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## Review of *Inside Story: How Narratives Drive Mass Harm*. Lois Presser

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researchers need to adapt their instruments to reflect these new taxonomies. Overall, this is a fascinating read addressing a topic that is only getting more relevant. I recommend it for interested readers who seek a deeper understanding of the multiple identities being presented by the youth in our midst.

Melinda McCormick  
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Lois Presser, *Inside Story: How Narratives Drive Mass Harm*. University of California Press (2018), 200 pages, \$85 (hardcover), \$29.95 (paperback).

Lois Presser's newest book contributes to a growing literature within the study of narrative criminology. In *Inside Story*, Presser explores the relationship between stories, emotion, and action, providing an interesting review and critique of theory, as well as a framework with which criminologists can examine how stories told in support of racism, autocracy, and nativism move us. While this book is likely to be an important contribution to narrative criminology, it is challenging to digest. Yet Presser's thesis is clear throughout—the stories we tell often justify mass harm.

Presser begins by considering the importance of narrative, asking what accounts for the emotional power of narratives and what can they teach us about mass harm. While narrative has always been central to criminology, Presser's goal is to explain the *arousal power* of narrative while still accounting for context and human agency. Narratives can compel such large swaths of people. While chapter two focuses on how harmful narratives become normalized, chapter three considers how theories of cognition and emotion might help clarify the "figurative pull" of narratives. According to Presser, for narratives to be effective they must first be enculturated. To demonstrate how narratives of mass harm become so widely accepted, Presser considers how language is manipulated and presented as "value-neutral," when it is often clearly not value-neutral at all. Word choice, she argues, is culturally and historically specific and never simply

an objective enterprise. Her overarching argument is that language is morally charged, myths are often passed off as reality, and narrative is highly affective.

At this point, Presser begins the analytic portion of the book. In these chapters, she explores the “figurative pull” of two types of narratives: underdog stories and theories of crime. The underdog narrative, which take the form of David vs. Goliath, she argues, is particularly compelling because it tells the story of an ordinary man succeeding by faith and fortitude alone, despite insurmountable odds and a cruel adversary. She then switches gears to examine the role of theory in creating “pain-causing public policy” (p. 131). What I found interesting about Presser’s analysis here is her refusal to let the audience off the hook. “We readers are the protagonist’s helpers, supporting the authors in their quest to attain intellectual mastery” (p. 113). Still, Presser’s insight could have been more compelling had these chapters been organized more succinctly. Rather than choose a few stories to analyze in detail, Presser moves around from one anecdote to the next with each new subheading, of which there are many.

Presser’s final chapter is devoted to summarizing the key insights of the book and considering methodological issues for studying narratives. Presser contemplates what type of texts are considered narratives and asks the audience to challenge harmful narratives. Restorative justice narratives, she argues, hold the most promise for producing counter-narratives capable of defying harm-producing stories.

The task Presser sets out to accomplish is not a modest one, yet by the end of the book she is quite convincing in her claim that narrative criminology has practical applications for researchers and policy makers alike. There are a few areas in which *Inside Story* falls short, however. Presser promises early on to “suggest precise ways of thinking about...narratives” (p. 2). Yet her conceptual framework was difficult to follow and I was frustrated by how the chapters were organized. Moreover, I found her use of quotes throughout to be gratuitous and distracting. Often, a single page included more quoted material than original writing. Ironically, Presser also fails to deconstruct her own morally charged statements. For example, in one chapter Presser uses “prostitution” as an example of a mass harm, indiscriminately comparing it to sexual assault. In comparing

all sex workers to sexual assault victims, Presser denies agency to individuals who consciously choose to exchange sex for goods and services. This move flies in the face of her original promise to account for agency.

These criticisms aside, there are many strengths of *Inside Story*. Presser aptly demonstrates the importance of thinking about violence as slow and structural as opposed to swift and interpersonal. Moreover, she successfully persuades readers to think of harm in unconventional ways and implores us to challenge complicity, complacency, and the benevolence of theory.

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James Midgley, Espen Dahl, and Amy Conley Wright (Eds.), *Social Investment and Social Welfare: International and Critical Perspectives*. Edward Elgar Publishing (2017), 272 pages. \$135.00 (hardcover).

Rising global inequality and trade tensions have fostered a climate of economic uncertainty. Neoliberal and austerity approaches have failed to deliver on promises of robust recovery from the 2008 global recession. As prosperity has failed to materialize for many, countries around the world are retreating into nationalism, and their politics are wracked by destructive populism. What role in this historical moment could the nation state possibly have in preserving and promoting social welfare?

One answer is social investment, the theme of this timely new edited volume. Social investment draws upon the policy traditions of social development, asset building, and financial capability. It is by nature productivist and inclusive. Social investment policies are productivist in the sense that they aim to foster economic and developmental activity resulting in financial returns, thus producing economic revenue rather than simply welfare consumption. They are inclusive as they seek to enlarge economic participation by focusing on reaching those excluded from markets and economic wealth. Social investment points the way to a new direction in social policy, to shifting welfare states