

GRACE NOTES

DR SALMA SIDDIQUE begins a regular column looking at story-making through the lens of both an anthropologist and psychotherapist

HELLO, I'M SALMA. I am writing this new column in the hope that I can inspire, irritate and encourage you to respond so as to make the column as interactive as possible! As an anthropologist, looking at the relationship of anthropology to my practice as a TA psychotherapist, I am interested in how participating in story-making influences our role as therapists. I see the role of therapist as a significant part of the ritual of story-making.

My theme for this first column is the concept of grace notes. One definition of grace notes is as 'a musical note that is added by the musician for ornament: a small addition, inclusion or embellishment'. Within our TA community, much like an orchestra of individual instruments, we have our own grace notes where we annotate our own stories of the way we want to express and articulate our TA practice. The novel *Grace Notes* by Bernard MacLaverly (1998) uses a definition of grace notes as 'notes which are neither one thing nor the other'. This struck a chord with me as I am interested in in-between-ness as an anthropological concept and see it as having some relevance for therapy (Siddique 2011). The composer in MacLaverly's novel asks 'where are the notes between the notes?' Therapists might call these insights, unexpressed feelings or unspoken words.

We have these annotated notes of our lives which come from scripts narrated, dictated and written by others. Grace notes could be seen as reclaiming and annotating our stories. The stories we are told are usually dictated to us in childhood and generally become our life scripts. I was reminded of this when listening to Janette Winterston, in an interview about her recent autobiography:

'It's a cover version, I'm always clear that we're always writing a cover version that one story exceeds another; you cannot get at the actual truth. One thing I learned as a child is there's a big difference between a fact and the truth and that has continued to be so. We are all self invented; this isn't anything to do with the X factor or your 15 minutes of fame or who you want to be. It's who you have to become over the course of your life.... I read

myself as a fiction as well as a fact. In that way at least I can tell my own story instead of having someone else telling it for me.'

There seems to be an increased interest in published autobiographies – do we all need to tell a version of our story? The therapist can offer one way, by being actively engaged in the process of reconstruction of the client's story. Through aspects of the dialogue, which deal with beliefs and judgments, the therapist can bring to awareness the disruptions in the client's story which might lead to a negotiation of aspects of self, identity and autonomy. One of my clients, a woman in her eighties, can illustrate this. She was referred by her GP for therapy to help cope with her chronic illness. At supervision I said I could not tie her down to goals and tasks and felt frustrated and helpless. Then I realised she was trying to tell me the story of her life. She had had no opportunity to tell her story in a complete way. I could be the last person to hear her version of her life story as she was coming towards the end of her life.

Each person has their own story which evolves due to their experience or lack of experience in the world. TA uses the concept of scripts – stories we tell ourselves through early childhood decisions, expectations and family myths. I am suggesting that as human beings – clients and therapists – we have points of style (the way we respond to this rather than that), resilience (cognitive processes of learning to tolerate the misery or discomfort by holding on to a sense of worth), interpretations (experiences or the absence of experiences create a sense of meaning), and strategies (what you do when something does or does not happen) – which can form the grace notes to these scripts. I think we all carry our own grace notes. I am interested in whether you agree with me and would welcome your contributions.

A full version of this article will be submitted to the TAJ for review.

References

MacLaverly, B (1998) *Grace Notes* Norton Books
Siddique (2011) *Being in-between: The relevance of ethnography and auto-ethnography for psychotherapy research. Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 11(4) 310-316

Winterston, J (2011) *Why be happy when you can be normal?* Jonathan Cape Publishers



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