A narrative therapy approach to supervision and critical reflection: A conversation card resource

by Ash Husband



Ash Husband is a social worker and narrative therapist who lives and works on the lands of the Jagera and Turrbal people in Meanjin (Brisbane, Australia). Ash has experience working alongside children, young people and families in mental health and drug and alcohol contexts. This is where she developed an interest in resisting individualising and pathologising discourse through creative, collaborative and social justice-focused practice. Ash currently works as a team leader of a sexual assault support service that works alongside young women and gender-diverse folk. She is interested in how the narrative therapy field can contribute to the field of supervision and critical practice reflection. ashnarrativeconnections@gmail.com

ID ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5064-0660

Abstract

In this paper I explore a narrative therapy approach to supervision and critical reflection and present the "Reflective Conversation Cards", a resource to support practice reflection. The cards guide conversation partners through a series of reflective questions informed by narrative ideas, aiming to democratise access to narrative therapy supervision. I present four stories from practice, which show how the cards were developed in collaboration with other practitioners. The practice stories also show how the cards can be utilised by individuals and groups in diverse practice contexts and with practitioners of varied professional backgrounds. Importantly, the practice stories show how the cards can support collaborative conversations that incorporate an ethic of accountability to the people we work alongside.

Key words: supervision; group supervision; clinical supervision; critical reflection; reflective practice; narrative practice

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I have often wished for a kind of supervision that would take me somewhere new; for supervision questions that would challenge me to consider my use of power, deconstruct the discourses informing my practice, examine my values and support me to be accountable to those I work alongside. Supervisors have often provided assurances that I am doing a "good job" or are as stumped by a practice dilemma as I am. This can feel affirming and validating, but I have oftentimes felt as though my practice, thinking and understanding is left unchanged. I am interested in supervision as a space for transformative reflection: reflection that leads me to think differently than I otherwise would and stretches my practice.

For some time, I have been integrating narrative ideas into my supervision practice. Externalising questions have helped to name and describe the problem and separate it from the person (White, 2007, pp. 9-59). Re-authoring questions have helped me to explore the practitioner's "landscape of identity", their practice framework, and the values, commitments and intentions in their work (White, 2007, pp. 75-100). Re-membering guestions have helped me to explore the contribution of relationships to the practitioner and to their practice: lessons learnt from the people they have supported, colleagues or mentors, or learnings from the contributions the therapist has made to people's lives (White, 2007, pp. 129-164). Poststructuralist-informed questions that deconstruct the problem, question taken-for-granted ideas, and consider dominant discourse and power have helped me to integrate a critical approach to reflection (Simmons, 2002). Reynolds' (2013) work has prompted me to centre my supervision on relational ethics, accountability, justice and being "client-centred" rather than "staff-centred".

I have developed a resource, called "Reflective Conversation Cards", that guides conversation partners through a series of reflective questions informed by these narrative ideas. Through this series of question cards, I aim to democratise the process of supervision and enable people to choose their own pathway through a reflective conversation. This is a resource for supervisees and for supervisors who wish to integrate narrative therapy and critical approaches into their supervision or reflective practice. It can be used in individual, peer and group supervision contexts. I have long wished for a resource like this and hope it will be of value to others. This paper considers narrative therapy approaches to supervision, describes the Reflective Conversation Cards and provides four examples from practice. These show how the cards were developed collaboratively with other practitioners, and demonstrate how the cards can be utilised in diverse practice contexts and with practitioners of varied professional backgrounds.

A narrative therapy approach to supervision

The way that supervision is defined, understood, practiced and experienced is intimately tied to the discourses that underpin it. In dominant structural understandings of supervision, the supervisor is constructed as an "expert" imparting skills and knowledge to the supervisee, including in the application of theory to practice (Kahn & Monk, 2017). In contrast to this, narrative therapy supervision emphasises collaboration and attending to ethics and power relations (Tsun, 2020; Fox & Tench, 2002; Kahn & Monk, 2017; Perry, 2012; Reynolds, 2013; Shachar et al., 2012; Ungar, 2006).

Dominant supervision discourse and practice privileges the knowledge of the supervisor over the local knowledges of the supervisee and assumes the existence of a singular objective "truth". This imposes discourses and normalising standards about preferred ways of practicing and thinking (Kahn & Monk, 2017; Tsun, 2020). Conversely, "a narrative approach attempts to expand upon the ability of supervisors to utilize the local knowledges of clients and supervisees, viewing this as a source of knowledge that is credible" (Kahn & Monk, 2017. p. 11).

Collaboration is central to narrative supervision, particularly as a response to power dynamics in the supervision relationship (Reynolds, 2013; Shachar et al., 2012; Tsun, 2020; Ungar, 2006). Reynolds (2013, p. 8) noted that "collaboration assists in structuring safety as it invites the sharing of power and responsibility so that the supervisory relationship is not limited to monitoring clinical performance". An ethic of collaboration may be understood as resistance to supervisor-as-expert discourse. These narrative ideas about supervision are integrated into the Reflective Conversation Cards. The cards centre the local knowledge of the supervisee or "Reflector" and democratise the process of supervision through enabling the supervisee to choose the questions they respond to. An ethic of collaboration was highly influential in the design of the cards, which facilitate a collaborative process between supervisor and supervisee.

Design principles

The Reflective Conversation Cards use narrative therapy vocabulary and question forms to guide a reflective process. Through supervision questions selected by the supervisee, the cards support familiarity and engagement with the language of narrative therapy and critical reflection. Rather than the supervisor (called the Questioner in the cards) holding this language, the supervisee (Reflector) enters into their own engagement with it. This gives the supervisee agency over their learning and thinking.

Learning the language of reflection and of critical approaches to practice has been instrumental in growing my practice of critical reflection. As I learn more narrative therapy language, I become equipped to think differently, including in my practices of critical reflection, which involve a critique of power. My engagement in this language has evolved over time and been further developed with peers and supervisors. I now notice that the language of narrative therapy and critical reflection forms part of my "private speech", and is thus integrated in my day-to-day practices of reflection (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 37).

Democratising and facilitating access to the language of reflection and narrative therapy was an important ethic in the development of the cards. I piloted the cards only with people who did not have a narrative therapy background. This challenged me to adapt and develop the cards so they would be accessible to a broad audience of practitioners. This included changing words that were not resonant, simplifying the language, and testing and re-testing questions with practitioners from diverse contexts (community work, domestic violence sector, private practice) and professional backgrounds (social work, psychology, youth work). Feedback also led to the development of a glossary of key terms, which is now included in the instruction booklet, defining terms like discourse, social location, normative ideas, deconstruction, power, privilege, externalising and critical reflection.

The Reflective Conversation Cards can be used by professional peers, supervisors, and supervisees who do not have training or experience in narrative therapy and who may only be meeting on one occasion. In my experience, having access to a narrative therapy-trained supervisor and/or peers is rare, so I developed the Reflective Conversation Cards to be accessible to a broader cohort of practitioners. While the Reflective Conversation Cards cannot replace the role of a supervisor, the cards provide access to a series of reflective questions and support the Questioner (person taking on the supervisor role) to scaffold a narrative conversation.

Format and structure

When I started designing the cards, I wanted them to:

- support collaboration and the valuing of local knowledge
- support rich description of problems and practice dilemmas
- support re-authoring conversations and double-story development
- support a deconstruction of power, discourse and language
- offer opportunities to connect people to others, such as through re-membering questions or outsider-witnessing practices
- be accessible to people from various contexts and professional backgrounds
- be accessible to people with no background in narrative therapy.

Initially I'd planned to develop a single set of cards; however, I found that a better way to scaffold conversations was to produce three themed packs to choose from and a fourth pack for concluding the session.

CARD PACKS AND THEIR THEMES

Pack 1 – Externalising the problem

The cards in this pack encourage you to be playful and creative as you explore the problem, its effects on you, and the relationship you want to have with the problem. Externalising the problem helps you to resist seeing the problem as part of you or as part of someone else, allowing you to look at it with a new perspective.

Pack 2 – Deconstructing the problem: exploring language, discourse, power and assumptions

The cards in this pack challenge you to consider your own language, power and the assumptions you may have made in how you have understood the situation, the problem, power and your role. While challenging, these questions can help you to think differently, reflect critically and practice accountability.

Pack 3 – Exploring your values, commitments, intentions, hopes and skills

The cards in this pack support you to draw on your values, commitments, intentions, hopes and/or skills to respond to the problem. They encourage you to consider how you developed these values/commitments/skills and the roles that others have played in supporting you to enact these. These questions can help you consider how you might respond to the problem in a way that aligns with your values.

[From the instruction booklet]

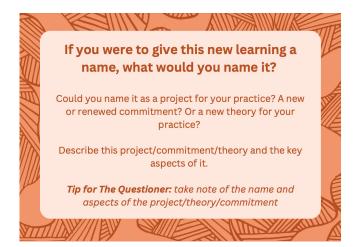
It would be unrealistic to expect anyone to work through all these conversations in just one sitting. Instead, I suggest engaging with a single theme, with the option to explore more than one theme over multiple conversations. The "Concluding Questions" pack ties the themes together. For example, the card below invites people who have not chosen the "Deconstructing the problem" card pack to consider power:



The following card invites people to consider applying their values, hopes, commitments and intentions in their future practice:



This question offers an opportunity for those who did not engage in the "Exploring values" card pack to name an alternative story:



Inviting people to choose the theme and card pack that most interests them supports a collaborative process that engages the Reflector in deciding the direction of the conversation.

Clear step-by-step instructions are provided to guide people though the process.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE REFLECTOR (SUPERVISEE)

- 1: Start with the card labelled "start here". This card encourages you to describe a problem or dilemma and its effects on you and your practice.
- 2: Select a card pack with a theme that you would like to focus on. You may wish to explore the themes in all 3 card packs, in which case it is recommended that you split this over 2 or 3 sessions. Lay out the question cards in front of you. You will start with the card labelled "Theme start card".
- 3: As your conversation unfolds, select the question cards that you are most drawn to and ask the Questioner to read the question out to you. It is recommended that you respond to 2 question cards per theme, but you may choose more or fewer. The question that is set in bold at the top of the card is the main question. The smaller questions below may be helpful as additional prompts to guide your discussion.

Note: some cards offer optional activities that you can select in place of a question. You may choose to do the activity during the session or afterwards.

- 4: Finish with the "Concluding Questions" card pack. Place the Concluding Question cards in front of you and choose 2 or 3 questions to answer.
- 5: End with the card labelled "End here". This card encourages the conversation partner/s to reflect on what stood out to them as they listened to your answers.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE QUESTIONER (SUPERVISOR)

- 1. Help the Reflector to choose a question it is their decision, but you might point out questions that stand out to you.
- 2. Read out the question they choose.
- 3. Write down key words and phrases that the Reflector uses.
- 4. Ask clarifying or follow-up questions to help you understand the Reflector's answer.

- 5. Share some of the words or phrases that you wrote down.
- Summarise what stood out to you at the end of each question, using the person's own words wherever possible.

Tip: Use the Reflector's words when referring to the problem or dilemma the Reflector has raised, preferably referring to it by the name they give the problem at the start of your conversation.

I avoided the language of "supervisor" and "supervisee", instead offering alternative language that emphasises the collaborative nature of the process, minimises the power differential and values the Reflectors' local knowledge. The roles are detailed in the instruction booklet.

ROLES

Reflector – this is the person seeking support to reflect on a problem or dilemma they are having in their work. The Reflector selects the questions they want to respond to. If they wish, they can ask the Questioner or Witnesses to help them choose.

Questioner – the Questioner facilitates the conversation. The Questioner helps the Reflector to select a question, reads the question to them and asks additional clarifying questions. They take note of key words, phrases or images that stand out to them as they listen to the Reflector, and offer some of these to the Reflector at the end of the set of questions. They also facilitate responses from any Witnesses.

Witnesses [for use in groups] – Witnesses are invited to listen to the Reflector's answers and take note of words, phrases or images that stand out to them. They may ask additional clarifying questions if needed but should be careful to allow the Reflector the most space to speak. Witnesses will be asked to share what stood out to them at the end of the set of questions, so remember to take notes!

The cards support externalising and deconstructing the problem or practice dilemma, rather than centring the practitioner as the problem (White, 2007). They are also designed to ensure that supervision and reflection remains client-centred rather than staff-centred (Reynolds, 2013). The questions invite participants to co-research power, including how one may enact or misuse power, providing practitioners with opportunities to centre the people they work with and take accountability for any misuse of power without their identity being totalised. Engagement in this practice is self-directed as the Reflector chooses the questions they wish to respond to, placing them in a position of agency. The use of tentative language of the cards is intentional, including words like "could", "might" and "if". Such language reduces assumptions and creates space for the Reflector to consider the question.

A collaborative co-research approach was key to the development of the cards. The cards were significantly improved with the input of the co-researchers and consultants who kindly agreed to test them out with me. I invited feedback on the questions asked, the language used, the format of the cards, the structure of the process, the instructions, and the framing and naming of the roles.

Collaborative beginnings: The first pilot of the cards

The collaborative process of developing and refining the cards started with fellow social worker Jen. Jen took the role of Reflector and I took the role of Questioner. I followed the instructions, writing down key words and phrases throughout and reflecting these back.

Jen described a problem she called "imposter syndrome", which led her to lose confidence in her work. She worried that she did not have the skills to "achieve positive outcomes" with the people she was meeting with. The Start card elicited a description of the problem and its effects; however, we later reflected that it would have been more valuable if the Start card questions had elicited a richer description and a clearer naming of the problem. After meeting with Jen, I added the following questions based on White's (2007) statement of position map:

- Elaborate on why these effects on you/ your practice are significant to you.
 Why do these effects matter to you?
- [Optional] Describe the history of the problem: When did it first arise?
 How long have you been experiencing it?

Jen chose the Theme 3 card pack: "Exploring your values, commitments, intentions, hopes and skills". These questions elicited an alternative story about Jen's skills in "working relationally". Jen described a time when she worried she had "made no progress" in her work with a young person. Jen sought feedback from a supervisor and was later able to recognise that her work "didn't always have to have a big outcome", and that in this case, the "positive relationship" she built with the young person was meaningful. This story was significant to Jen because she initially doubted her practice, but later came to appreciate that she had notable influence in this young person's life through her skills in "working relationally".

In the Concluding Questions pack, Jen was drawn to this card:



Jen remarked that she had not sought feedback from the young person in the previous story and instead approached her supervisor. She reflected that she had positioned her supervisor's opinion as more important than the young person's opinion, replicating power. Further question cards led Jen to articulate plans to approach young people for their feedback. Jen felt she could resist the influence of imposter syndrome by being led by young people and by valuing her skills in building relationships. As the Questioner (who also adopts an adapted outsider-witness role), I shared what stood out to me in Jen's reflections, repeating back key words and phrases and sharing how aspects of her story had resonated with me. This process was scaffolded by instructions on the Ending card, which is informed by White's guidelines for outsider witnessing (2007, pp. 165-218).

Jen said that she found the Concluding Question pack particularly consolidating. She valued the opportunity to hear how her reflections had resonated with me. Jen said that the process had helped her think differently about the problem and consider new ideas. Jen reflected that at times the language of the questions felt unclear, and she wondered if they might reflect "narrative language". I reflected that as Questioner, I needed more information about my role such as guidance on when I should have input in the conversation.

Although further refinement was required, in this first test the cards helped to:

- · elicit a description of a problem and its effects
- elicit a story of a unique outcome and naming of values and skills
- elicit reflection on power leading to a focus on centring the young people Jen worked with
- · highlight to Jen opportunities for future action
- engage Jen in an adapted outsider-witness response that was meaningful to her
- leave Jen thinking differently about the situation and considering new ideas.

The pilot with Jen also indicated the cards' utility for addressing practice dilemmas that are not directly client or therapy related. In my experience as a supervisor and supervisee, dilemmas raised in supervision are often related to topics such as relationships in the team, challenges of working in particular systems or organisations, broad concerns about one's competence or ability, dilemmas about whether to remain in a position or to move on, and so on. Critical engagement in reflection about any of these matters can be meaningful. Jen identified the problem as "imposter syndrome", centring her experience in the work. By the end of the process, Jen had identified a client-centred action: seeking feedback from the young people she works with. In this case, a client-centred outcome was scaffolded through the cards posing influential questions that supported Jen to reflect on her values, commitments and power.

To further develop the cards following this initial pilot, I took the following steps:

- adjusted and simplified language to make it more understandable to practitioners with no narrative therapy background
- edited the instruction booklet to better describe the Questioner role, including additional special instructions for the Questioner (as above)
- revised and re-tested the Start card questions to better reflect White's statement of position map (2007) to elicit a richer description of the problem.

Story from practice: A rich description of an externalised problem

After the cards had been updated, I tried them out with Alfred who works in a domestic violence context and has a youth and community work background. Alfred began by responding to the Start card questions, which had been refined following Jen's feedback:

Describe a problem or dilemma you are facing.

- Describe the effects the problem is having on you and your practice.
- Elaborate on why these effects are significant to you. Why do these effects matter to you?
- [Optional] Describe the history of the problem. When did it first arise? How long have you been experiencing it?
- If you were to come up with a name or title for this problem, what would it be?

Alfred described the situation as

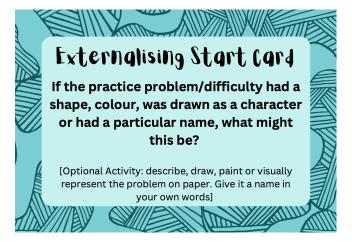
my own blockage in supporting a victim-survivor because ... while she is a victim-survivor of DV, the relationship started when she was 26 and he was 15, and it's continued. The person using violence is now just over adulthood, and I think it's really hard to grapple with those two realities.

Alfred intended to continue offering support to the person experiencing violence, but was concerned about difficulty "processing" the problem and worried that they would engage in "unconscious bias" in their work. Alfred said:

Ultimately that ethical dilemma doesn't have any bearing on how I would approach that victimsurvivor. It's not going to fundamentally change ... It's more around your own mind frame of how you view the person.

Alfred went on to describe the effects of the problem using the metaphor of a "mental alarm" or "alert text" that came up in their head when they were working with the person. They also provided another metaphor: "It's like a file in my brain that can't find its filing cabinet." When asked about the significance of these effects, Alfred spoke about their commitment to being "victim-survivor centric" in their practice. What I do remains exactly the same. It's just how I process it ... You kind of hold the two opposing sides in your head. And, like I said, a victim-survivor doesn't need to be perfect. I think that's why it's tough to grapple with

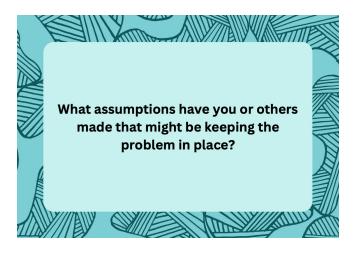
As the conversation progressed, Alfred chose the Externalising card pack, starting with the Start card below.



Alfred settled on the externalisation of the problem as "the Bouncing Tetris". They described an image of a Tetris block never finding its place, relating this to challenges they had in holding "two realities" that didn't "fit": that the person they were supporting was experiencing domestic violence and needed resources and support, and that the person had commenced a relationship with an underage person when they were much older.



Alfred chose the above question, and identified a dichotomy in the domestic violence sector between "victim-survivors" and "persons using violence" in which both positions can be reduced to a single story. This had contributed to the Bouncing Tetris as this situation was more complex than those roles could explain.



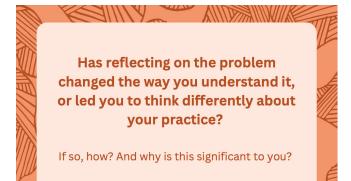
Alfred identified the assumption that this dilemma needed to be "processed" or "filed away":

I guess it is probably because it's important not to have just filed it away in the filing cabinet ... When I was young and travelling somewhere, I remember being in this bookshop and I picked up this book. I ended up just standing there in the bookshop and reading 42 pages or something. In the book it was kind of addressing some of these themes. It said something like, "the thing about life is that there are no exact answers ... it's all about questioning".

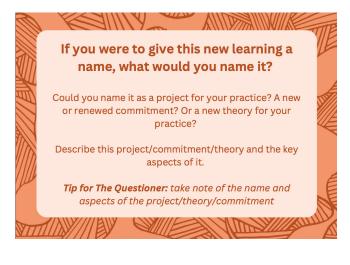
After acknowledging this story and its significance to Alfred, I referred back to the question card to ask some clarifying questions.

- Ash: Could you put some words around what the assumption is?
- Alfred: That life is complex and there are situations that don't make sense.
- Ash: Does that keep the problem in place?
- Alfred: It kind of transforms the problem ... the reason it doesn't become a problem anymore is that you realise that the Tetris block never really needed to be put in place anyway. It was just a lesson in realising that things don't fit perfectly and sometimes things will never fit perfectly.

Alfred and I moved on to the Concluding card pack, starting with Alfred's chosen question:



Alfred said: "It has changed the way I understand it. There is no finalised process. The resolution is that there is no answer." They spoke about the importance of collaborating with others to reflect on and question their practice and decided to raise the topic at reflective practice discussions with colleagues. They noted that overall "It kind of summarises the space I've been sitting in for a while. The more you live, the more those boundaries of what you once believed are pushed. But that in turn strengthens my values." Alfred spoke about their values of being victim-survivor centric in their practice and of conceptualising people who use violence "holistically" and in a nuanced way.



Alfred described their values as a "foundation" to their practice. They said:

This is going to be a long name. It's almost like the earth is shaking but your foundation remains. [So I'd name it] "changing patterns, strong foundation" or something like that. It's almost like once it all settles you realise that you had it all along.

Alfred provided feedback on the process at the end of our conversation. Alfred liked choosing their own question and having options to choose from: I really like that you can see which question you lean to. I like that you can see all the questions, you can see questions that don't resonate and then you read some that you really resonate with.

Alfred gave specific feedback on the Start card, reporting that the order of questions was helpful in supporting a description of the problem.

The history of the problem makes sense as well. In my mind it's like the issue, the effect, the significance of the effect and then the history kind of wraps it all together ... If you put it [the history question] first, you'd just be describing the problem rather than being specific to the history.

After Jen's feedback, I had added a question about the history of the problem. Alfred's feedback suggested that the cards were now eliciting a richer description of the problem.

Alfred liked the questions about giving a name or title to the problem: "Initially they seem a bit scary, but I feel like those are really exciting questions". Naming the problem was an influential element of the process:

It's actually really important because it gives you a starting point or a thing to hold on to when you're talking about other things. Naming a problem or giving it a colour, it anchors you back to it, which is really good. I never would have thought of that. Or if I was trying to help someone else to do that, I'd never think to ask that question. It's really good to see that prompted.

This example demonstrated how the cards scaffolded a rich externalised description of a problem, a deconstruction of the problem, an exploration of values, intentions and commitments, and a naming of an alternative story. What was initially named as the "problem" was "transformed" for Alfred into a commitment to questioning their practice and upholding their values of centring the people they work with. Alfred named this as "changing patterns, strong foundations", representing an emerging alternative story.

As the Questioner in this scenario and also a narrative therapy-trained practitioner, it was challenging not to ask further narrative questions that might have helped to pull meaning forward. However, in order to test out the cards and their accessibility to practitioners not trained in narrative therapy, I diligently followed the "Special instructions for the Questioner" (see above), writing down and reading out key words and phrases that stood out to me and only asking questions that clarified meaning or directed the conversation back to the question cards. This example shows how the Reflective Conversation Cards can support a rich description, make accessible a narrative therapy approach to reflection, and contribute to thinking differently about practice.

Deconstructing discourse, language, power and assumptions

"Language structures one's own experience of 'reality' as well as the experiences of those with whom one communicates" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20). It is

Externalising Start card

If the practice problem/difficulty had a shape, colour, was drawn as a character or had a particular name, what might this be?

[Optional Activity: describe, draw, paint or visually represent the problem on paper. Give it a name in your own words]

Deconstructing Start card

What are some assumptions you have made about this situation/problem?

What discourses or ideas might underpin these assumptions?

Exploring values, skills, commitments and hopes - START CARD

- What skills, values, hopes, intentions or commitments do you hold that might be drawn on to help you respond to the problem?
- How did you develop these skills, values, hopes, intentions or commitments? Did anyone help you or influence this?
- Is there an example or story from your life or practice that speaks to why these skills, values, commitments, intentions and/or hopes are important to you?
- For the Questioner: please ask about this story, when it was, who was there, what happened and why it is significant to the person in responding to the problem.

important that supervision questions draw attention to language, expose dominant discourses and deconstruct taken-for-granted ideas.

White (1991) brought concepts of deconstruction to therapy through externalising, re-authoring and the narrative metaphor: "The narrative metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories – that these stories are shaping of life, and that they have real, not imagined, effects – and that these stories provide the structure of life" (White, 1991, p. 123).

I developed the cards to support people to externalise a problem, reflect on how they talk about problems at work, address power and dominant discourse, and create meaning through the narrative metaphor and double-story development. Some questions that aim to externalise, deconstruct the problem and contribute to re-authoring include:

If the problem could speak, what do you think it might say?

What would you like to say back to it?

[Optional activity: write a short dialogue between you and the problem]

What language did you use to explain/describe the problem?

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- What words/phrases did you use?
- Did you use any binary or labelling language?
- How might this language relate to dominant discourse, normative ideas and/or power?

Tip: ask the Questioner and any Witnesses to share any notes they took when you initially described the problem.

If enacting these values, commitments, intentions and hopes were a project in your practice/life, what might this project be called?

Can you describe the project and the history of it in your life?

Tip for the Questioner: write down the name of the project and ask any clarifying questions to better understand it.

Derrida (2008) discussed the importance of an analysis of history to deconstruction. He stated that to deconstruct is to "analyse historically ... the formation and the different layers that have built ... the concept. Every concept has its own history" (Derrida, 2008). To deconstruct discourse, including therapeutic discourse, one must consider the history of these ideas across time. In supervision, this might include considering where a problem or idea comes from, tracing its origins, or exposing it, as shown in the below questions:



Concepts of deconstruction connect to Foucault's (1989, p. 186) ideas about power being "always born of something other than itself". Foucault (1989, p. 187) noted that "there is no power, but power relationships which are being born incessantly, as both effect and condition of other processes". One such process is the development of psychological theories and discourses that are considered unquestionable "truths". Hare-Mustin (1994, p. 32) critiqued this, noting that "decontextualised theories legitimize, justify, and perpetuate current arrangements of privilege and power". A narrative supervision approach can move beyond a narrow application of theory to practice to an approach guided by a valuing of local knowledge and an analysis of power, dominant discourse and language through the narrative metaphor.

In deconstructing power in practice, the sociopolitical and cultural histories underpinning the operations of power within everyday relationships must be considered. Foucault discussed the concept of local power, arguing that "efforts to transform power relations in society must address these practices of power at the local level – at the level of the everyday, takenfor-granted social practices" (Foucault, as cited in White, 1991, p. 137). Thus, the political is present in the personal everyday relationships between people, including in the relationship between supervisor and supervisee and in the practitioner—"client" relationship.

The Reflective Conversation Cards apply Foucault's analysis of modern power through a collaborative approach and by proposing questions that consider the operation of power in practice.



Story from practice: Deconstructing professional discourse

This story from practice explores Alex's reflection on a scenario with a new client in a private psychology context. This example explores how the cards supported Alex to deconstruct how discourse in the psychology profession had informed her construction and understanding of the problem.

When responding to the Start card, Alex described meeting a client for the second time. The client had reported having poor experiences with previous therapists and Alex felt it was taking him some time to feel comfortable. In the second session, he spoke more about traumatic events and asked Alex to hold his hand:

He asked me to hold his hand in the session. He was really upset about that as well that I didn't. He was saying how there was another therapist that he saw that does hold his hand. I didn't say yes or no. I just kind of was exploring it with him. But I didn't hold his hand. I did not feel safe myself to do that.

After the second session, he was really overwhelmed because we were asking a bit more about trauma. He left the session really distressed. One of the admin staff had let me know what he looked like leaving.

Alex described feeling worried and later reaching out to check in. Alex then received numerous emails from the client expressing anger and frustration at Alex for asking questions about past traumatic experiences. These emails increased in frequency when Alex didn't respond immediately. The person never returned for follow-up sessions. This situation had caused significant "distress" and anxiety for Alex and had led her to doubt her practice:

I was very anxious once I saw the emails. I reread over the emails a number of times, reanalysing it in my mind ... It definitely took a toll on how I felt over the next couple of weeks with clients. I felt like: Am I making everyone feel unsafe? Am I actually not a trauma-informed practitioner? Am I just digging into people's trauma without any thought or care?

Alex named a tension between her commitment to hold responsibility and feeling "over-responsible". She spoke of her commitment and responsibility to support people to feel comfortable and safe in sessions. Responding to Start card questions exploring the effects of the problem and the significance of these effects, Alex expanded on this sense of over-responsibility:

I think it [over-responsibility] can hinder your sustainability working with people. It generates too much distress for you ... A previous supervisor said to me, "You have to learn to step down from responsibility with clients because otherwise, it's just too much". I always remember that.

Through the Start card, Alex externalised and named the problem "the responsibility wagon" to represent a wagon that she pulled around, describing the challenge of knowing when to pick up and pull the wagon and when to set it down. Alex chose the "Deconstructing the problem" card pack, expressing an interest in considering the role of power.

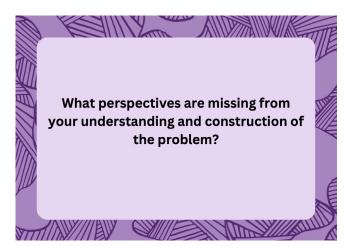
This led to an interesting discussion that involved a deconstruction of assumptions and discourses influencing Alex's construction of the problem, starting with the Deconstructing pack's Start card:



Alex identified some assumptions in her psychology training program:

There are some assumptions about what's your role and how much you need to do. There are definitely some assumptions that probably come from the training program and the way that they teach you or tell you to do things ... People always say things like, "You leave everything at the door when you leave", and there's these assumptions that it's bad to take it home. Actually, I don't think that's a bad thing that you take it home. It's how you take it home ... Both of these [assumptions] are underpinned by this idea that you don't get too close and you don't let things affect you. Because it's bad if they do. You're somehow not doing your job right if you're impacted. Or you're seen as not coping with it very well.

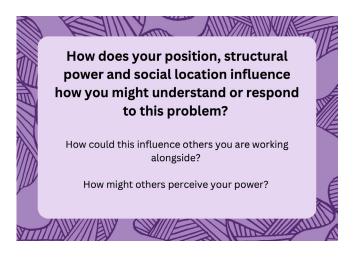
This led Alex to choose the following question card:



Alex noted that she had limited opportunities to talk with colleagues about practice and had not spoken to others much about this situation. She felt that she was missing feedback on her work:

There's probably an element missing around just how psychologists speak to one another – or don't speak to one another rather. You don't have time to talk to each other about how you're going with work. You're kind of in and out ... It's more rare that you get opportunities to talk on a deeper level about how the work feels. You don't really have people watching you work. So you're just like, "Oh, what am I doing? Is this okay?" It's pretty weird. People have obviously watched how I work before, but not for a long time.

Alex reflected on her own position of power through choosing the card below.



Just being a psychologist, there's already a lot in that that you're always kind of aware of in terms of power. It relates to responsibility in some ways because of our responsibility to make sure that people feel comfortable in that space, and it's their space. I try not to overpower my presence in the space. Try and make them feel kind of at home there or comfortable.

By the time we reached the Concluding Questions card pack, I wondered if Alex might have begun to untangle some of the discourses and assumptions she had named from her understanding of the dilemma. The concluding questions helped solidify Alex's position on the responsibility wagon, with Alex expressing a commitment to continue pulling the wagon, resisting professional discourses that minimise responsibility in the work. For example, Alex chose the question below and articulated how her thinking had changed.



It's definitely confirmed some of my views around how I want to practice and separated that from how others talk about how we should practice. It's helpful to reflect on that idea of "the client does all the work" and how it might influence the responsibility wagon. Because I actually realised, I don't agree with that ... It makes me feel more sure about the responsibility I am taking at times because it's more based on my values ... With those assumptions, they're making you second guess whether you should be pulling the wagon or not, or whether you should be approaching it in the manner that you are. But knowing that difference now, it's like, "Actually, no. I do want to pull that wagon more than others, and that's how I want to be".

The cards helped Alex to take a position on the externalised problem of the responsibility wagon. She described the importance of taking this wagon with her (including sometimes at home), of looking inside it and considering its contents, being intentional about when to set the wagon down, and holding a commitment to carrying responsibility for her power and privilege.

I'm getting a really good idea now of an imagery exercise of coming home and recognising how much I'm pulling the wagon or how much it's pulling on me. Being mindful of that and seeing if I can change that depending on what I'm pulling. Being more intentional about when I take on the responsibility and when it's unnecessary.

At the end of the process, we used the End card to structure an adapted outsider-witness response. In this process, I highlighted how Alex's questioning of and resistance of professional discourses resonated with me. When seeking Alex's feedback on the End card, Alex expressed that "It's helpful to have the things being read out back to me ... it's another way to process it". I felt that the End card needed some additional scaffolding to enrich the process, so following my conversation with Alex this card was further adapted.

Overall, Alex reported that she found the process helpful. The questions were "powerful" in supporting reflection and she liked the structuring of the process through roles.

I really liked the role thing ... that's really helpful. Sometimes in peer supervision ... it's just like a chat ... having those roles would be really helpful in contexts like that. Even if you're less experienced, you can still write down and reflect back ... It takes the pressure off people to try and solve things because they're just guided by questions, rather than feeling like they have to give you the answer of how to do the next step.

Alex suggested that I consider simplifying the language and changing the format of the cards to include a primary "bolded" question with follow-up questions in smaller type underneath. Alex felt that this would help to make them more accessible and readable. This feedback was integrated into the current format of the cards.

Inviting connections beyond the individual: Outsider-witnessing practice and "experience of experience" questions

Applying a narrative supervision approach to a group or peer context, or inviting witnesses into supervision, facilitates a greater integration with Myerhoff's (1982, p. 231) ideas about outsider witnessing, definitional ceremony and re-membering processes as a practice of "self-construction". In her work with Holocaust survivors, Myerhoff (1982, p. 231) observed how people "make' themselves, sometimes even 'make themselves up'" through seeking "opportunities to appear before others in the light of their own internally provided interpretation" (p. 235). For Myerhoff, "Performance is not merely a vehicle for being seen. Self-definition is attained through it, and this is tantamount to being what one claims to be" (p. 235). In individual supervision where there is no wider audience to this performance of self and identity, "experience of experience" questions can be utilised to "recruit the imagination of persons in ways that are constitutive of alternative experiences of themselves" (White, 1991, p. 132). For example:



The below question offers an invitation to the Reflector to share their learnings beyond the reflective conversation, inviting them to expand the audience of their learnings:



In Myerhoff's (1982) view, the performance of self, culture and history "requires an audience in addition to performers" (p. 234). Referring to the concept of definitional ceremony, Myerhoff (1982) noted that "a story told aloud to a progeny of peers is, of course, more than a text. It is an event ... the listener is changed" (p. 245). Locating an audience to witness the re-authoring process in a narrative-informed supervision process is thus a "two-way street": not only does it pull meaning forward for the supervisee, but it contributes to the life of the supervisor and any other witnesses. Connecting practitioners to other practitioners through outsider-witnessing practices in supervision is another possibility in narrative supervision (Fox & Tench, 2002; Kahn & Monk, 2017; Shachar et al., 2012; Tsun, 2020). White's four categories of outsider-witnessing inquiry (2007, pp. 165-218) have guided the development of question cards addressing expression, image, resonance and transport. For example, in the Ending card, both the Questioner and any Witnesses are invited to give an adapted outsider-witness response.

Story from practice: A story shared is a story transformed

This final story of practice shows the use of the cards in a group/peer supervision context. After refining the questions, simplifying the language and improving the format of the cards in consultation with Jen, Alfred and Alex, we all met together. Jen took on the role of Questioner; Alfred was the Reflector; and Alex and I acted as Witnesses. Everyone in the group knew each other and expressed feeling comfortable talking openly together. This was the first time I had piloted the cards without taking on the Questioner role myself, so I was curious to see if the role would make sense to Jen. I stepped back and let Jen facilitate the process from start to finish. This included Jen consulting the instruction booklet when she was unsure of something, rather than asking me, and orientating everyone else at the table to the process.

Alfred (the Reflector) discussed a recent situation at work where a colleague had made what Alfred initially called an "offensive comment" towards them about their gender as a nonbinary person. This led to Alfred moving to a different work location where they felt more comfortable. Alfred described the effects of the problem to Jen, who rescued some of Alfred's words, editorialised and scaffolded through an externalising conversation using the Start card questions:

- Jen: What are the effects the problem is having on you and your practice?
- Alfred: That's a good question because I guess it's like those microaggressions, you know? It's kind of in the back of your mind. And in every situation you're going into, you're kind of preparing yourself.
- Jen: So there's microaggressions, and you're "armouring up" to kind of "defend yourself" against those. And then you're worried that it "might happen again" and that you might be "perceived as the problem" if it happens again.
- Alfred: Yep.
- Jen: Why do these effects matter to you? So why are they significant to you, and why do they matter to you?
- Alfred: Not being male or female in that context is a very vulnerable space or very raw. Ultimately, I don't want to have to think about these things because, obviously, there's bigger problems at the heart of why we're doing the work. But it's an ever-present issue that's surrounding your work in those spaces. It's hard to ever feel fully safe.

Alfred externalised and named the problem as "the backseat bandit", due to it being "ever present" in their experience at work. Jen went on to read aloud the card pack themes, and Alfred chose "Deconstructing the problem: power, discourse, language and assumptions".

- Jen: What are some assumptions you have about this situation slash problem?
- Alfred: I guess it probably underpins the fear I have about the world not understanding the diversity of gender. And it probably validated that fear. It's almost like a dark scary monster under your bed that you're afraid of, but does it exist? Doesn't it exist? You're living with the assumption that it does exist. And then it was almost like you sighted the monster, and you know it exists for real.

Jen went on to ask questions from the Deconstructing pack Start card, which led to Alfred using the word "transphobia" for the first time.

Jen: What kind of discourses or ideas underpin this?

Alfred: I guess the whole world at the moment underpins that assumption. And I think the growing threat is kind of more prevalent. In a way I've been skirting around it, I guess. Transphobia is pretty rife at the moment. And it's really hard to catch a break from it.

Alfred then chose the card below:



Alfred recognised that there was language that they didn't use when initially describing the problem:

- Alfred: Well, actually, there's probably more language that I didn't use. I probably didn't name it all exactly. I probably didn't identify what the problem was and kind of skirted around it.
- Jen: Would you mind if I reflect it? [points at handwritten notes]
- Alfred: [Nods]
- Jen: I did notice that too. You referred to it as "the incident" quite a few times. I mean, you'd said someone said something "pretty offensive", and then you referred to it as the "incident". And so it was quite vague, but then you did get into what the incident was about.

Jen prompted Alex and I to share the notes we had taken about the language Alfred used, with us both noting similar observations to Jen's. I noticed that examining the language Alfred used to initially describe the problem supported a richer exploration of the problem and helped expose how the dominant discourse of transphobia had affected how Alfred described the problem. I also observed that when Jen, Alex and I reflected back Alfred's words, this pulled meaning forward and supported Alfred's reflective process. Similarly, the notetaking and recording of Alfred's words, as detailed in the instruction booklet, supported this to occur.

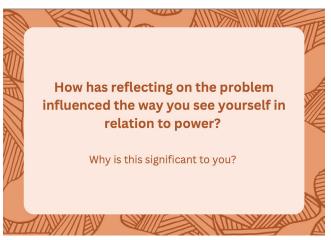
Alfred reflected how not being "explicit" in the way they described the problem mirrored how they were not "explicit" in who they are at work. Alfred noted tensions between wanting to be more open about their gender identity at work but not wanting to be the "sacrificial lamb" so that their colleagues could learn about gender diversity. Alfred identified a sense of solidarity with trans and nonbinary folk who seek out support at their service and acknowledged the relative power and privilege they hold in their position:

Imagine a victim-survivor who's trans [and] people aren't using their pronouns, how impactful that can be as well. We don't have these practices in place that make it a safe space. Or actually, it's all promoted to be a safe space and everyone has their fucking trans flag or pronouns in their signature. But, actually, what is the reality of that?

Jen and Alfred moved on to the Concluding card pack.

- Jen: Has reflecting on the problem changed the way you understand it or led you to think differently about your practice? If so, how and why is this significant to you?
- Alfred: I guess it kind of sums up my beef with the DV space in general. But it makes me more passionate, or whatever the word is, to push for deeper equality in marginalised spaces.

Alfred selected their next question:



Alfred went on to acknowledge how their power changes depending on the context. In the context where they experienced transphobia at work, they felt they had limited power. Alfred also acknowledged their power relative to people seeking support from the service and their influence in affecting broader change:

There are lots of other areas where my power is, I guess, a stronghold. I have a stable job. I have a steady income, all of those things. If you look at power in a different context, we are of an age where we have the power to change the narrative as well. That's what comes with visibility and trans rights. And that's really important to remember. But ... someone who's trans and homeless and is experiencing DV ... that's the issue – marginalised people being further marginalised by situations.

To conclude the process, Jen facilitated the outsiderwitnessing process detailed on the End card. Jen, Alex and I offered outsider-witness responses, noting key words and phrases that stood out, detailing areas of resonance and how our thinking had been changed by the conversation (see White, 2007). Some key quotes from the transcript demonstrate this:

- Ash: Another word that stood out to me was when you use the word "transphobia" for the first time. I think that that was the first time I'd heard you name it that way. And my other favourite word that you used, you talked about this idea of pushing for "deeper equality", which made me think about the stuff you were saying around rainbow cupcakes and pronouns and pride brunches. That really resonated for me, this idea of something a bit deeper than that.
- Alex: You said something right at the beginning: "am I the problem if I'm the one standing up", making a song and dance about this. So that's that fear of being perceived as someone who's standing up for something that's important, which I really could understand ... I'm always aware of the conversations I have with colleagues, and how they talk about seeing queer and gender-diverse clients. I almost use it as a bit of information gathering to know where they're at with you. And to find ways to maybe gently offer other opinions and perspectives. But I feel that's always a difficult space for me too because I then out myself ... so I think I'm always feeling that urge to keep working on my ability to just speak up in those moments and say what needs to be said.
- Jen: When Ash was saying you named transphobia, that felt like a powerful moment as well when I was listening. We all face homophobia and, obviously, not transphobia because I'm cis,

but, I guess that idea of complacency – it made me think about what I'm doing in this space, because in the past I've tried to be quite a strong advocate in my workplaces for queer people, particularly queer young people, so I think that listening to you talk about it really reminded me of the importance of continuing to be committed to that space – keep fighting the good fight. I think we all need to do some activism together!

In response to the End card questions, Alfred shared how the outsider-witness responses had resonated for them.

They did very much resonate. The first time transphobia was mentioned, I think I probably recognised that I was maybe skirting around the issue, that I hadn't named it properly.

Jen also reflected on her experience as the Questioner:

I think sometimes in this space, we just want to be like, "Oh, this is the way to fix it". And, actually, sometimes it's just working through the problem and the person coming up with their own solution as well.

This reflects how the decentred but influential role of the Questioner supports the Reflector to draw on their local knowledge.

This practice story shows how the Reflective Conversation Cards can be used in a peer or group supervision context. The inclusion of outsider witnesses led to increased meaning-making and supported a connection between individual and collective experience. Jen is not specifically trained in narrative therapy, but facilitated a narrative therapy supervision conversation using the cards while maintaining a decentred but influential posture.

The Reflector, Alfred, developed an externalisation of the problem of the backseat bandit, reflected on how discourses of transphobia had influenced the language they used to describe the scenario, and detailed their commitments to influencing broader social change, with the people who access their service in mind. The addition of outsider-witness responses within a group setting helped to pull meaning forward and to connect Alfred's individual experience of transphobia at work to the collective experiences of their peers. This led to participants sharing their "reinvigorated" commitments to "speaking up" and effecting change for the queer and gender-diverse people who they work alongside in their contexts.

Conclusion

This paper has considered narrative therapy approaches to supervision, highlighting collaboration, sensitivity to power, resisting the "expert" positioning of the supervisor, and valuing practitioners' local knowledge. Through four stories from practice, I have described how the cards were piloted, refined and developed collaboratively using a co-research approach. These stories have shown how the cards can be used to democratise supervision through a collaborative process, externalising practices, clear roles, positioning the Questioner to be decentred but influential, and enabling the Reflector to choose their own questions.

The stories provided examples of use within diverse practice contexts with practitioners of varied professional backgrounds. Piloting the cards with practitioners not trained in narrative therapy exemplified how narrative therapy processes and reflective approaches can be made more accessible. The practice dilemmas and problems explored were broad in scope, demonstrating how the cards can be utilised in diverse situations. The scaffolding of the process and questions supported participants to reflect on their values and commitments, and on the operations of power and dominant discourse, supporting an accountable and client-centred reflective process. The final story explored how meaning-making can be enhanced through the inclusion of outsider witnesses in a group context. Finally, the practice stories demonstrated how the cards supported a sense of transport and of thinking differently. These themes are reflected in the final feedback from participants:

- Alfred: The cards definitely changed my thinking around navigating issues within my practice. Having been the Reflector in both the individual and group settings, the cards not only expanded my understanding on how to externalise and work though an issue, but really helped me in how to facilitate others to do so; in particular, skills such as active listening, summarising and capturing others' words. The cards weaved values, collaboration, connection and solution-forward practice perfectly. The skills I have learnt from participating will continue to be embedded in my practice.
- Alex: The cards were definitely helpful in helping me understand the different aspects of the

problem I was facing and what it boiled down to with regards to practice values. It also made me reflect on a broader issue that would likely appear again and provided me with an awareness of how I might be mindful of it in future situations and how I can name and externalise it as it arises again.

Jen: My thinking changed particularly with the ability to use the cards in both a one-on-one and group context. It was really powerful to be able to explore my own practice issue and then also be able to bear witness to someone else's issue and see how they examined their experiences. The cards scaffolded this really beautifully, and their content aligned with social work values that were highly relevant to my practice. The group context really enabled me to feel solidarity and connection with the social justice issues we are all working through, while reaffirming how intimately connected our personal and professional lives are.

I set out to create the Reflective Conversation Cards for myself. I wanted a resource that would help me centre an ethic of accountability and justice in my practices of reflection as a supervisee and practitioner and in my role as a supervisor. Since developing the cards, I have observed that democratising the process of reflection or supervision by giving the Reflector agency over the questions they respond to has opened up new possibilities for critical reflection and supported a decentred Questioner role. The guestions posed are at times challenging, stretching you to examine your own assumptions, language, thinking, use of power and alignment with dominant discourse. Being asked some of these questions by a supervisor, who is in a position of power, may feel more confronting, perhaps contributing to a sense of being "called out" that could hinder the reflective process and centre the supervisor's perspective. Seeing the question cards laid out and making the choice to pick one up and engage with it seems to support people to approach it with a sense of openness, intentionality and oftentimes integrity.

Making the choice to reflect on your own use of power is a different experience to having someone tell you that you've misused it, deciding to examine the language you use is different to someone correcting you for getting it "wrong", and choosing to consider how your actions align or misalign with your values or commitments is different to having someone tell you that you have acted unethically. Oftentimes, practitioners are seeking ways to be more ethical in their work but are met with supervisor-centred advice-giving or may not feel able to raise their concerns. In an era of cancel culture and of dominant professional discourses that value "practice competence" above an accountable and vulnerable practice of critical reflection, finding our way to accountable practice can be challenging. I hope the Reflective Conversation Cards can light up the path to a conversation that might not always come easily: a conversation that allows us to take the wheel in our own reflective process and in our efforts to be accountable to the people we work alongside.

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