## Being in a position to tell: experiential knowledge in narratives

Personal narratives about mental health and illness play increasingly important roles in both mental health care practice and research. They are central to the training and practice of experts-by-experience (Van Erp et al., 2023), and a key focus in fields such as medical humanities and narrative medicine, as well as in psychology, sociology and anthropology (e.g. Frank, 2013).

There is a hope in both practice and science that personal narratives can create a bridge between the psychiatric institutional 'system' and the subjective experience of that system - in both an epistemological, as well as an ethical sense. Narratives are thought to convey experiential and embodied knowledge (Noorani et al., 2019), in addition to prompting perspective shifts that can reshape power dynamics and further epistemic justice (Woods, 2012).

In this talk, I use the attuned responsiveness framework of Dings & Strijbos (2025) to critically explore how narratives of personal experience in psychiatry relate to experiential knowledge and considerations around epistemic justice. I argue that such narratives can inform clinical decision in ways unique to the nature of story, and that they are even more informative when they are not isolated from their narrator, who is in a unique 'position to tell'.

References


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