you ... but we do think that it’s possible to shake them free. We don’t quite know how that’s going to happen. What I would like to do is just read through some of the other points that we’ve made here. We think that this recollection is important because, apart from anything, Lacey’s future is at stake, doubly, and my colleagues agreed with me that her future was doubly at stake. First of all, there’s the trauma of the event, that we can address more fully and help her with more fully if your recollection of the event was available to us. The second, the second thing is that because there’s nothing to corroborate it, you know to support her story, then um ... she won’t be able to trust her own self, and that can have some devastating effects on her future. It could lead to her becoming depressed as she gets older, suffering from extreme self-doubt, self-rejection. I mean, sometimes children who have experienced something similar but there’s been nothing to corroborate it, even get into self-hate as they get older. They can become very isolated, and I’ve even met some that have got into self-abuse. It’s also had rather damaging effects on the relationship between the daughter concerned and the mother. It’s had long-term damaging effects on that as well, because for a whole range of reasons, the daughter feels somewhat betrayed because the mother can’t support her experience of it, you know, and even though that’s not possible for you to do, that doesn’t make the child any less involved in that sense of betrayal. Does that make sense? So, that’s why recalling these events is so, so critical. Now, obviously there are other consequences from your lack of memory in relation to this, and that includes insecurity in relationships in this family, and you said that you thought about that yourself, that there’s some insecurity about the future of relationships in this family, because it’s constantly a possibility that the same events could be repeated. That remains a constant possibility. Obviously, if you do maybe work with someone here, or work on yourself a bit to try and shake this memory free, and if you can recall it, then that can be addressed in a way that makes it much less likely that in the future these events can be replicated. Does that make sense? So, it’s pretty important from that point of view, and until it’s disclosed, obviously you and Lacey really shouldn’t be alone in each other’s company until you’ve been able to recall the events, because that’s not safe for either of you under the circumstances. And I don’t know how to find the right words to make you aware enough of the importance of that...

The ‘doubly destructive’ effects of Jake not remembering the abuse he perpetrated against Lacey and the ways in which this might impact Lacey’s ability to ‘trust her own memory’ stood out very significantly to me. As I mentioned earlier in this document, the people consulting me often speak about not trusting themselves and their memories

when people respond to their disclosures of abuse with disbelief. Furthermore, even when people have clear memories of experiences of abuse and they have certain family members who believe them, they sometimes express a sense of disbelief at their memories. Thus, I can relate to the seriousness that White is assigning to Jake being able to recall and validate Lacey's experience.

This understanding about the 'doubly destructive' effects of unacknowledged experiences of abuse also reminded me of something that Michael White wrote in relation to women who have been subjected to physical violence from their partner. In an early article, White (1986b) wrote about the importance of women reclaiming aspects of their identity that had previously been co-opted by their abusive partner. In relation to this co-opted sense of identity, White explained that he was very familiar with many examples of 'men systematically retranslating a woman's experience and reinterpreting her history to the extent that her account of these experiences and history is so radically altered as to have no relation whatsoever to the versions that the woman had previously identified with' (M. 1986b, p. 102).

Similarly, what I hear White speaking to in this exchange with Jake is a pre-empting – a sort of warning – of what could occur if Lacey's experiences and memories were not validated. That is, if Jake did not recall the abusive acts that Lacey recalled being subjected to, then it was very possible that Lacey's future sense of self would be 'retranslated' and 'reinterpreted' through the viewpoint of this experience. Lacey might go on to learn that she actually could not trust what she experienced and even if she thought she remembered something, she may be wrong. This sort of distrust of one's own experiences and memories is something that I encounter a lot in my therapeutic practice. This sort of distrust of oneself can also serve to keep survivors of abuse quiet, as they are taught that they are not to be trusted.

In the same article, White (1986b) wrote about how conjoint therapy sessions (in which both the perpetrator of abuse and the person who suffered the abuse are present) can provide a context for women to 'disentangle' themselves from the abuse and violence they have been subjected to. To explain this concept, White (1989) wrote the following:

Throughout this process, it is my experience that the woman disentangles herself from the responsibility for violence and, as well, becomes empowered as she arrives at a position of authority in relation to her own history and experience. (1986b, p. 105)

What I understand White to be voicing in this instance is that violence and abuse do more than cause physical, emotional and psychological injuries. In addition to this, they can cause people to feel distanced from their own lives, selves and identities. Through practices of abuse and violence, people's histories can be rewritten, their future hopes can be taken from them, and they can end up needing to engage in some very dedicated work to separate their lives from the effects of the abuse.

In Lacey's case, it seems that White was advocating for Lacey to have the chance to engage in this 'disentanglement' process and to avoid having her memories being 'reinterpreted' from the viewpoint of the perpetrator of abuse.

The Domain document concluded with a series of questions for participants in focus groups to consider (see Appendix II).

Domain-specific findings

on Narrative practice and memory

The following chapter highlights significant learnings that occurred as a result of the focus group practitioners' engagements with the Domain: 'Narrative practice and memory'.

Eleven themes were generated:

1. Sharing the concept of the injustice of 'foggy memories' and 'the sludge'
2. Talking about 'are you wanting to remember or not remember?'
3. Honouring and working with the politics of survivors' anger about memory
4. Making visible facts of the everyday to support preferred story/memory
5. Seeing 'frozen memories' from a different point of view
6. 'What did you look at?' as a way of unfreezing a frozen memory
7. Exploring real effects of not remembering: is this sometimes also an act of protection?
8. To think more about the distribution of memories and different responsibilities to remember
9. Made me more confident in going back to working with men
10. Exploring what difference it would have made to have been believed
11. Lines of questioning for future conversations.

1. Sharing the concept of the injustice of 'foggy memories' and 'the sludge'

After engaging with this Domain and the practitioner focus groups, two participants spoke about how helpful they found the concept of 'the injustice of foggy memories' – as named in the Domain. In particular, Angel Yuen described how helpful it could be, in her work with survivors of sexual violence and other sorts of trauma, to have certain concepts, phrases and/or metaphors such as 'foggy memories' to share at times when it was difficult for the person consulting her to find language for their experiences.

My work is mostly with women, but I also work with men who have been affected by childhood sexual abuse. So, one thing that I really appreciated in the Domain was the part about the 'injustice of foggy memories', because I think that even just having that as a naming and a description could be so helpful for anyone who has been suffering from the effects of childhood sexual abuse, or been a victim of rape ... I felt that the concept of foggy memory offered me a lot right from the get go. And your conversations with your colleagues, Kelsi [as included in the Domain], I

thought that was so interesting. Like when your colleague asked: ‘Do you have a preference for these memories of abuse to be confirmed or disconfirmed?’ I found that really helpful. (Angel Yuen)

Similarly, Ruth Pluznick described how helpful to her practice the concept of ‘the injustice of foggy memories’ and Michael White’s question ‘So, you haven’t accepted this minimisation?’ had been. Specifically, Ruth said that sharing these phrases reminded her of just how valuable it can be to be able to *offer up* concepts or language from someone else who has been through something similar – as this can serve to counter feelings of isolation and loneliness.

I think the sharing of metaphors and language like this reflects the value of us sharing work with each other ... and I’ve had so many people consulting me who I ask, ‘What name would you give it?’ and they say ‘I don’t know’, and it’s so helpful to be able to say, ‘Well, I know someone who called it this, does that fit for you?’ So, just offering those phrases – ‘the injustice of foggy memories’ and ‘you haven’t accepted minimisation?’ – can lead to people having language for an experience they couldn’t find words for before ... And I think it can also counter the loneliness people often experience when abuse happens, particularly when no-one is acknowledging that it happened. For example, I have spoken with many women who have spent years blaming themselves for the sexual abuse or sexual assault they were subjected to, and questioning every relationship they’ve been in, as they felt like it was simply *bad judgement* on their part. So, in these instances, I think it can be so helpful to be able to share language or stories from other women, and to know that if somebody else named it that, then that means that somebody else has had an experience similar to theirs. (Ruth Pluznick)

Angel Yuen spoke about wanting to borrow the metaphor of ‘the sludge’ – a metaphor that was included in the Domain from a woman that I had worked with named Carol Pearl. Specifically, Carol described her encounters with traumatic memories as being like ‘putting my hand in black sludge’ and how this felt like ‘having to dive into something you can’t see’ (C. Pearl, personal communication, February 5, 2019).

I found myself thinking that I’d love to share that metaphor of ‘the sludge’, where the woman consulting you so descriptively talked about her experience of revisiting memories of sexual abuse through that metaphor of it feeling like being in a tank of sludge. And I just thought that if I were to share that metaphor with some of the people consulting me, it could possibly be really helpful. Because sometimes it seems that people just can’t find the words or the language to speak about what’s been so unspeakable in their past. ... I think just to even be able to name those sorts of shared experiences can be so helpful for people, even if they take that metaphor or language but then decide they want to use a different kind of

naming. I found [those metaphors] quite powerful, and they made me think about what I could bring into my own work if I were to share pieces of those transcripts. (Angel Yuen)

2. Talking about ‘are you wanting to remember or not remember?’

One practitioner²⁵ spoke of what she found especially helpful in engaging with the Domain and the focus group discussions. In particular, she stressed the importance of allowing survivors of abuse, violence and trauma to decide for themselves whether or not they want to remember. To illustrate these learnings, she shared a story from her practice about a young woman who chose to remember despite it being difficult to do so, and about the ethics underpinning that decision.

The part that I found really useful was the work with Renee [see transcript in the Domain], where Renee and Michael were talking about her ‘foggy memories’ and why it felt so important for her to not allow it to be minimised by her friends, and Michael really took that up, like really got her to evaluate it and say that this is really important for me, to hold on to my sense of self ... So, this woman who was consulting me was saying that she had large pieces of memory that were missing, and she knew the time period of when the memories were missing, and there were other bits that she did remember, but there was some uncertainty about whether she was accurately remembering all the events of abuse, and when I asked her some of those questions about like, ‘Are you wanting to remember or not remember?’ ‘Why is that important for you?’, she was saying that it was really important to her because otherwise, she wouldn’t have a sense of herself. She discussed different ways that she recalls the memories that do occur, and how she responds to those memories when they’re bothering her. Our conversation helped her get clearer on why she chose to hold on to memories despite the distress. When I asked her more about why it was important to hold on to the memories even though it was distressing, she described it as creating a solid ground. She also spoke about the risk that by not remembering, it benefits the people who abused her. So it just lead to all these really strong stands that she was taking about really, despite the distress, really choosing, like actively choosing to remember, and she said previously she’d tried to resist the memories, but now she was in a different place where she was choosing to remember them, and she said that she realised that by having memories missing, it had been affecting her sense of herself as an ‘I’, which I thought was so amazing because this idea of the ‘I’ was in the Domain discussion as well ... She was reclaiming her sense of herself now ... Yeah, so it was really powerful, and then she said it was really anchoring for her to know for herself that it was *real* and it happened, so even though the memories were still foggy – she didn’t quite use that phrase, but something similar – to know that it was *real* was

²⁵ This practitioner requested to remain anonymous to more fully protect the confidentiality of her client.

really important for her, and she was also starting a new life. So we were able to do lots of reauthoring about her values in her work and why it was that she works in the way that she works, and all these different things ... What really stood out to me were those two things. 1) That she was actively choosing to hold on to the memories despite them being distressing; and then 2) It was an act of reclaiming this sense of 'I' ... I thought was so interesting So, I was like, 'Wow, this is so relevant!' ... I was really pleased that we had that conversation [in the focus group] because it helped me kind of be curious about certain things that I might not have asked about ... like I don't think I would've really asked, 'Are you wanting to remember? Or not remember?', you know? To be really careful about checking-in with her – what does she want to do with this *fogginess*? Like, is it okay to leave it as it is, or...? So I found that really helpful.

3. Honouring and working with the politics of survivors' anger about memory

One practitioner conveyed a significant story of how the writings from this Domain influenced her response to the anger of a six-year-old girl:

I had some thoughts after today that had to do with the *foggy memories* survivors speak of ... For example, recently I was speaking with a mum and her six-year-old girl daughter. The six year-old girl's dad abused her, and so our conversations were centred around that ... But just recently, this young girl told me that she found out that her testimony [to court] would not be used due to 'inconsistencies', but her older brother's testimony would be. This young girl was so angry with all us adults ... She was mad at her dad for not remembering and admitting to what he did, and she was mad at the unfairness of being denied a voice to speak up. In response, I drew on some of the transcripts and ideas [from the Domain] in that session. This led to the young girl drawing me pictures of what happened, and her mum told me at a later session that on the way home her daughter's opinions and feelings just seemed to flow out. The mum also told me that her daughter said that she realised she had been blaming her mum but in speaking to that realised [this was] unfair because 'Dad knew and Dad made choices, not Mum'. (Jo Allen, sent as email prior to the feedback focus group)

This was an example of honouring the anger of child survivors in relation to injustices connected to foggy memories and how significant this can be in protecting relationships with a non-abusive parent or carer.

4. Making visible facts of the everyday to support preferred story/memory

Jussey Verco made links between her experiences of working with the Silent Too Long group (Silent Too Long, 2003) for women survivors of childhood sexual abuse and

learnings from engaging with the Domain and the focus group discussions. Specifically, Jussey spoke about the concept of ‘the ethics of the everyday’, which she learned through discussions with Michael White, and which had been especially helpful in her work with survivors of sexual abuse and domestic and family violence.

Even though people’s lives might have been significantly challenged by trauma, they still engage in these everyday acts which reflect their values and their ethics. This reminded me of a woman with whom I worked who had a long and tragic history of domestic and family violence and sexual abuse. As a result of those abuses, she engaged in self-harm by cutting herself and would often go for days without eating. But, despite being impacted by these traumas, she also made sure that her kids had clean knickers, that they went to school every day, that they were well-fed, and they knew that they were loved and safe in her care. We worked together to identify the ethics and the values which underpinned those everyday acts in which she engaged. We acknowledged that these acts were undertaken against the contrast of this huge history of abuse, violence and trauma to which she had been subjected, which had invited her into thinking she was totally worthless. The fact that she washed her children’s clothes, she made sure her children were clean and well-fed, these were facts in her life in which she engaged on a daily basis. These were acts of love and responsibility. When we really highlighted her ethics and acknowledged that, even in the face of this history of horror and abuse, there is a very, very powerful alternate story here about being a responsible and loving parent. Because this alternate story was located in the facts of her mothering, she could acknowledge this. Whereas, if I had said to her, ‘Wow, how amazing you are that you are able to do this’, most likely, she would not have been able to hear those comments and would have thought I was just making this up, trying to make her feel better. Instead, as we were talking about the nuts and bolts of the situation, the facts of what she did every day to care for her children, she could take in this information because these were truths. She could also allow herself some quiet pride in acknowledging her loving actions towards her children. This helped to shift her understanding of her being worthless to recognising that she was a loving and responsible parent. Over time, she was able to stop engaging in the self-harming practices and made a commitment to eat something every day. I’m bringing this story back to Michael’s understandings and really looking at the ‘ethics of the everyday’ which he highlighted. I found this process of acknowledging this alternate story really incredibly helpful and respectful when working with many clients. (Jussey Verco)

5. Seeing ‘frozen memories’ from a different point of view

Jill Freedman spoke about some of the work she has done with people who experience ‘timeless’ or ‘frozen memories’ within the context of abuse and trauma. In the piece of transcript below, Jill was responding to thoughts that Angel Yuen expressed in the focus group discussion about how traumatic memories can sometimes have people feeling

stuck in therapeutic conversations. Thus, this transcript speaks to some of the ways in which practitioners are working to approach these types of ‘frozen memories’ in different ways.

I have a different way that I sometimes deal with those recurring memories. I think the part that’s most important is to be able to see them from a different point of view. Like, maybe from my point of view or from the point of view of somebody who, if they had been there, would’ve done something. But the thing that I’m interested in – I think it relates to Angel’s work – is lots of times people experience traumatic memories as still, frozen images. And if they just go back inside of the memory, the memory is still or frozen, often at the most difficult moment. But if they are looking at it from a different point of view, then they can begin to see more about what happens afterwards; and so, a frozen image can become a movie. And the movie always includes the person’s responses. So, once it unfreezes, the memory changes to include the person’s responses, and to end instead of being endlessly fixed. I’m not suggesting that it becomes a *good* memory, but it’s not that frozen image that just comes back and wakes people up in the middle of the night or just intrudes on them in their daily lives, because it includes *more* of the memory ... which I think changes it ... I worked with someone whose upstairs neighbour (a teenaged young man) often babysat with her. In the frozen memory that haunted her, she is looking up from the corner of the bathtub where she is trapped. The neighbour is looming over the tub. She is seeing the memory from the corner of the tub, feeling very small and vulnerable and seeing the neighbour as very large. I asked her to look at this from the point of view of an adult who had always felt safe to her. When she did, that the memory unfroze, and she saw her younger self manoeuvre out of the tub and around him. She witnessed herself run from the bathroom and into her room, where she flung the door closed and locked it. The memory of being trapped actually changed and through the adult’s eyes, she witnessed herself being able to leave. And this did happen in the actual event, even though it was not part of the frozen memory. In some situations, something more horrible happens when the memory unfreezes, but even then, when the memory unfreezes, it is still over at a certain point in time, rather than being endless. And the person can recognise their agency in surviving the situation. (Jill Freedman)

6. ‘What did you look at?’ as a way of unfreezing a frozen memory

Angel Yuen elaborated on Jill Freedman’s comments (above) about ‘frozen memories’ by making note of some of the questions she might ask when she is exploring traumatic memories that feel ‘frozen’ or unmovable.

In thinking about what Jill said about ‘frozen memories’ and the quote in the Domain where Michael talks about half memories ... A question came to mind that I might ask [in relation to frozen memories]: ‘What did you look at [during times of abuse]?’ And actually, recently, I asked a woman I’ve been working with a

version of this question, and it was so interesting how it shifted the conversation. So, when I asked this woman this question, she began talking about how she remembered looking at the details in a painting that was in the room where she was subjected to childhood sexual abuse ... She talked about how the picture had many flowers in it, and how she'd count the flower petals ... like she'd literally take her mind away by counting the flower petals in this painting. And recently she said to me: 'I don't know if you've noticed, but when it gets hard here, and I know I'm getting maybe a trigger or a flashback or I'm getting distressed, I look at the plant in the corner of your office and I count the leaves.' This was so interesting to hear, as I'd completely forgotten that plant was there – but she noticed it, and intentionally focused on it, which was reflective of a skill that's taken her through her life. So, it's really interesting how questions like these, which can seem small, can actually lead to the telling of some important stories about how people develop these skills for surviving really horrific and unimaginable acts of violence by taking their mind away. (Angel Yuen)

7. Exploring real effects of not remembering: is this sometimes also an act of protection?

In the focus group discussion, Jussey Verco spoke about the concept of 'foggy memories' in the context of the work she had done with the Silent Too Long (2003) group for women survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Jussey explained how in this group, many of the women started to see their lack of recollection, or their 'foggy memories' of the abuse, as perhaps being reflective of a type of safety mechanism – a way of keeping them physically and psychologically safe from the effects of the abuse.

I had the privilege of working for several years with women who were survivors of domestic violence and also women who were survivors of child sexual abuse [CSA]. We formed a group called Silent Too Long [2003], where the women had the opportunity to discuss the impacts of these abuses on them, but to also identify the many ways in which they had made commitments to make stands against the CSA, to educate the wider public about CSA (as it was not given that much acknowledgment at that time), to recognise their strengths and their ethics and, in this process, to heal.

In the focus group discussion today, we were just talking about 'foggy memories' where people do not have clear recollections of the abuses to which they had been subjected. A number of the women had been invited by others into thinking 'maybe the abuse didn't happen', or maybe it wasn't as extreme as they had thought. The work which we did in the late 1990s and then into the 2000s for victim/survivors to name that child sexual abuse had actually happened to them was quite a courageous undertaking as it was not given all that much credence at that time. Talking with them about not having clear memories about the sexual abuse, we wondered whether this might have been a safety mechanism to help shield them

from remembering the horrors which they had experienced. What was important was to then look at the ethics which were involved in having foggy memories. Talking this through with the women, whether the lack of clear memories was about them endeavouring to keep themselves emotionally and psychologically safe. I think these are important concepts to take into consideration because for the women in the Silent Too Long group, that notion of foggy memory was there, and for many of them, it was actually a very useful strategy to help them move away and heal from the horrific impacts and memories of the CSA. This instead enabled them to live one day into the next: to stand with justice, to look to a brighter future, premised upon their strengths, values and ethics. (Jussey Verco)

In a similar vein, Yael Gershoni described how important it has been in her work with people who had survived abuse and trauma to remember that sometimes it ‘is the opposite’ regarding people’s *problems with memory*. That is, Yael spoke to the fact that foggy memories can indeed be painful, but that in her work with survivors of trauma, memories can also be too strong, and they can haunt people, so in this way, she said ‘the opposite can also be true’.

I wanted to also point out the opposite can also be true ... I know that foggy memories can be very painful, and I also think that validation is very important in order for people to get better ... but I think many, many times in trauma, it’s the opposite: the memories are too strong, and they are there too much, and they haunt you day and night. So I know foggy memories, I can understand that and the need for validation, but I think most of the time, we struggle with the opposite, that the memories are haunting them day and night, wherever a person goes. (Yael Gershoni)

8. To think more about the distribution of memories and different responsibilities to remember

Alongside the important contributions that practitioners have made about how they work with *memory* with those who have survived sexual violence, it was also significant to hear from practitioners whose main therapeutic work was with men who had perpetrated acts of violence (sexual abuse, physical violence, manipulation, etc.). In speaking with practitioners who mainly work with those who have survived sexual abuse versus those who mainly work with those who have perpetrated the abuse, I started to realise that there were some clear distinctions to be made, particularly in relation to considerations about inviting those who have enacted harm to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions. Those practitioners who mainly worked with people who had perpetrated abuse did not focus as much on allowing space for the person to

remember or not, but rather, stressed the importance of remembering as a way of taking responsibility for their actions.

On this topic, one practitioner described how engaging with the idea of ‘opening space’ – as described by Michael White in the Domain – influenced a therapeutic encounter he had between the initial and feedback focus group meetings.

[In] the Domain, Michael outlines like a four-stage process of how he might go about helping someone remember the abuse they have been accused of perpetrating – in this instance, he’s talking about how he would re-engage with the family afterwards, once this person [who has been accused] has remembered and understood the effects of their behaviours, in regard to sexual abuse ... This part of the Domain reminded me of a practice situation I engaged in just after our first meeting, where these ideas from Michael were fresh in my head. So, I met with a family where the parents had separated but they wanted to work out how to co-parent peacefully, you know, without violence, without them going to war with each other. But there was another issue that seemed to be coming up, where one of the children, the older child who was in their mid-teens, just didn’t want to be there [in the counselling session], and both children ended up disclosing their fear of Dad, and Dad and Mum basically denied that ... like, denied the legitimacy of that fear, you know? The parents weren’t aggressive in denying the children’s fear, but the mum was sticking up for the dad, and the dad didn’t understand it ... While this was happening, this [points to transcript/Domain] was basically running through my head the whole time, so I found myself thinking, ‘how do I create a space for this guy to open up?’

After about an hour, the kids wanted to get out [of the therapy room], so they left with his ex-partner ... and I basically ended up disclosing to the father some of my own journey, which is not something I do often ... and actually, this sharing of my own experience seemed to work for him ... he eventually confessed that ‘maybe some of my body language is a bit scary?’ ... and his ex-partner came back in the room, and he said, ‘Ah, it’s okay now, and what Brian’s told me, it makes sense to me now...’ And she seemed to come on board with the idea that his body language, and the way he spoke at times, could be perceived as scary, even if he wasn’t deliberately physically violent ... so that was one example that came to mind.
(Brian Morris)

This practitioner spoke of a renewed determination to ‘keep trying to find ways to help the dominant person, in this case the father, to acknowledge what they’ve done and the effects that it’s had on the person who is being perpetrated against’. In this instance, speaking of his own experience was an attempt to:

‘open up space’ like Michael did ... Because, in some ways, I think that sharing of your own experience can open space by alleviating some of the shame that comes with public confession – or ‘public avow’, to use Foucault’s words. So, I thought that could maybe open up possibilities by opening space for his shame to be minimised, and I think that’s what happened. (Brian Morris)

9. Made me more confident in going back to working with men

In the focus group discussion, Jo Allen described how seeing Michael White step into a more centred and influential stance with a man who had been accused of perpetrating abuse (as seen in a transcript in the Domain) made her feel more confident in possibly returning to work with men who have perpetrated violence or abuse. This was quite a significant response from Jo, as she is someone who has spent many years working mainly alongside survivors of childhood sexual abuse and she had previously stepped away from engaging with those who have perpetrated abuse. However, in the focus group meeting, Jo spoke of how she now felt like it might be more possible for her to work with men who have perpetrated violence, while also remaining in an ‘ethical territory’ that fit with her values and commitments.

When we talked about this particular transcript and Domain, I had an image of Michael standing right next to the child, Lacey ... and I saw Michael refusing to walk away from the child. It was like he was standing with her. It was an act of solidarity. It was an act of support. It was an act of believing the uncle [Jake] would find it within himself to value something about the powerful effects of remembering the harm that he’d done to Lacey’s future wellbeing, and her current wellbeing. So, I felt like Michael’s ethics came across more strongly than ever in that moment by being so dogged, and not ... like kind of a refusal to let the man [Jake] get away with saying ‘I can’t remember’ ... you know? And I think it’s quite powerful ... In observing the work that some of my male colleagues do with perpetrators of violence, I often see that sort of impatience that turns into persistence around believing there must be a way that we can remember this. But I find it really hard to do that work with men, particularly when you do so much work with women and children that are harmed, because part of me just wants to say, ‘Well, isn’t that convenient that you’ve forgotten that?!’ So, I kind of admired the way that Michael did it ... He found that ethical territory to stand in. And in a way, it made me feel more confident to going back to working with men ... to do it slightly differently maybe, but just to really not let them use the ‘I forgot’ sort of place to stand. So, yeah, it definitely seemed much more centring of the young person [Lacey], which I kind of liked, I’ve got to say. (Jo Allen)

10. Exploring what difference it would have made to have been believed

A number of practitioners spoke about how often they had heard survivors of abuse say that the way that the people closest to them responded to the abuse or assault was as influential or more influential than the actual abuse or assault itself. In particular, the experience of not being believed by adults about experiences of child sexual abuse was often seen as the significant event, more than the abuse itself. Building on this, Jo Allen spoke about how important it is to have people who can join in on, and reinforce, the ‘believing story’ of the person who has survived sexual abuse. Specifically, Jo noted that she had come to realise that this is such a big part of the work in the realms of trauma and abuse, and she referred to this type of coming together of the people closest to the person as a collective ‘justice-doing project’. Furthermore, Jo described the ways in which people can still be invited into these territories of being ‘believed’ when they are invited to consider what difference it might have made if someone had believed them when they first spoke up about the abuse they were enduring.

I think such a big part of the work around responding to trauma is finding out what difference they believe it would’ve made if someone believed them. And usually you can find someone that did believe – if you dig deep enough. Like maybe it was that their dog kind of knew ... or a teacher that kept asking ... But those stories often become buried under all the people that didn’t really do ethically the right thing by that child, from their point of view ... I think that’s a huge thing to consider when responding to trauma. And so, in regard to that ‘realness’ [referring to Renee in the transcript], I wonder if sometimes people become even more committed to holding the sacredness or the *realness* of that memory of trauma or abuse as a response to the injustice? Like, people think... ‘other people didn’t believe me, so I’m going to believe me. I’m not giving up on myself, because I know what happened’ ... The story of ‘realness’ actually becomes stronger because of that protest or that refusal that Maggie [Carey] was talking about [in the focus group]: ‘I’m not letting someone diminish that, because I know that happened’. So it almost becomes like a justice-doing project for yourself ... I think those are really important things that narrative brings to the table. And I think that holding on to the realness and being almost more committed to the truth-telling is a very important thing to find out about ... and if we don’t, I think we’re missing something really important. (Jo Allen)

Following this comment, Jo spoke about how, moving forwards, she wanted to find ways of doing more of a collective-type of acknowledgment in her therapeutic practice, as this was something that Michael White often did in his work with outsider witnesses and definitional ceremonies. Jo spoke about the possibility of inviting parents, friends,

and others more in her work after engaging with this Domain and this focus group discussion.

11. Lines of questioning for future conversations

The following questions were written up by Angel Yuen after she engaged with the Domain and after our initial focus group meeting. To give some context for these notes and questions, Angel said that since reading the Domain and since the first focus group meeting, she had found herself really appreciating the concept of ‘the injustice of foggy memories’, but she also said:

I wondered if maybe there was some possibility in naming the ‘injustice of foggy memories’ to explore meaning-making because it may not feel like an ‘injustice’ for everyone.

Angel said this got her more interested in the meaning that people give to memories, and this led her to write up the following questions.

I wondered if there’s a possibility for ‘double-storying’ foggy memories or these ‘not-remembered experiences’ – which was another name you used, that I really liked ... because I think that language can also be helpful. Okay, I’ll just go through the questions...

1. What has been hard or distressing about the ‘foggy’ or maybe the ‘not remembering’ or ‘not knowing’ – what’s been hard about that? But also, I think if we’re double-storying we could maybe even ask, ‘What’s been helpful about not remembering?’

And I wondered, is there some kind of discourse at play as well that ‘you need to remember in order to heal?’ I started to think about that as well. Because people do come in to see us, and often I think there’s a belief that we can help ‘uncover those memories’

2. What has the effect of ‘not remembering’ been on you?

3. What would it mean to ‘remember’ what happened?

4. What would it mean if the memories were not foggy? Would that be good, bad, scary, something in-between, or a bit of all of that?

[Angel linked this question to story from practice] It’s so hard to know the meaning that a person might give to not-foggy or unfoggy traumatic memories. For

example, I can think of one woman I was seeing in therapy, and it was distressing for her to actually remember the horrors. At the same time, it was also helpful to remember and have the memories un-fogged. At the times when her memories were foggy, she could only speak to them in bits and pieces, as the memories were so timeless and fragmented. It's not that she wanted to know exactly what happened, but at the same time, she just wanted that experience of not knowing to stop – whether it was a feeling in her body, or the flash of her father being in her bed. It was particularly distressing because nothing was clear – it was all timeless for her, so she couldn't make sense of it. But she knew it was traumatic and horrific ... So, this is an example of a situation where a question such as 'Would remembering it be good, bad, scary, or something in-between, or a bit of all of that?' might be especially helpful [...] And so, going back to this woman who had the fragments of memory, there were some times when she did remember. And as much as the unfoggy memories were distressing, she would say to me, 'It helps me to tell you what I remember. Even though I get this feeling of dread and I keep seeing this visual at least now I know what was done to me. It's beyond horrible but it's not as confusing. And when I tell you the memory of what happened, because I can't share it with my family ... but when I tell you ... it's like now you have it'. I'm not sure if this is all making sense. But what we learned together is that when she told me about the unfoggy memory ... it was almost as if she was giving it to me. She would say to me, 'It's like now you have it and when I leave your office, I can say to myself, 'Well, Angel has it'. And then she explained to me that when she told me memories of what she remembered in a previous counselling session that the memory would stop visiting her at night or at least not be as powerful. With that in mind, it seemed that there was something about her sense of agency that seemed to elevate a bit more, when she came up with that idea of 'I'm giving it to you, Angel, so you have it'.

5. Are there any parts of 'foggy', 'not remembering' or 'not knowing' that have perhaps been helpful to you?

This is a question that I have asked before, because some of the things that have happened to people have been so unimaginable and so unspeakable ... but I just thought of this question again.

6. Even though your memories are vague, fragmented or foggy, (however we might want to word that) ... What do you remember about how you responded during that time – or during those years? What did you do? How did you comfort yourself? Or what helped to lessen the effects of those horror years?

So, then the person might not be remembering the actual memory, but there can be memories about how they responded.

I thought of this question because I feel that Michael's ideas have been so helpful in terms of this concept of 'half memories' – that people do respond that they're

not passive that they are doing something – so I think I ask a version of this, or I thought about it more on account of your Domain, Kelsi... (Angel Yuen)

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