**NARRATIVE PRACTICE AND RESEARCH SYNTHESIS**

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**Part One: Description of Narrative Practice Innovation (**6300 words approx)

**Introduction**

A significant portion of my current clinical work involves the provision of individual

supervision to colleagues at Relationships Australia Northern Territory (RANT) in Darwin,

Australia. In 2014, I provided monthly individual supervision to five colleagues. In addition, I

was responsible in for organising and co-facilitating monthly group supervision (two

groups). These group supervisions are attended by all of the counsellors for whom I provide

individual supervision, as well as other RANT counsellors supervised externally or by another

colleague. Consulting literature in combination with this context led me to embark

upon a project and practice innovation involving 'justice doing' and its relationship to clinical

supervision (Reynolds, 2011a, 2011b, Denborough, 2013). Before outlining my plan to

describe this practice innovation, I will briefly discuss my reasons for linking justice-doing

and supervision

**My approach to clinical supervision: Why focus on justice-doing?**

My approach to clinical supervision is informed by several authors. Bird (2006) and Reynolds

(2014) both describe supervision as a process of expanding vision, of opening up multiple

possibilities and options, rather than simply focusing on problem solving and solutions. This

concept of expanding vision is beautifully reinforced within an article by Scerra (2012). She

cites a 2005 work by Wahanui & Broadkoorn who describe a supervision model for Maori

nurses 'He Tohu Matekite - To See Beyond' (p80). Bird's (2006) regular use of the

hyphenated term 'super-vision' further highlights that supervision is more about a vision

above and beyond than it is about finding definitive answers

Both White (1997) and Crocket (2002) discuss the suitability of the term ’supervision’. They

conclude that, while the term itself is not ideal, no adequate alternative exists at this stage.

White (1997) mentions that ‘co-vision’ has been suggested as an alternative in some circles.

His argument for not using this term, an argument I agree with, is that it tends to obscure

the “power relations” (p149) present in the supervision context. Discussion of these power

relations is important, and I will attend to it later in this essay. However, White (1997) does

suggest other useful alternative terms: ‘therapist’ instead of ‘supervisee’ and ‘consultant’

instead of ‘supervisor’ (p149). I will use these terms throughout this essay

I also believe that an important goal of supervision is to be useful for the therapist. This

usefulness is ultimately measured by the clients of the therapist - do the insights and

discoveries from supervision contribute to a positive difference in the lives of the clients?

This is where justice-doing comes in. All therapy is of course located within a broader social

context, and much of this context is characterised by "injustice and a lack of respect for

human rights" (Reynolds, 2013, p2). Reynolds (2011a) further points out that the role of

therapy is not to assist people to accommodate themselves to injustice, but to somehow

support them in standing against it. Another hyphenated term used by Bird (2006) is

relevant here. She uses the term 're-search', and I take this to mean 'looking again with new

eyes'. There is potential for the practice innovation of reflecting upon justice-doing within

supervision to be enhanced by this idea e.g. Are there new or different ways to understand

justice and/or injustice in this situation? Could injustice be impacting here in ways we have

not yet been able to see? Thus, this research project and practice innovation aims to

support clients standing against injustice by inviting therapists to engage in 'justice-doing

conversations' within supervision sessions.

**Practice innovation: Justice doing conversations within supervision**

I will describe this practice innovation by using a number of case examples which illustrate

three types of justice-doing conversation:

(i) Client-Focused Conversations: Incidents of injustice impacting on a specific client or

clients with whom therapists are working

(ii) Issue-Focused Conversations: Broader justice issues and their impacts on therapist work

in general with clients

(iii) Process-Focused Conversations: Just approaches to supervision and therapy

**Case example: Client-Focused Conversations:** Incidents of injustice impacting on a

specific client or clients with whom therapists are working

**Theoretical Discussion**

Several ideas shape my desire to be holding this type of conversation. As indicated above, I

am mindful that supervision ought to be accountable to therapy in terms of making useful

contributions to therapist/client work (White, 1997, Bird, 2006, Reynolds, 2011a). In the

context of justice-doing conversations within supervision, this accountability is expressed via

double-listening and double-storied accounts (White, 1997, Marlowe, 2010). This means

that I want to be having a conversation with a therapist across two levels. The first level

involves asking the therapist if the client is or has been experiencing injustice. If this is the

case, I would then be inviting the therapist to name and acknowledge the difficult and

challenging effects of incidents of injustice on the client. These effects are likely to span

multiple domains in the client’s life (Denborough, 2013). I want to invite the therapist to

express “an acknowledgement of all that’s been endured” (Hung & Denborough, 2013,

p22) by the client

The second level of the supervision conversation involves listening for and asking about

therapist awareness of client responses to the incidents of injustice. These client responses

could take many forms – enacting values and preferred ways of being, acts of resistance,

skills and knowledge around survival, working for a more just outcome for themselves or

others (Newman, 2008, Reynolds, 2011b, Denborough, 2013, Hung & Denborough,

2013). I want to encourage the therapist to look for and bear witness to those ‘small

responses’ to injustice which could remain unnoticed even by the clients themselves. I also

want to be asking the therapist about past, present and future supports for the client in

enacting responses. In the light of the above discussion, I have devised the four questions

below as a guide for myself in engaging in Client-Focused justice-doing conversations within

supervision:

What effects of this injustice on the client are you aware of? How has this injustice affected her/him personally, or his/her relationships, work etc?

What responses to this injustice is the client enacting?

Who/what is supporting the client in dealing with the effects and responding to the injustice?

How are you bearing witness to the client’s struggles and responses?

An important aspect of the accountability mentioned above is that, wherever possible, the

therapist and I prepare a document (e.g. letter, whiteboard printout) based on our justice-

doing conversation. This document can then be taken back by the therapist to the client for

use in future therapy sessions as a way of helping the client to stand against injustice.

Case Example 1:**Please note that all names used in this and other case examples in this essay are pseudonyms**

In a supervision session, my colleague Jill who works in the organisation’s Children’s Team

raised the following situation. She had been working with a 12-year old boy Fred who had

been experiencing injustice in terms of unfair treatment at school. Fred had been asked to

go to the Principal’s office a few times. He and his Mum & Dad thought that he was not

getting a fair deal, and that no-one at the school was listening to him because of things that

had happened in the past. When Jill asked Fred if he could put a name to the injustice, Fred

said: “They were treating me like the person I used to be, instead of the person I am now”.

Guided by the ideas of White (1997) about re-authoring and of Chilisa (2012) urging

avoidance of a “deficit-driven and damage-centred approach” (p160), I asked Jill about her

view of Fred outside of the influence of this unjust situation. She told me that Fred is a very

creative person who enjoys things like drama and art, and that this year he had a leadership

role in the school for IT. I then asked Jill about the effects of the injustice on Fred. She said

she was aware that it had made him feel rejected and not equal to the other students, a bit

distracted in his schoolwork and upset and stressed at school and at home. He wasn’t

playing much at home and the trouble had talked him into thinking that maybe he had done

something wrong. By the time that Jill and I were having this first supervision conversation,

the situation at school had largely been sorted out and Fred was feeling better about

himself. In order to compile a double-storied account about Fred, I asked Jill what she

thought he had done to respond to the unfair treatment and to help sort things out. She

indicated that he had talked to her and his Mum & Dad about it, had listened to some of

Jill’s ideas and was willing to try them out, and had looked for ways to work things out with

the other students.

This supervision conversation had Jill and I wondering about how we might support Fred to

continue his stand against unfair treatment, and also support his journey towards positive

identity conclusions about himself. Thus, in line with the earlier theoretical discussion about

accountability, we together composed a letter to Fred which outlined the details in the

above paragraphs. The writing of this letter also enabled me to step into a ‘remote’ Outsider

Witness role for Fred (White, 2007). In addition, the letter invited Fred to think about

questions such as:

* Do you know how you came to be such a creative person? Did someone help you to do this or give you some good ideas?
* Do you agree that you are a person who stands up for himself when he is treated unfairly? If you do, can you think of any other times in the past when you have stood up for yourself? Who else at school or at home would be on your side when you are being treated unfairly?
* What do you think your Mum would say if someone asked her what sort of person you are?

Jill then took this letter to Fred and at his invitation read it aloud to him. At our next

supervision session, Jill spoke about some of Fred’s responses to questions in the letter e.g.

He ‘sort of agreed’ that he is a person who stands up for himself when he is treated unfairly.

He remembered a time when he used to get bullied at the park. It was so bad that it was

making him physically sick, but with the help of his older sister, he was able to stand up for

both of them. He listed his family as well as some friends and teachers at school, as being on

his side when he is treated unfairly. Fred also thought that his Mum would say that he is a

creative motivated person because he always tries different things. He added his own idea

“If you never try things, you’ll never know if you are good at them”.

Jill and I composed a second letter to Fred which detailed his responses to the questions in

the first letter, and added a few other questions for Fred to think about e.g.

* What was it like for you to hear and read this second letter?
* When you think about all the things that are mentioned in this letter, what do they say about what’s important to you in your life?

One of Fred’s responses (via Jill at a further supervision session) was that it was exciting

getting to hear what someone else is saying without having to talk to them – an interesting

comment on this particular Outsider Witness process. He also added that taking risks, giving

things a go and adventures are important to him in his life. Jill and I had also discussed the

possibility of conducting a Definitional Ceremony (White, 2007) involving Jill, Fred and a

teacher nominated by Fred. Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to arrange this

ceremony, but it may happen in the future. However, this process as a whole has hopefully

taken Fred to a place where, when he is confronted by injustice and unfair treatment in the

future, he is more aware of the internal resources and external supports he can draw on to

stand against this

The above process of carrying story backwards and forwards and bearing witness at both

the therapist and consultant level has Fred at its centre. There has also been a parallel

process involving Jill and me, making use of the whiteboard to document our conversations.

I inquired of Jill about the history of justice-doing in her own life. She gave a recent example

of speaking up against racist attitudes within her own family, and another example from her

teenage years. She recalled an incident from a netball game where she had been treated

unfairly, and how support from her own team and an apology from someone on the other

team had helped her deal with the incident. I then asked Jill what she thought she was

contributing to justice-doing in the present in her support for Fred, and she responded that

“It helped him deal with doubts about himself that others had sowed”. She also spoke about

her preference as a therapist working in schools – a preference to keep teachers informed

about the pressures that are on their students. I understand my role in this process as

supporting both accountability to Fred and his family and co-research (Epston, 1999,

Denborough, 2004, Hilker, 2005) between myself and Jill. By inviting her to reflect on her

experience of justice-doing in her own life, and on her role in bearing witness to and

supporting Fred’s stand against injustice, I was acting as a direct witness to Jill and assisting

her to incorporate ‘justice-doer’ into her preferred therapist identity. Our justice-doing

conversations allowed Jill to connect with a sense that her work has the potential to “make

a difference in the lives of those she works alongside” (Reynolds, 2012, p25)

**Case examples: Issue-Focused Conversations:** Broader justice issues and their

impacts on therapist work in general with clients

**Theoretical Discussion**

I want to outline here my reasons for including this type of conversation as an example of a

justice-doing conversation within a supervision context. Several authors have informed my

thinking. White (1997) and Denborough et al (2004) speak about the operations of power

and privilege within the dominant Western culture in areas such as gender, class and race.

These operations can amount to “structural oppression” (Reynolds, 2014, p2), particularly

for those individuals or groups who sit outside dominant or mainstream culture. However,

the location of these power relations within the structures of our culture and society can

also make them less visible, so that therapists and clients are invited to blame themselves or

those close to them for the problems in their lives

The purpose of a justice-doing conversation around broader justice issues is so that these

issues can be brought to conscious awareness for therapists. The very naming of something

as an issue (such as white privilege or the treatment of asylum seekers, as in the case

examples below) allows therapists to take a standing back and observing position. This can

then encourage curiosity about the possible impacts of the issue on themselves and their

clients. If therapists are going to be able to support clients to stand against injustice, then

greater awareness of the possible sources of injustice may well be helpful. In addition,

speaking about broader justice issues in a justice-doing conversation may also reduce for

therapists a sense of “becoming overwhelmed or immobilised’ (Orr, 2014, p22) in the face

of these issues. Again, as for the Type 1 conversations, I have devised four guiding questions

for myself for use in these Type 2 conversations:

What is your understanding of the impact of this issue on clients you work with?

What is the impact of this issue on you personally and professionally?

Are you aware of any responses to this issue from clients you work with? If so, what are these responses and what impact do these responses have on you?

How might thinking about this issue impact on your work with clients?

Case Example 2

One of my colleagues L lives and works in an Aboriginal community in the Top End of the

Northern Territory. During a supervision session, she raised the issue of ‘white privilege’.

She had been reading a 1990 article *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by

Peggy McIntosh as part of the Relationships Australia (2009) Cultural Fitness Package. This

reading had prompted her to reflect upon some of the challenges of living and working in a

cross-cultural context, so she chose to bring this to supervision. I asked her about the impact

of this issue on her personally and professionally. She explained that she was being invited

by dominant Western cultural ways of thinking to adopt a judgmental attitude towards the

people of the Aboriginal community. However, reflections on the concept of white privilege,

in particular the fifty examples listed by Peggy McIntosh of the everyday effects of white

privilege, had led her to express a desire for “a new perspective”.

Guided by Michael White’s 1997 article which spoke about supervision as a re-authoring

conversation, I chose to explore her preferences for life and work which might form a basis

for this new perspective. I was also interested in the possible impact of thinking about this

issue on her therapeutic work as well as mine. She talked about a preference for a non-

judgmental and compassionate approach which would involve appropriate self-care and a

willingness to learn from her Aboriginal co-workers and clients. This willingness to learn is

described by Blacklock et al (2014) as “reconciliation in practice” (p26). She was also able to

identify that the new perspective involved a broader view of the ongoing impacts of

colonisation on Aboriginal people. As we reflected together on our shared white privilege,

we agreed that holding on to an awareness of white privilege could be useful in preventing

“unconscious colonising practices “ (Orr, 2014, p20) and judgmental attitudes from taking

over our thinking.

In terms of justice-doing, what was it that L and I were engaged in as outlined above? I

believe that we were involved in a type of “ongoing conscientisation” (p 101) seen by

Tamasese et al (*Year*?) as essential for members of a dominant group or culture who wish to

relate in just and respectful ways to members of a marginalised group or culture. However,

we both also realised that this is not enough. Tamasese et al (*Year?*, p100) point out: “the

best judges of injustice are the groups that have been unjustly treated”. So a key two-part

question arose: (i**) How could two Western practitioners incorporate an Aboriginal**

**perspective into our supervision sessions?** and (ii) **How could we also maintain**

**accountability to this Aboriginal voice, without placing undue burden on Aboriginal**

**colleagues?** A step towards an answer to the first part of this question emerged a couple of

months later

L and I and other RANT staff had the opportunity to view and discuss the John Pilger film

*Utopia* as part of one of the organisation’s three-monthly Cultural Fitness exercises. *Utopia*

highlights the embedded systemic issues which are the result of past and on-going

colonising practices, and which serve to hold many Aboriginal communities in a state of

extreme disadvantage. I found myself invited to give into a sense of paralysing guilt and of

being overwhelmed, a sense of “This is just too hard. What can I or anyone do in the face of

this?” I brought this to our next supervision session, and L agreed that this same sense was

also around for her. I then explored with her the question: “How do we deal with an

invitation to allow an overwhelmed feeling to take over?” Using the whiteboard, L and I

were able to document some of the ‘invitations’ she experienced e.g. the consequences of

having to make mandatory reports to Child Protection authorities, her perception of a

culture shock as she struggled to understand the different world view of her Aboriginal co-

workers and clients. She was also able to give a double-storied account of this situation by

detailing some of her ideas for dealing with these invitations e.g. doing more reading about

Aboriginal culture in general and about the local Aboriginal culture, and (significantly) using

an Aboriginal cultural consultant to guide her personal reflection

Because of L’s situation of living and working in an Aboriginal community, RANT

management had arranged for her to have monthly access to an Aboriginal cultural

consultant. While I was aware of this, I had not previously thought to make use of it in our

supervision sessions, and it was L’s mention of it that prompted me to further exploration.

Therefore, during another of our supervision sessions, I invited L to speak about the impacts

of her conversations with the Aboriginal cultural consultant on her work and life. This

allowed a more thorough description to emerge of some of the concepts that L and I had

spoken about in earlier supervision sessions. in terms of “a new perspective”, she explained

that the consultant offering an Aboriginal perspective had helped her move to a greater

understanding of the Western cultural conditioning to which she (and I) are continually

exposed. This had led her to more thinking about the different Aboriginal and Western

world views and to a realisation that “the more you get into it, the more there is to

understand”. She was able to give examples of putting into practice her desire to learn from

Aboriginal co-workers and other Community members e.g. consulting with the Strong

Women’s group, taking a back-seat role while co-workers conducted a local Healing

Ceremony. Of course, what I have outlined is not the final answer to part (i) of the above

question, but a small step in an on-going process in which Land I and the Aboriginal cultural

consultant will need to engage

Answering part (ii) of the above question is also an on-going process. L and I began to

discuss how our justice-doing conversations could somehow incorporate accountability to

the Aboriginal community in which she is working. L gave examples of how she was

endeavouring to be accountable in her day-to-day practice e.g. seeking input from her

Aboriginal co-workers, consulting with the Strong Women’s group, talking with parents of

the children with whom she works. Our conversations also moved to asking how RANT could

support L in this accountability. We came up with the idea of finding out more about the

accountability process which the external funding body already has in place with this

Aboriginal community, and exploring the possibility of greater involvement in this process

for L and for RANT.

This is an illustration of an attempt by L and me to move beyond reflection to action

(Reynolds, 2012***)*** in our justice-doing. I also felt it was important that I took some

responsibility for extending this aspect of justice-doing beyond this particular individual

supervision context. This led me to further thinking about how reflection upon ‘privilege’ in

general and ‘white privilege’ in particular might contribute to justice-doing in supervision

and therapy. I’ve included discussion of this issue in Part Two of this essay.

I also asked myself how I individually and RANT as an organisation could be accountable not

only to the Aboriginal community where L is working but also more generally to groups such

as other Aboriginal clients, Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal organisations in the NT. As a

result of my conversations with L and the reading I was doing for this course, one small

initiative occurred to me. I wondered whether questions from the “Appreciating Cultures

Exercise” (Raheim et al, *Year?*, p8) might be useful for non-Aboriginal staff of RANT.

Consultation with Aboriginal colleagues led to a re-wording of some of the questions to

refer specifically to Aboriginal cultures, and it was decided to use the questions in one of

the organisation’s three-monthly Cultural Fitness exercises. Staff were invited to discuss the

questions in small groups and then to share the group’s ideas in the larger forum. These

ideas were recorded, documented and later circulated to all staff

I see the above activity, and other Cultural Fitness activities, as definite steps in the right

direction in terms of justice-doing and accountability at an organisational and personal level.

But it’s an on-going and complex process and there will always be more to do. For RANT and

myself, this may mean things like consideration and adaptation of “cultural caucuses”

(Tamasese et al *Year?*, p100), or extension of the practice of cultural supervision beyond its

current use only with particular non-Aboriginal staff to more widespread use with managers

and other senior staff (myself included)

Case Example 3

The justice issue featured in this example is one of considerable interest and passion for me

and I see it as a key issue for Australia – the treatment of asylum seekers by the Australian

Government. I invited a female colleague R (who does not receive individual supervision

with me) to engage in a justice-doing conversation around this issue. She also has an

interest in the issue, and some mostly indirect contact with asylum seekers through her role

in the organisation promoting work with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) clients

I began the conversation by asking R about the specifics of a recent Government decision.

She explained that the Government had recently changed the access to employment and

welfare for those asylum seekers classified as ‘Bridging Visa e’ . I then asked her about her

understanding of the effects of this decision on asylum seekers, particularly those living in

the community or about to be released into the community. She replied that, if working,

they were required to terminate employment, and that they could no longer apply for

employment or receive Centrelink payments. When I asked her about further impacts on

the asylum seekers, R said:

There are negative impacts on a sense of self and well-being. It’s not just about something to do during the day or a bit more pocket money. For many people but particularly refugees and asylum seekers, work is an important factor in their mental health. Not being allowed to work leads to a loss of purpose and a diminishing role as mother, father or provider

During any justice-doing conversation, I want to allow for second-story development by

asking about responses to the injustice as well its effects. Therefore, I continued the

conversation with R by asking her whether she was aware of any responses to this issue,

either from asylum seekers themselves or from those who support them. Because of her

indirect contact with asylum seekers, she was unfortunately not aware of their direct

responses. However, she did speak about the activities of DASSAN (Darwin Asylum Seekers

Support and Advocacy Network) who visit families in asylum seeker detention and put

together petitions and protests. She talked about her own involvement in protests,

mentioning in particular a march she attended while on holiday in Melbourne in January of

this year, an experience she found meaningful and inspiring. It’s worth noting here that

Reynolds (2011a) believes that such examples of direct action by therapists are one of the

ways in which they can “help to change the real conditions of people’s lives” (p30)

Mention of direct action leads, as in the previous case example, to consideration of my

responsibilities as a consultant and RANT’s responsibilities as an organisation to justice-

doing in this context. This conversation with R inspired me to re-commit to taking action on

the asylum seeker issue. Later in the year, I joined a DASSAN-organised protest outside the

security fence surrounding the detention centre located near Darwin. Attending this protest

has also given me the opportunity to be part of DASSAN’s program to visit individuals and

families in detention. This is a small but significant step for me, as it links me back to the sort

of actions for justice I’d been taking 5 or 6 years ago but somehow had lost contact with. On

an organisational level there is a commitment from RANT to make our services available to

asylum seekers living in the community. However, appropriate organisational support for

asylum seekers, as well as the best way to advocate for Government policy change, are

issues for RANT to continue to work through

I then asked R about the values or principles that might support these actions of hers, and the history of these values or principles in her life:

Early in my Social Work degree, I became interested in and connected to the concept of human rights. This is also linked to the Christian values I was brought up with and still hold to now about respecting each person and respecting humanity. I believe that those who are in more privileged positions in life have a responsibility to help those who are less privileged. Difference is not something people should be punished for. It’s important to make a stand and be part of a community group which espouses values that go against those promoted by the Government or the mainstream

My purpose in exploring these principles and values and their history was to make them

more readily available to R, so that our justice-doing conversation might contribute in some

small way to a positive difference in her day-to-day work. Our conversation continued as

follows:

R: My values and principles keep me going in small practical steps such as giving my time on a weekend to help out at the DASSAN market stall. They maintain my interest and hope

Barry: When you think about keeping going in standing for justice, how might this impact on your direct work with clients and on your more general CALD work?

R: I can keep hold of the idea that small day-to-day things I do like talking at a meeting are contributing to important work. I am keeping others informed so that they can also stand for justice. For direct work with clients, I’m really wanting to be as flexible and respectful as I can. This is putting justice into practice, treating someone as respectfully as I can and being flexible, not too rigid about rules and regulations

Barry: If this conversation that we’ve just had could make some sort of difference in your work, how might this difference be shown?

R: Perhaps if I do work with asylum seeker clients directly, the fact I’ve spoken these ideas out loud could help me carry them closer. Also, by keeping myself more informed I can better inform others that I work with

This conversation has contributed to justice-doing in a number of ways. R has been able to

spell out some of the effects of an unjust Government approach to asylum seekers as well

as some of the responses to this unjust approach. In speaking about the injustices

associated with the asylum seeker issue, R has also been able to name and briefly explore

personal impacts (e.g. the inspiration she received from involvement in a protest march)

and professional impacts (e.g. her sense that talking at a meeting is still important work).

The conversation has left her with a sense of being able to “carry these ideas closer” in the

future. Hopefully, this will mean a continued commitment on her part to work for change in

asylum seeker policy. Another hoped-for outcome is that this justice-doing conversation will

make it more likely that R will notice the effects of injustice when she speaks with

counselling clients in the future. She may thus be more willing to explore with her clients

the effects of injustice as well as their responses, and more effectively support their stand

against injustice.

It is also worth noting that these same hoped-for outcomes for R can apply equally as well

to me. I declared my passion around the asylum seeker issue in the first paragraph of this

case example and spoke about some actions I have taken or may take, so this justice-doing

conversation has already made some difference. However, it is just one conversation and

therefore cannot be seen as “delivering justice” (Reynolds et al, 2014, p3) to asylum

seekers. I believe it has the potential to be a step in the right direction, but will require that

R and I and other RANT staff be prepared to continually assess our progress as justice-doers

at both an attitudinal/professional identity level and at a taking action level

**Case example: Process-Focused Conversations**: Just approaches to supervision and

therapy. My understanding of just approaches to supervision and therapy is illustrated

in the case example below. There will be a brief theoretical discussion at the end of the

example

Case Example 4

During this year, I have been involved in therapeutic work with a male client Bill who wished

to address his abusive behaviour towards his partner. Bill chose to complete a 12-week

course for men, a course designed to support participants in a journey away from abusive or

violent ways of thinking and behaving towards more respectful ways of thinking & behaving.

When the course had concluded, Bill also chose to continue counselling sessions with me to

assist him to stay on track on his journey. I had also had separate therapeutic conversations

with Bill’s partner to assess and maximise her continued safety and that of their young child.

As a way of providing further support to Bill, I obtained his consent to video-tape one of

these follow-up counselling sessions and to show this tape to my colleagues in a group

supervision context. Unfortunately, I neglected to ensure that his partner was aware of this

plan and the reasons behind it, meaning that she did not have the opportunity to give or

withhold her consent. I will discuss this further in Part Two.

Because of the complex nature of work with men who have used violence or abuse and the

paramount importance of ensuring safety for women and children, I let Bill know that I

would be giving my colleagues detailed background information about his abusive

behaviour as well as his preference to behave more respectfully. I invited my colleagues to

provide written Outsider Witness responses (White, 2007) based upon what they saw and

heard in the tape, keeping in mind the background information I had given them and the

impact their responses might have on the safety of Bill’s partner and child (Again, see Part

Two for a reflection on this). I then compiled these responses into a document

structured under three headings (Things that stood out for us in hearing your words; The

values and beliefs that we heard reflected in your words; The things we thought about in

our lives and work as we listened to your words) and emailed the document to Bill along

with these three questions:

1. What stands out for you in these comments and ideas?
2. What do you find helpful or useful, especially with regard to your journey away from abusive or violent ways of thinking and behaving towards more respectful ways of thinking and behaving?
3. What is not so helpful or useful?

Bill and I then reflected together on this document at a subsequent counselling session, so

that the session took on the structure of a Definitional Ceremony (White, 2007). One of the

team’s comments that stood out for him was “Your desire to understand your partner’s

experience”. As he thought about this, he was able to recall a recent example where he had

felt angry with his partner but had chosen not to speak or act in an abusive or aggressive

manner. He said:

I’m prepared to compromise, I’m trying to understand her experience. I wasn’t happy but I remained calm. I need to keep working on it

The team had also been able to highlight some of Bill’s values, beliefs and commitments

such as “Fair play and responsibility”, “Defining ‘victory’ differently”, and “Wanting a happy

relationship without fighting”. Bill’s comment was:

This is making my values known and helping me to hold on to positive ideas. It will help me keep the journey going, and it will help a support person to assist me in the right way

This led to a further conversation about identifying the support person (his brother-in-law),

and ways for Bill to set up this support so that it could challenge him in a constructive way.

We had planned to hold further sessions, with one agenda item for the next session being a

check-in on whether or not he’d been able to connect with his brother-in-law as a support

person and how this had gone. Unfortunately, I subsequently lost contact with Bill and his

partner so that the opportunity to continue our conversations was lost. While there is some

hope that our counselling conversations and the Outsider Witness feedback provided by the

counselling team have helped to thicken Bill’s preferred story (Simmonds, 2010) of

respectful behaviour, there is at this stage no way to confirm this

**Theoretical Discussion**

The approach I have taken in this example is strongly influenced by the concept of collective

ethics (Reynolds 2011b, 2014). Reynolds maintains that consultants and therapists have an

ethical responsibility to acknowledge the contributions that clients make to their

development as professionals by making an appropriate contribution back to the client (Fox

et al, 2002). Thus, Bill’s willingness to allow a video-tape of his counselling session to be

viewed in a group supervision context is his contribution to the professional development of

the counselling team. My invitation to the counselling team to provide written Outsider

Witness responses to the client is the team’s opportunity to offer something back to him

and indirectly to his partner and child. The Outsider Witness process did enable the

counselling team to demonstrate a just way of relating to Bill. There was also an opportunity

for me and the counselling team to grapple with the concept of contributing to justice in

situations of domestic violence where the issue is always going to be a complex one. Finally,

as indicated above, it has revealed a weakness in my own approach to justice-doing – see

Part Two!

**Process of Adapting Ideas Taught within the Course** (1000 words approx)

One of the challenges of justice-doing within supervision (or justice-doing in any context) is

dealing with associated complexities. I’ve attempted to outline some of these complexities

in the first part of this essay, and an increased awareness of complexity has been a key

learning for me in the course. The reading I’ve done has also enabled me to realise that

complexity does not have to be a barrier to working towards justice. Bird (2006)

understands supervision as a place for illuminating complexities and dilemmas rather than

resolving them. Both Bird (2006) and Reynolds (2012) urge a stepping away from binary

thinking and language. With reference to complexity and justice-doing, i take this to mean

that I can free myself from thinking ‘I either understand the complexities of working

towards justice in this situation or I don’t’. Rather I can hold onto ‘I have some

understanding of the complexities involved and working towards justice/standing against

injustice will also help me (and the therapists I work with) move to a greater understanding’.

Reynolds (2012, p 28) echoes this idea of partial understanding of complexity not being seen

as a barrier to justice-doing when she speaks about: “engaging in de-colonising practices in

imperfect solidarity”

Some other new understandings have emerged from both my supervision practice and the

reading I have done during the course. Within the individual supervision context, I have

now moved much more into a re-shaped role. This role involves bearing witness to and

documenting (usually via a printable whiteboard) therapist understandings of injustice and

their preferred ways of working towards justice and of supporting their clients to do this.

Carlson & Erickson (Year?) urge that the supervision process include an exploration of the

lived experience and knowledge of therapists as well as of their theoretical knowledge and

practice experience. This is something I am trying to put into practice in supervision. The

aim for each therapist I supervise is to move towards “a rich description of their preferred

story as a therapist” (Gershoni & Cramer, 2002, p 40), particularly as it relates to justice-

doing

There has also been a significant learning that justice-doing must move beyond the

individual supervision context. Reynolds et al (2014, p5) express this as follows:

*The duty of the witness is to move beyond hearing individual pain into collective accountability to take actions against injustices*

Thus, as in cases examples 1 and 2, I engaged in co-planning with the therapist as to actions

she could take against injustice and towards justice. The accountability referred to by

Reynolds et al has further helped me to realise that I need to respond to the stories of

injustice I hear in supervision by engaging in justice-doing myself. In case examples 2 and 3, I

have outlined my attempts to do this

I‘ve also encountered two other overlapping ideas which have presented a definite

challenge. One idea is the accountability of supervision to therapists and hence to

therapeutic work with clients, and the other is the obtaining of informed consent (McLeod,

2013a). My preference within this project has been to hold Client-Focused conversations I

believe that Client-Focused conversations hold a greater potential for accountability to

therapeutic work with clients because they allow for direct concrete feedback to the client

(e.g. letter, document, video-tape), and this in turn allows the client to comment on what’s

useful or not so useful. Issue-Focused and Process-Focused conversations can still make a

contribution to therapist work with clients, but usually in an indirect way. However, I have

not been able to hold as many Client-Focused conversations during this project as I would

have preferred, due to the relative challenge of obtaining informed consent for Client-

Focused conversations compared to Issue-Focused and Process-Focused ones

The obtaining of informed consent for Issue-Focused and Process-Focused conversations

has involved just two participants – myself as the consultant and the therapist involved (or

as in case example 4, myself as the therapist and the client I was working with). There was

some on-going negotiation between the two of us which included the signing of a consent

form I had developed for this purpose. When considering Client-Focused conversations

where I was hoping to include the client’s story as part of the project, the obtaining of

informed consent needed to include three parties - myself, the therapist involved and the

client or clients of the therapist. In the case of child clients, the parents or care-givers

constitute a fourth party to the consent process. This three or four-way consent has proved

difficult to achieve as it involves a degree of forward planning for both therapy and

supervision that myself and the therapists I supervise are simply not used to. One positive

result of my thinking through this dilemma of accountability and informed consent has been

my decision to specifically invite the therapists I supervise to consider the forward planning

required to allow Client-Focused conversations to occur. This is in fact the process I used to

ensure that I had the necessary consent to allow case example 1 to be used in this essay

Reflecting upon the reading I have done in conjunction with this research project and upon

my actual involvement in the project has led to a number of interesting conclusions. In this

work of justice-doing, it has become apparent that I need the support of the therapists who

consult me in supervision equally as much as they might need mine. This conclusion fits well

with the ideas of collective accountability, care and sustainability promoted by Reynolds

(2012). There are some indications that this project and its invitation to focus on justice-

doing within supervision has made a positive contribution to my therapist colleagues in

terms of their practice as therapists and their “sense of professional identity” (Redstone,

2004, p62). However, something else has become very clear to me. The willingness of my

colleagues (and in some cases their clients) to act as co-researchers throughout the project

has given me the opportunity to develop professionally (Tootell, 2004) as a therapist,

consultant and ‘justice-doer’, to be “other than who I was” (White, 1997, p 153) at the

beginning of the project**Part Two: Appraisal of Use of Narrative Practices** (1150words approx**)**

I will structure this section of the essay by reflecting upon three of the four case examples

used earlier in the essay

**Reflection on Case Example 1**

In terms of practicing in an ethical manner, I found it was important to regularly ask myself:

“Am I inviting Jill to be part of a justice-doing conversation, or am I somehow applying

pressure to her to agree to participate?” As White (1997) points out, there is an inherent

power differential in the supervision context, and this needs to be addressed openly rather

than allowed to operate in an unrecognised manner with likely negative effects. Therefore,

as well as inviting Jill to sign a consent form, I tried to explored with her on a number of

occasions her reasons for being part of a justice-doing conversation. We talked about the

possibility of a ‘hidden pressure’ being present for Jill to say what she believed I wanted to

hear, and how both of us could play a role in unmasking this pressure if we felt it might be

around. I also encouraged her to speak out any concerns she had about the process. These

conversations indicated that Jill was comfortable to participate. In addition, I talked with Jill

about how she might use a similar process to negotiate the power differential between her

and Fred and his parents, as she invited them to participate in the justice-doing

conversation

**Reflection on Case Example 2**

I indicated in this case example that I would reflect upon ‘privilege’ in general and ‘white

privilege’ in particular, and how such reflection might contribute to justice-doing in

supervision and therapy. Reynolds (2013, 2014) and Bird (2006) speak about the power

relation within therapy and supervision, and the potential for oppressive use of this power

for one from a privileged dominant cultural background. McIntosh (1990) and Reynolds

(2014) further note that there are number of sources of privilege within Western culture,

such as privilege based upon gender, class and sexual orientation. Thus:

1.In my therapy and supervision practice, I as a white middle class heterosexual male mostly

work with those from the same white cultural background as me, though not necessarily the

same gender, class or sexual orientation. I can continue the reflective, justice-doing process

by asking myself questions such as “What aspects of unearned privilege might be

influencing me (and perhaps the person I’m working with) in this context?” and “How can I

remain aware of any potential for me to misuse power?”

2. In terms of white privilege, my reflection has again been aided by the readings I have

encountered. Though not referring specifically to white privilege, Reynolds et al (2014, p5)

maintain that “our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering” I’ve found this

a useful concept to keep in mind as I relate to Aboriginal colleagues and clients – it reminds

me of the bigger picture of colonisation and privilege and their impacts on Aboriginal and

white Australians. In addition, I spoke in case example 2 about my being invited into a ‘sense

of paralysing guilt’ as I watched the film *Utopia*. Maddison (2011) has thrown out a

challenge to me to move beyond paralysing guilt (which is a possible outcome if I choose not

to face up to white privilege) to “a guilt which opens our eyes” (p179).

A small example is useful here. During recent therapeutic work with a male Aboriginal client,

I began to encounter a sense of stuckness, perhaps even paralysis. Fortunately, the client

was able to speak to an Aboriginal colleague and reveal that he felt I was not relating to him

in a culturally sensitive way. This colleague was then prepared to speak to me, and helped

me to realise that white privilege and Western assumptions were actually blinding me to the

impacts of my words and actions on this Aboriginal man. I pay credit to the client and my

colleague for speaking up in the face of power and privilege, and helping me to open my

eyes and be more accountable for my practice. I also hope that this is a lesson in justice-

doing I can carry with me into my future practice

**Reflection on Case Example 4**

As I described this case example, I noted two instances where my actions seemed to fall

short of the ethical and accountable practices to which I aspire. Feedback I received from

David Denborough on an earlier draft of this essay has guided me in this reflection. All

therapists share the common human trait of at times falling short of our ideals, of speaking

and acting in ways that do not fit with our preferred stories. When this happens, it may

mean that we inflict some form of injustice on our clients, and justice-doing requires

acknowledgement and possibly redress in such cases

In the first of the instances mentioned above, I neglected to ensure that Bill’s partner was

aware of the plan to videotape one of Bill’s counselling sessions and then to take this tape

to group supervision. She therefore had no opportunity to give or withhold her consent for

this to happen. The second instance also involved something I neglected to do at the time,

and reflection now allows me to spell out what I could have done differently. After providing

background information but before viewing the tape of the counselling session, I could have

invited the counselling team to engage in a much more thorough and detailed conversation

about how to do justice in a situation involving domestic violence. We could have worked

with questions such as: “What does a just approach to supervision & therapy mean in

situations of domestic violence? Whilst making a contribution to Bill by providing feedback

to him, how can we prioritise accountability to his partner and child and their safety?”

As I look back, it seems likely that there were two restraints influencing me in both

instances. One restraint was my desire to have a Process-Focused example to use in this

project. The other restraint was due to my lack of recognition of the likely influence of

men’s culture which may have had Bill and me and the counselling team placing his needs

first and overlooking the rights and needs of his partner and child. I can now acknowledge in

this essay my injustice to Bill’s partner and child (and ultimately to Bill as well), but I may

not have the opportunity to speak to Bill and his partner about this acknowledgement as a

step towards redress A learning for me from this reflection is that an important part of my

role in the supervision process is to work with therapists in a process of acknowledgement

and redress where necessary, holding accountability to clients as the guiding principle. I

hope to engage in this process with a supportive rather than judgmental approach, knowing

as outlined above that I am just as prone to falling short of ideals and preferred ways of

practising therapy as are any of the therapists I work with

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