

Editors' Introduction

Don Redmond and Richard LaFleur

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**SPECIAL ISSUE:
NARRATIVE AND PERSONAL AND SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION**

Editors' Introduction

Don Redmond
Mercer University

Richard LaFleur
University of West Georgia

We are honored to commemorate the 10th Narrative Matters conference--taking place on the 20th Anniversary of the inaugural event in Toronto in 2002--with this Special Issue of *Narrative Works*. Further, we appreciate the invaluable guidance and support of Bill Randall, the founding editor of the journal, and the journal's new editor, Kate de Medeiros.

It would have been difficult to imagine how the world would look when the organizers of Narrative Matters 2018 handed the baton to us at the University of Twente in July of 2018; from a global pandemic, to the Black Lives Matter movement and a renewed push for racial and economic equality and justice, to the ongoing humanitarian and political crisis in Ukraine. Clearly, the importance of dialogue, and finding shared meaning through stories, is as important as ever--interpersonally, and internationally.

Atlanta holds a deep connection to the United States Civil Rights movement, and in hosting the 10th Narrative Matters--the first Narrative Matters in the US--we attempted to recognize this history with the theme of personal and social transformation, including with the keynote address of Derrick Alridge (forthcoming), and his ongoing work documenting the experiences of courageous

Southern Black educators--beginning in the late 1800s and through the US Civil Rights movement. Further, we hoped to embrace the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King as well as a second Nobel Peace Prize winner with deep roots in Atlanta, President Jimmy Carter, with the choice of the Center for Civil and Human Rights as the location for our opening reception. In addition to artifacts and exhibits from the United States, Center installations recognizing global human rights activists such as Estela Barnes de Carlotto, Nelson Mandela, and Vaclav Havel. The Center's presentation of the *International Bill of Rights*--comprised of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the *International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) treaties--provided additional conference relevance, and inspiration.

Our Special Issue begins with an engaging and candid "intellectual autobiography" by Dan McAdams, including what became a prophetic career anecdote about his early junior faculty struggles to help himself, and his students, understand Erik Erikson's (1968) meaning of identity--until considering the metaphor of "story." Also addressed are McAdams' prolific subsequent contributions to the field of identity and the life story, redemptive life stories told by highly generative American adults, and most recently, psychobiographies including Big 5 personality characteristics of former 21st century US presidents, narrative arcs, and the uniqueness and even a proposed absence of a narrative arc.

On the topic of life journeys, and those close to us who become central characters in our respective plot lines, Karen Skerrett presents her concept of relational wisdom as "*the ability to connect individual concerns to relational consequences, approach like challenges from a team, or 'we' perspective...*" while also considering "purpose" beyond the relationship. She shares fascinating examples from transcripts of real-life couples, while also demonstrating the power of metaphor in providing additional context and meaning.

Natalie Merrill provides an impressive example of mixed-method, narrative-based research in examining the role of intergenerational narratives--particularly from parents--in helping to construct identity. Further, Merrill considers the fascinating question of whether generational influences work toward reinforcing a person's identity achievement (Erikson, 1968), or a sense of identity foreclosure (Marcia, 1966) if an individual's career aspirations and path may be narrowed. Merrill concludes with a charge for researchers to increase emphasis on marginalized individuals and "*...how individual trauma is passed down through memories shared across generations.*"

Art Frank's reflection and re-visitation of his seminal work, *The Wounded Storyteller* (Frank, 1995) provides further insights, including how we can become

what Frank terms “vulnerable readers”--that is, more intentional in how stories connect us to our own current and future challenges. Further, Frank provides an especially relevant observation to our conference theme with a discussion of so called “tricksters,” who “...*force us to acknowledge and embrace that duality in ourselves. We have to find a way to live with our own dividedness, whether that is as individuals or as a collective.*”

Bill Randall adds to his impressive scholarly output – and the gift for helping us all to appreciate aging not as a process to fear but as an adventure. Randall provides a fascinating cross-section of thinkers, from Paul John Eakin’s consideration of multiple ‘selves’, to Mark Freeman and the rewards and risks of hindsight, to the concept of narrative freedom introduced by Margaret Morganroth Gullette. He concludes with the beautiful suggestion that despite significant obstacles—if not trauma and tragedy—we encounter in life, perhaps we all “...*need to lay out a more hopeful, more affirming vision of life overall, and of later life too.*” Randall’s contribution also foreshadows his recently published book, co-authored with Barbara Lewis, and Andy Achenbaum, *Fairy Tale Wisdom: Stories for the Second Half of Life*.

Gerben Westerhof offers additional insight into mixed method research and even the evolution of the Narrative Matters/Narrative Works community; Westerhof’s description of the pursuit of research in applied narrative practice perhaps mirrors the broad discipline of narrative from the more theoretical to the practical--at least for those in a human science and service disciplines such as psychology, counseling, social work, and nursing/medicine. Westerhof provides an impressive and diverse list and description of 11 interventions from Story Lab researchers and practitioners, including those aimed at resilience, connectedness, personal recovery, and meaning through art-based learning.

Jason Whitehead takes up the formidable task of seeking out “*Narrative Truth...in spite of [the] apparent contradiction between holding on to narrative theory’s constructivist, post-positivist assumptions and engaging in empirical critique of social narratives.*” Whitehead succeeds, while highlighting techniques that can be useful when combating socially dangerous narrative. He also offers additional context to cultural and religious motivations that led to Christian Nationalists embracing the “Stop the Steal” movement after the 2020 US presidential election.

Moenandar et al. also present a critical approach to receiving and interpreting narratives, in this case using a “strategic analysis” approach to considering the narrative Mark Zuckerberg used to introduce Metaverse. The authors present a “strategic” model that considers how Zuckerberg’s description is

constructed, and thus to “...open up the possibility to consider possible ways of constructing the narrative”, including from a naturalistic rather than technological perspective.

Perhaps the best example of personal and social transformation from a collaborative international perspective comes from Cathy Raymond and her moving work on decolonizing research using culturally sensitive creative collaboration with Parvana, an Afghan woman. Raymond provides a timely critique of western-centric approaches to research while offering a model for non-dominant epistemologies, specifically co-constructed poetic re-storying. Her contribution is reminiscent of the work of Brian Schiff (2018) and narrating as political action, and Molly Andrews (2007) book *Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change*.

Finally, the 10th Narrative Matters conference attendees were treated to a powerful address by Isabel Wilkerson (2011) capturing her extraordinary and compassionate decade of research interviewing 1,200 Black migrants fleeing the racism of the Deep South of the United States throughout much of the 20th century. Considering the context, effort and skill Wilkerson demonstrated in what became *The Warmth of Other Suns*, her work stands as one of the most important and impressive examples of the intersection of qualitative research, social justice, and narrative nonfiction in recent history. This Special Issue concludes with an afterward inspired by Wilkerson, provided by Chloe Jordan (2022), a Mercer University, College of Professional Advancement working-adult student in a course entitled “Liberal Studies 303: Issues of Justice in a Global Community.”. For those of us lucky enough to attend Wilkerson’s closing keynote on May 19, 2022, in Atlanta, you likely remember Ms. Jordan from the Question and Answer session following the Wilkerson’s talk. We hope Jordan’s essay entitled “*Meeting Isabel Wilkerson, The Pulitzer-Prize Winning Author of Caste*” reminds us of the power of narrative, and the written and spoken word.

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