

## ABSENT BUT IMPLICIT

Drawing on his reading of Gregory Bateson and Jacques Derrida, Michael White became interested in the idea that the meaning we make of any experience comes from contrasting it with another experience or set of experiences. No experience has a set of meanings that exists independent of other experiences, and we make meaning through operations in which we say (or think, or sense) “this is different from...” This means that a single description of any experience can be thought of as the visible side of a double description, and that a story about a problem is made in contrast to some experience that is preferred and often treasured. If we listen closely, using what White has called “double listening,” we can hear implications of the experiences that are being drawn on to make a distinction concerning the present experience. These *implied* experiences are a rich source of alternative stories. Engaging in double listening puts therapists in the position to ask about subjugated stories of what people give value to, long for, or hold precious. White called this sort of inquiry listening for the *absent but implicit*.

White has listed, as examples, various meanings that we might understand to be implicit in people’s discernments:

The discernment of:	Is made possible by:
Frustration	Specific purposes, values, and beliefs
Despair	Particular hopes, dreams, and vision for the future
Injustice	Specific conceptions of the just world
Burden	Particular missions for and pledges about life
Woundedness	Specific notions of healing
Abandonment and desolation	Particular knowledges of life that are of tradition, of spirituality, and of highly valued cultural wisdoms
And so on . . .	

Adapted from: White, M. (2003). Narrative practice and community assignments. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. (2) pp. 17-55