Dear reader,

Most of the papers that can be downloaded from the Narrative Therapy Library and Bookshop were originally published in the *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. We recommend this peer-reviewed journal to practitioners who wish to stay in touch with the latest ideas and developments in narrative therapy. This journal offers hopeful and creative ideas for counsellors, social workers, teachers, nurses, psychologists, and community workers.

In each issue, practitioners from a range of different countries discuss the ideas and practices that are inspiring them in their work, the dilemmas they are grappling with, and the issues most dear to their hearts. Their writings are easy-to-read while remaining rigorous and thoughtful. The first section of each issue revolves around a particular theme, while the second consists of a collection of practice-based papers on various topics. The journal is produced four times a year. If you wish to stay in touch with the latest developments in narrative practice, we hope you will subscribe and become a part of our community of readers!

**To subscribe**

If you wish to subscribe to this journal, please contact your local distributor:

North America: Narrative Books (USA) kenwoodtherapycenter@mac.com
UK: Narrative Books (UK) mark@hayward.flyer.co.uk
Australia & elsewhere: Dulwich Centre Publications: dcp@senet.com.au

Ask about current special offers for new subscribers!

**Narrative Therapy Library and Bookshop**

Back issues of the *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* are available for purchase via: www.narrativetherapylibrary.com

This website makes it possible to research, browse, and purchase writings about narrative therapy. It contains an extensive bibliography about narrative therapy and community work which can be searched via author, title, or keyword.

www.narrativetherapylibrary.com
Email: support@narrativetherapylibrary.com

Dulwich Centre website:
www.dulwichcentre.com.au

**Copyright**

The following article is copyright © Dulwich Centre Publications. Except as permitted under the *Australian Copyright Act 1968*, no part of this article may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission. All enquiries should be made to the copyright owner at: Dulwich Centre Publications, Hutt St PO Box 7192, Adelaide, SA, Australia, 5000; email dcp@senet.com.au
A t present, prisons are upheld as our society’s response to those who have done the most harm to others. Those who have killed, hurt, assaulted, raped are supposed to be imprisoned. Also imprisoned are those who have committed property offences – most of which are directly related to poverty and the use of certain drugs which are deemed illegal.\footnote{\textsuperscript{2}}

To sincerely think about prisons involves trying to come to terms with the profound class and race-based injustices that our legal system creates and maintains. It is also to face the question of what to do with those whose acts seriously harm others, those who terrorise, assault and kill. During my years of working within prisons, I met with many men who had committed what I consider to be horrific crimes – callous, violent, cruel acts. I also met many lovely men brutalised by generational poverty, racism and/or ill-treatment.\footnote{\textsuperscript{3}}

What was almost uniformly common was that no-one was talking about any sense of regret they may have felt about the crimes that had led to their incarceration. No-one. Perhaps this was due somewhat to the fact that I was working in a maximum security prison, but in my experience it was a system wide phenomenon.\footnote{\textsuperscript{4}}

In the very institutions in which we place those whom the community judges to have done the most wrong, there is no talk of regret, sadness, shame, or the will to seek forgiveness. Far more likely are continual protestations of innocence, of appeals, or simply silence when it comes to the crimes committed. It is a silence that staff perpetuate. It is a silence that I maintained.

Why is this silence pervasive? Is it because those who have done such wrongs feel no remorse? Is it symptomatic of dominant masculinity? Is it because our legal system in some way encourages claims of innocence even in circumstances of overwhelming guilt?

Perhaps it is due to all of this, and more. Perhaps the ways in which we treat those who have committed terrible wrongs makes it likely that we will never witness any remorse they may feel.

Although they may not speak about regret or shame, every day many prisoners engage in acts of self-mutilation, self-punishment, and far too often suicide. The longer I worked within prisons the more I came to believe that these actions were not only responses to the daily degradations they were experiencing, but were also commonly expressions of regret and shame for past actions. And so, why does this remorse remain unspoken?

Prisons degrade. Every minute of every day, those with numbers rather than names are invited to see themselves in only one light – as individuals who deserve to be punished. Such a belief is ingrained in the architecture, the clothing, the food, the minute-by-minute routine, the endless boredom and the violence. To survive prison life is a brutal art form, one in which resistance becomes quite literally a matter of life or death.

It is my belief that to respond to crime and acts of injustice with further degradation and brutality is to reduce the possibilities of the individuals concerned feeling regret for their actions and seeking forgiveness. To respond by placing people within hyper-masculine institutions is to increase only the likelihood of resistance and further aggression.

We totalise the identities of those the courts convict and in the process close down the possibilities for them to step into territories of sorrow, of regret, of the desire to restore the harm that they have done. By placing those who have done wrong into prison cultures that encourage denial and the diminishment of the effects of their crimes, we play a part, I believe, in reducing the possibility of restorative actions. In so doing, I believe we let down those who are subjected to violence, and we let down our communities.

We don’t hear the regret of those we incarcerate partly, at least, because we do nothing to make it possible for it to be expressed, built upon and acted upon. What would institutions, community processes, and rituals look like that made this a priority? I believe they would look very different than our prisons.

Notes


2. Many people who do harm to others are not imprisoned – including those who commit harm through government sanctioned violence, economic policies, business decisions, or environmental devastation.

3. Sometimes, I would discover that the men whom I considered lovely, were also the men who had committed terrible acts. Other times, I met with those who I considered to be horrible men to discover they had committed only paper crimes. It was a profoundly confusing experience.

4. I may be exaggerating slightly. Occasionally, glimmers of a conversation about regret and shame might occur behind the closed doors of a psychologist’s office, but even this seemed very rare.

\textsuperscript{1} David Denborough