



***“No Tom, we are not the justice league:  
The justice league is imaginary, you know  
And we are real.”***

## **Observations on the real effects of Insider Witnessing In our clients’ words**

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This paper is a beginning sketch of our participants’ words in response to experiencing an Insider Witnessing interview. It is based on our recorded and transcribed follow-up interviews, as well as our clients’ spontaneous letters and documents back to us. Every quote in this paper is a verbatim representation of our clients’ words.

Many of the papers in this special issue already contain case-studies of the “real effects” of the practices of Insider Witnessing on particular clients. This practice has been shaped by every person whom we have interviewed, and each one of them has made a unique contribution to the character of the practice going forward. The real effects of Insider Witnessing on our clients are by now inseparable from the ways our clients have supervised us into taking it up with the next person.

It has been a summary privilege for us to witness our clients joining us as shapers, contributors, supervisors, evaluators, co-researchers, and co-authors together with us. It is impossible in this paper to represent all that we have come to know through our clients of what becomes possible when we as therapists join our clients as witnesses on their behalf. We have tried and formed and discarded and re-formed questions that we might ask our clients that might give us a fair idea of what this was really like for them and what it got them thinking about in their lives.

For example, early on, we asked our clients to evaluate the value of an Insider Witnessing interview in terms of therapy hours: If you compared this session to previous sessions, how many therapy sessions would you estimate this experience was worth to you?

We stopped asking this question after un-printable and un-reportable answers such as “light years,” or “9 years of therapy,” “it’s invaluable to me”, or “it’s like the Visa commercial: it’s priceless!” -Did I tell you that our clients just happen to be some of the funniest and fiercest women around?

The follow-up interviews after the Insider Witnessing happen between the therapist and the client, without the presence of other members of the witnessing team. From time to time,



clients have requested to meet with the team in addition to speaking about the effects with their own therapist. The following are some of the questions that we have played with for therapists to ask their clients after the witnessing:

- Would you mind sharing what it was like for you to see your life portrayed before your eyes by your therapist?
- As you were watching the portrayal was there anything in particular that was said that really surprised you?
- As you were watching was there anything in particular that you found yourself relating to or agreeing with, or protesting and dissenting that you had never considered before?
- As a result of watching the portrayal of your life did you come away with any new appreciations for yourself and your life?
- It has been common for the people who have participated in these interviews before you to tell us that they felt like they had traveled a great distance during the interview and in the weeks that followed. Would you say that your experience was similar, or different?
- Were there any points or realizations that seem particularly important to you to pursue further either on your own or in this therapy?

The expressions of the effects of participating in an Insider Witnessing practice by our clients that are quoted in this paper speak for themselves and are purposefully highlighted without additions of conclusive theoretical pronouncements on our part. It is too early to narrow down the considerations of what Insider Witnessing makes possible in our clients' lives, and more thorough study and co-research is necessary in order to illuminate such considerations in the future.

In order to facilitate some appreciation of the below expressions, however, I would like to remind the reader of one significant matter: all of our clients who participated in these interviews have histories of experiences of serious trauma in the form of physical and sexual abuse, violence, and mistreatment as well as histories of many years of therapeutic treatment. It is against this backdrop that we were humbled to wonder together with our clients about the achievement of uttering expressions as the ones printed below.

The decision was made to organize the countless expressions taken from our transcripts, poems, and our clients' written documents back to our team into categories of ideas and notions that repeated over and over again across each of their experiences. These expressions





by our clients of what happened to them and why they think this happened have a lot to teach all of us about the venture of therapy. They have certainly changed my therapy practice irrevocably and educated my attention to the means by which grand stories of shame that have been made to take root in a soul by repetitive mistreatment and the Master Narratives that give permission for the continuation of the mistreatment by powerful others can be made to hesitate and yield. In my own practice, I have taken up this generous supervision by our clients regarding the effects of Insider Witnessing to all of my daily encounters with clients. The expressions that were most common among the diversity of thoughts fall into the following categories:

1. Spontaneous expressions immediately afterwards
2. Epiphanies regarding my suffering
3. Claims of my respectworthiness
4. Why I think this touched me so:
  - a. Someone really cared
  - b. For once, I was not inside my life but on the outside looking in

Each comment below denotes a different speaker.

### 1. Spontaneous Expressions Immediately Afterwards

- *I was skeptical, but when I walked away, like I said, the first words out of my mouth when I saw my sisters was, "you have to try this."*
- *I walked away, sat down in my car, and I thought, "man, I've got this." Meaning the rest of my life: I've got this.*
- *I walked away and sat in my car for an hour, unable to drive home just yet. I journaled instead. This is the beginning of what I wrote:*  
*"I walk out and to be unaffected is impossible*  
*She cries my tears and feels my pain*  
*Maybe I am not alone*  
*Maybe I have a right to my sadness*  
*And something*  
*Shifted like the tectonic plates were moving..."*





- *We drove to the hotel and I remember not wanting to take my sleep medication that night. I'm usually so anxious about being able to sleep in a new place. I thought: "I don't know what this is, but I want to stay awake for this."*
- *After the interview I went home, and I was trying to explain it to my dad. The analogy that I was using was the it was like this warm bath of sunlight, like comfort and caring, and kindness. And he said, the clouds opened up and sun was shining down on you. That was the perfect analogy.*
- *We spent almost three hours talking and watching the video. It was both tiring and enlightening for me. Tiring in a good way. At the end of it, I felt at peace somehow and the way we talked about me and my thought processes made me think about myself with a renewed sense of pride. I wrote a poem for you all after watching that. Here is the beginning of it:*

*"Trudging through the snow  
searching through tear smeared eyes  
imaginings evoked by distant lights  
he says I've been in this field before  
and I have  
more than once  
more than twice  
if the lights are worlds within a world  
each wonderer of a world left their porch light on  
signaling a home within which to belong  
she thinks of a light house  
reaching me at sea  
more than once  
more than twice..."*

## 2. Epiphanies Regarding My Suffering

- *I had an epiphany! I had an epiphany about this paternalistic interference in my life. I want to say "bullshit," I want to say paternalistic interference can never, it can never be justified! When I saw this, and when I thought about what is different in it for me, what is important to me, I came to the conclusion paternalistic interference can never, never be justified.*





- *When I saw this, I suddenly thought, I thought “who did this to you!? Who beat this out of you? Who made you feel like this is not something that requires acknowledgement?”*
- *When I am talking (about the childhood circumstances) I have feelings filtered through feelings. When they are saying, and hearing about this child and what she’s been through -the unfairness shone through!*
- *When I saw this, I thought, maybe I didn’t create this, maybe it’s not my fault. They stole my magic, my power from inside me, they tried to fill it with shame. They tried to keep me from myself, and tell me how to live, how to feel, how to act, how to be. They tried to bury me alive, lull me to sleep, wrap me in this ill-fitting, expensive cloth and make me ashamed of my nakedness. Then I would always be clothed and never feel at home in my own skin, I would never be at home, because I don’t have one. And when I cried, they said, quiet down, don’t be such a baby there’s no place for that here.*
- *When I saw this, I realized fully the place I lost all agency for the first time in my memorable life and I say let it never be twice.*
- *You see, my life taught me to see myself as a broken person, forever trying to climb out of that hole and stay despair in the attempt.*
- *Like I mentioned before, I was finally able to see my struggles and the ways that I had been mistreated in life without all the negative feelings attached to them or perhaps it was more like there were new feelings, feelings of compassion and pride, now attached to my life and my history.*
- *The other thing is I like I never saw myself exactly clearly before. And like—and then I never gave credence to the problems I was having, like I always thought that I was being a wimp. I think I said that to you several times. That I was a victim, that I just you know, need to suck it up kind of thing. And then I think like watching that portrayal was, you know like the things I went through were really painful, you know? And my therapist was expressing that pain and showing me that, that pain was a very real thing.*
- *When my therapist told the story, it felt like “this really happened.” This really happened to me. And I thought to myself, “here we go.” And something shifted, like the earth shifted underneath me.*

### 3. Claims of My Respectworthiness

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- *I think like it's like I'm unapologetically myself right now. I feel so free, it's like the same thing I said to you last time. I felt complete freedom.*
- *I think it allowed to stop being so hard on myself. After she recognized all the baby steps I'd taken over the last few years or even a lifetime are huge and it's okay for me to be proud of myself and happy with who I am. I didn't really get that before.*
- *You know, I was like "I didn't realize how kind of cool I am. I'm kind of like a different person, I'm kind of like my own person."*
- *You guys helped me realize how brave I've been throughout all of the stuff I have been going through. And how that like—even though I wanted to die in situations, that brazen rebellion inside of me is probably what kept me alive.*
- *Regardless of the depression or the anxiety, or being female, I claim my right to make decisions that are mine. Not because they are imposed on my mind, but because they are mine. And more importantly, not only am I making decisions, but I have to freedom and capacity to act on my decisions. I have the ability to make good decisions for me. I don't need to fixed or cured in order to make a decision that can be accepted or honoured. I claim respect for my decisions.*
- *"Through the smoke and mirrors I can see myself  
I can see myself through the lens of someone else  
I can see how I matter  
I can see that my opinion has clout  
I can see that the sweat the blood and the gouges have all been worth it  
Or at least are seen.  
Maybe they have a place  
And maybe the blood is not just mine.  
I can see my strength my fragility  
I can smell my sadness  
And so I breathe deep and fully  
And I feel the fire in my belly and I rise  
And I rise to fight  
I rise to fight for myself  
To claim my space in this world"*
- *There was an arc to the interview....a story that unfolded....it gave me a picture of that unfairness and reminded me of the innocence. That child was innocent.*





- *What stood out to me was the daring of it. I was always thinking that I was too afraid to go after things. And someone saying "perhaps it was daring..." Okay, let's pull it out of the "scared socket" and put it into the "daring socket" and have a look at that. Am I a daring person? Let's look at everything I have done in my past and everything I am doing right now. Am I daring? Damn straight I am.*

#### 4. Why I Think This Touched Me So:

##### a. Someone Really Cared

- *They're the ones that have been listening. They're the ones that are taking notes and it's like "They're listening to you!" It's like proof, it's like "see?"*
- *Seeing other people moved by me, my existence has meaning.*
- *When she was portraying me, she was outraged, - their empathy is so touching, so apparent in the room. It made the experience one of safety. The process wouldn't be as positive without the empathy that I could feel. It is the cornerstone of what you are doing there. It is the distinction between feeling investigated versus supported.*
- *Yeah, like I didn't even realize you were paying that close of attention. Like, I was like, "okay people pay attention," but you were paying really close attention to me, as a person.*
- *I think it was like really interesting. I think it was very accurate, which I was—[sighs] Well, you know that I always complain that no one was really listening to me, so it was actually really touching to me that you actually are listening. And truly like trying to help and grasping the struggles I was going through.*
- *It was like – I think it was – I think I said it when we were doing it and I think after the first or second question and I said, "Oh my god you were listening. You were taking notes." It was really touching [tearful] and it really meant a lot that I was heard. I think sometimes you feel like you go to counseling just to talk and let stuff out, but the experience of doing this Insider Witnessing really proves the relationship bonding that you have with the counselor and therapist, if they truly want to make a difference and help. That's kind of what the whole process kind of showed me.*





- *I can't even begin to tell you what it means to me to see my therapist crying about the injustice in my life.*
- *It just felt so special. And I think about you, and you wanting to do that for me. And how much it's helped me. I'm just like, fuck dude, these people care so much!*

#### **b. On "Outsight"**

- *It is like this: you people always say to me "you are superwoman, you can move the mountains." And it's good to hear it, and maybe I believe that. But watching this was like "I really moved mountains." In the interview, I actually saw myself moving a mountain.*
- *It relates to you, and it's just like—I don't know, watching your character on TV. I don't know how else to put it. Except the story is about you. I don't know why people relate to things more when it's on the outside, when it's obscure, it's on the outside of them and not within them. Like they can't see it going on with them, but when you are sitting on the outside looking at it, and you're seeing something—you're like, "that person is really like a heroine. That person is like, wait a minute—that's me!" [snaps fingers] Snap.*
- *And it was the first time that I had heard my story, outside of myself, right? Because you're used to hearing your story inside of yourself, and you don't know how that is being portrayed on the in—the other person, the interpretation of it on the other side of it, right? So, it was really interesting to see the interpretation come back and see the pain, in that, and that pain is real. And that, you know it was interesting to see, you know, that anger. And that anger was real, and it was validated.*
- *It offers a bit of distance... It made me think as an adult about the child I was.*
- *Watching it from the outside, you can see how people have something they always have in them. It's not that they never thought about it, it's something they've been equipped with—it's something that's always been there, but hasn't always been acknowledged or given a word or whatever. But it has always been there. And you can see it, when you are on the outside.*
- *It's weird, to hear it as an outsider looking in. It is like reading a story. And you think about all the adventures that the person went through. And you're tying in the memories to all of that. It's kind of crazy to hear it in that form. People have told me that "you're*







*one of the strongest people they know” and I don’t get it. I’ve just survived. Gone through the motions. But then you hear it like that, like you are a hero in the story. Going through all these adventures. And it’s just like, “wow.” It’s crazy to think about. Because it is actually me.*

- *It was very much like reading a book about the character and feeling for them and understanding what they’re going through. I was feeling love and care about this girl they were talking about – who is me! That third perspective really allowed me to give those compassionated thoughts to myself.*
- *From the outside I could see that I am not too big not too small or too loud or too quiet - maybe I am exactly who I need to be and where I need to be. And maybe that’s the point.*
- *Somehow, listening to your words, my efforts appeared differently to me: my baby steps rose up and grew tall right in front of my eyes.*
- *Watching my therapist portray me helped me detach myself from the problems I was experiencing. From this outside perspective, it was easier to sift through the events and the feelings that had previously been attached to them.*
- *Watching them talk about me in this way allowed me to see myself with new eyes. I was able to see myself from a distance and I found myself agreeing with the choices I made throughout my life; those same choices that used to bring shame somehow brought a new sense of pride and conviction that I have always known what’s right and wrong and this IWP experience actually confirmed it. I have a good moral compass in me, and this helps when I have bad days.*

### **Conclusion: A “Poetic Transcription” Of A Group Interview**

A few words from us to describe an IWP

Or:

Are there any therapists trailing up the mountain?

Tell me

What powers live in words?

And tell me





What powers lie curled up in the word powerful  
To describe This  
That has happened to us?  
Can you taste the strength of the awakening of this word  
From sleep  
To test the true measure of its wings and its fur  
Once again.

Words are falling out our mouths  
And leaving a trail of new growth  
Up the mountain  
For others to behold and walk on.  
In our pain, we are teachers.  
Do you know this power?

This gift has been dismissed by so many  
Who say I am broken as if I did something wrong  
Who say I am broken as if I were an old car.  
I looked into this black hole and the black hole looked back at me  
And my humanity started fading out  
Under the pressure to forge a tuna can mind.  
Tell me, do you know this power too?

But I am not a car and I read their report  
And I cried.  
And I am never not broken and I found words  
To refuse my capture  
And I swore.  
Do you know this power?

And then one day someone really listened  
And cared for my words instead of doodling  
And held them up for me to see  
And put them in a play.  
-You can't walk out of this play!  
You have to see it to the end  
You have no choice but to see yourself.  
Hell, you're the star  
And have wildly inspired a roomful of women.  
Do you know this power?





And now:  
Am I the butterfly or am I the dreamer?  
Am I Zhen's Zhen or Loree's Sue or Tiffany's DonnaSueZhen  
And how awake is my humanity while I have been doing it?  
How have I made this moral choice?  
And why did these changes occur?

I saw my compassion  
And I saw my kindness  
And they came cracking through darkness  
And breaking free  
And transcending my every effort.  
And so the light swallowed the darkness whole.  
Tell me truly  
Do you know such power?

I revisited myself for the first time  
And  
I have been humbled  
I have been reminder-ed  
I have been awakened  
I have been restored  
I am fucking trying  
I am leaping and flying  
I am spreading this shit  
And dreams and want and desire  
Wait on my every move.  
Man, I got this.

No Tom we are not the justice league  
The justice league is imaginary you know.  
And we are real.  
And do you know this power?

