

Storying Counselors: Producing Professional Selves in Supervision

Kathie Crocket

Although a great deal of attention has been paid in recent years to issues of power, knowledge, and relationship in therapy, the literature on these subjects as they pertain to supervision is still remarkably thin. As Kathie Crocket points out in this chapter, much is said about how selves are constituted in conversation, and yet the conversations between "supervisors" and "supervisees" typically construct the former as knowing and seasoned and the latter as unknowing and inexperienced. Crocket suggests that all therapists enter supervision with a good deal of life "expertise," and she is interested in supervision conversations that make room for these knowledges. In effect, supervision becomes a site where therapists may consolidate their professional identities through the expression of their "author-ity."

In this chapter, Crocket takes a critical look at the developmental metaphor that predominates in the counselor supervision literature, arguing that it constructs an unhelpful story of counselors as underdeveloped in their work. She shares a wealth of reflective questions she poses to counselors in training in order to invite them to connect with their own knowledges. The chapter also includes reconstructed conversations that provide a glimpse into her supervision approach.

INTRODUCTION

Counseling supervision is a place for the telling and retelling of stories. Client stories enter the room via video or audio tapes, or they appear in the form of a retelling by counselors. These client stories are told as counselors relate the narrative of their work with clients, and this retelling undergoes a further transformation as supervisors engage with it and coconstruct meaning with counselors through the

unfolding supervision conversation. This chapter provides some ideas about how to work with these many stories in a manner that is *productive*. More specifically, it looks at how supervisors and counselors can draw on a multiplicity of rich narratives in supervision to invite forward counselors' professional stories, thus promoting author-ity on the part of counselors through supervision conversations (Crocket, 1999a). Earlier chapters have articulated some practices of respectful therapy, which aims to privilege clients' voices. Taking the position that in many ways supervision and therapy have more in common than much of the current supervision literature allows (compare Carroll, 1996; Gardner, Bobele, and Biever, 1997; Holbway, 1995), I suggest that the ideas and practices of those chapters can also help us think about supervision. If as counselors we commit ourselves to producing respectful relations with our counseling clients and their families, with our agencies and professional associations, why would we stop short of the supervision relationship?

This chapter is based on the constructionist premise that as people story their lives, they also perform and produce their lives. In supervision, then, the stories we tell of our practices and the ethics of those practices do not merely *reflect* our work, they produce us as practitioners and produce our practices. In this chapter, I will render this process visible by referring to supervision as a site of the production of our professional selves. The metaphor of storying, introduced by White and Epston (1989), offers important tools for making sense of supervision in this way. It draws attention to the acts of storying and the persons producing the stories. And it reminds us that we do not tell just any stories: we are dependent upon the cultural stories that are available to us in the production of our personal and professional lives. With that interest, in this chapter I propose enlarging the emphasis, in supervision, on the counselor as an agent producing therapeutic (and supervision) practice, generating possibilities for practice in the dialogue of supervision, and thereby storying his or her professional life.

COUNSELOR AUTHOR-ITY IN SUPERVISION

Although there is a good deal written about the supervision relationship—Holloway (1995), for example, has it at the core of her model—I suggest that counselor author-ity is for the most part ne-

glected in the supervision literature (Crocket, 1999b). The notion of author-ity is derived from the narrative metaphor, which offers up the idea of storying lives. When we story our lives, we take up positions as authors of those stories. In positions of author-ity, we notice the accounts available to us as we story our lives and select those accounts we prefer. This view of counselors as authors of their practice is virtually absent in the literature. Typically, the supervision relationship is depicted in such a way that counselors are produced as people to be acted *upon* in supervision: to be developed, to be subject to assessment and appropriate intervention, to have their practice monitored and evaluated. Counselors are thus found in subjected positions in most accounts of supervision (Crocket, 1999b). In contrast, I am interested in counselors as *actors* in supervision, as agents producing therapeutic practice as they engage in the to and fro of supervision conversations. Although some attention has been paid to advising supervisors about collaborative supervision relationships (for example, Anderson and Swim, 1995), I think that we need to go further than this and to prepare counselors to be collaborative partners in supervision. Put differently, I am interested in counselors as *storying*, rather than *storied*, in supervision.

In my work as a counselor educator, I attend to this storying aspect of supervision at the beginning of our counselor education program. In inviting counseling students to think about the positions-in-relation that may be offered them in supervision, distinguishing between subjected positions that do not privilege their own voices and subjective ones that do. I am interested in helping them identify positions that will be most productive of their agency as counselors—that will promote their professional author-ity. In one of the teaching sessions as part of this work of orientation to supervision, I invite counseling students into an imaginary storying experience. As we begin, I ask them to think of someone, from another setting, who knows them and their work or their qualities well. They might think of one of the people who supported their application to our program, a professional colleague in a previous setting, someone with whom they work on a committee, or a friend who supports their current study. I then ask them to imagine that individual having a conversation with the person who is to be their supervisor. As they imagine this conversation, I ask a range of reflexive questions that invite them to inhabit the scenarios

being asked about. (As readers, you might like to read these questions aloud: they may be easier to engage with that way.)

- What might this former colleague tell your supervisor about the qualities he or she most appreciates in you and your work?
- What ways of being do you think this person might want to speak of appreciating as he or she speaks of his or her experiences of you? What experiences of you will he or she be drawing on in this telling?
- As you imagine this conversation, what might your former colleague tell your supervisor about what he or she thinks your supervisor might come to appreciate about working with you, in supervision?
- As you imagine yourself entering the supervision relationship with your supervisor, what will it be like for you entering that supervision relationship, carrying with you these accounts of yourself that you have just overheard in this imagined conversation?
- How do you see yourself as you engage in the work of supervision alongside your supervisor? What does it mean for you to see yourself in these ways? What does it mean for the supervision relationship that you see yourself in these ways?
- How do you see your supervisor seeing you? What does it mean for you and for the supervisor that you see your supervisor seeing you in these ways? What does it mean for the work of supervision?

Questions such as these open the supervision space to be something other than an assumed hierarchy of expert and beginner. The questions offer counselors positions where they, too, are seen to bring experiences, wisdom, and valued personal and professional qualities and experiences to supervision. In this way they are positioned to engage in robust reflection on their counseling work in supervision. My experience has been that these acts of imagination work to position counselors well, too, to engage in building a working supervision relationship in collaboration with their supervisors. They are less likely to find themselves in the position of having supervision *done to* them.

Students have spoken of the value of making more visible to themselves the many stories that make up their lives at a time when a story of themselves as a beginning counselor might obscure the richness of what they already bring for the work of supervision. These questions are not just for beginners, however. More experienced colleagues have also found it useful at the time of beginning a new supervision relationship to think about how they want to introduce themselves to their new supervisor, and what accounts of themselves they wish to be productive of their professional selves as they enter that working relationship. Who are we, as we sit down together, you and I, in supervision? What stories of our personal and professional lives do we both bring to this work? The pause in which we ask these questions offers us space to think about respectful relationship in supervision, relationship that recognizes that we are multiply storied. This emphasis on multivocality—many stories, many voices—contrasts with a well-entrenched narrative of counselors as “developing”—an account that presumes a progressive unfolding according to arbitrarily specified norms for counselor competence.

SOME PROBLEMS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS

As I pay attention to an account of supervision that makes room for a story of the resourcefulness that counselors bring to supervision, I note that those accounts of supervision which obscure such resourcefulness are so familiar that they are often taken for granted and their strategies not noticed. In my experience, those accounts depend upon the developmental metaphor and they persist sometimes even in places where their presence might be less taken for granted. Writing in the context of developmental psychology, Burman (1994) noted that developmental accounts become “naturalized”: their constructs are taken to represent reality. Despite warnings such as Holloway’s (1987) that the attractiveness of developmental supervision models might obscure the need for rigorous investigation of these models, developmental constructions have been naturalized in many accounts of and in everyday understandings of supervision. Naturalized, developmental constructions contribute to an idea that has persisted even in some accounts of a postmodern practice of supervision. This

ate more deeply the significance of the work we'd done together and of the steps Maureen had taken to win some difference in her life.

SUPERVISOR: You took the tape to your next counseling session with Maureen and played the conversation we'd had.

COUNSELOR: Yes, and one of the most important things I learned from that was how easily we can take for granted what our respect offers our clients. As Maureen listened to the tape of me telling you her story, she heard a story of her life from a new position. The grip of isolation was further broken as we listened together.

Joining with counselors in the production of their authority includes facilitating conversations that enable them to "hear" the voices of the persons with whom they are working. At times, it may also mean bringing to the surface of the supervision conversation voices in the background of that conversation: the cultural discourses that provide the life support for the problems clients encounter.

COUNSELOR: I remember wondering if the changes Sally had been making would endure. She'd been doing so well. Was it possible that she'd won that much ground back from bulimia when it had had such a hold? What would we do next in the therapy to make the most of these changes? Could I trust that we really had gained ground, and in what ways might I be blind to bulimia's sneaky tricks? What come-back tactics might bulimia have up its sleeve? That was what I was asking in supervision.

SUPERVISOR: I remember your delight in the ground Sally had won and your desire to shore those gains up. I asked you then if I might interview you as bulimia: given the uncertainty you were expressing, I asked you if you were interested to get bulimia's view on things.

COUNSELOR: Your first question opened the flood gates. You said, "Bulimia, has the therapy in any way taken you by surprise?" It turned out I had plenty to say about that. I really did think bulimia had been taken by surprise, because Sally and I had made such a thorough investigation of its tactics. I could see more clearly how the ground Sally had won wasn't due to chance, and wasn't too much at risk, as we'd been so thorough in unpacking the problem and Sally was so clear about what she now wanted. bulimia didn't have too many places left to hide. I saw we'd identified bulimia's

blind spots and Sally was indeed gaining the upper hand. Then you asked me what might happen next in the therapy that would give me, as bulimia, cause for concern.

SUPERVISOR: You took on the voice of bulimia, in that interview. How that was helpful?

COUNSELOR: Well, there's always more than one story, and more than one position from which a story can be told. As a counselor, I'd been so delighted to share with Sally as she reclaimed her life. I knew she was feeling pleased, but I was still worried. When I spoke as bulimia, it gave me another vantage point from which to look at the scene. Speaking with the voice of bulimia didn't resolve the problems it invited, but it offered me a richer understanding of bulimia's workings and of the dimensions of the work Sally and I were doing together. And I went back to the next meeting with Sally and asked her what she thought about her and I inviting bulimia into the counseling room for an interview. Different voices make different conversations possible.

SHARING THE CLOAK: RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SUPERVISION

A noteworthy feature of the preceding conversations is that they are not oriented toward monitoring clinical performance. Instead, they are generative conversations that invite the many voices of both counselors and their clients into the supervision session. In so doing, these conversations create space for counselors to produce responsible professional practice, rather than establishing a context for the supervisor to take responsibility for the "junior" counselor. And so these conversations are not principally oriented toward checking on the "assessment" the counselors had done at the outset of their work, or gathering details of their "treatment plan." This is not to suggest that eating disorders are not complex and challenging problems; however, I prefer to make at least as much space for the voices of clients as for the regulatory bodies that prescribe narrow modes of practice. Supervision is about producing quality assurance of effective and ethical therapeutic practice. Supervision ultimately is for the client. I do not believe Sally or Maureen would opt for an interrogation

idea suggests that the storying of professional identity is somewhat problematic in supervision because counselors early in their careers do not have enough knowledge or experience to draw on in that storying. The idea was expressed in two important supervision texts. Gardner, Bobele, and Biever (1997) suggested that while in post-modern therapy there is an assumption of clients being experts on their own lives, there is not the assumption in supervision that counselors are "experts on therapy" (p. 224). Their point was echoed by Bernard and Goodyear (1998) who, writing about narrative approaches in supervision, suggested that trainees are "just beginning" to develop stories of "self-as-professional" while clients have "well developed" stories (p. 22). Both author teams thus draw a distinction between therapy clients, whose knowing and expertise about their lives is to be valued, and counselors in supervision who, they propose, come without material to be storied because of a thinness of *professional* experience. I believe that to suggest there is little material to draw on in storying the professional identity of a counselor new to the field is to edit out the possibility that the counselor brings a richness of *lived* experience upon which they draw as they story their professional identity. I believe that the storying of professional identity that we do in the supervision room depends upon very much more than just stories about therapy that come from the profession's knowledge stores. Rainer, supervision might be practiced as a site for bringing forth the values, ideas, and histories that all counselors bring to their work (see White, 1997), and thus for producing new possibilities for effective and ethical practice. Of course professional knowledge and wisdom and practice experience is to be valued. However, it is not all that there is, and the field is impoverished if we behave in supervision as if it is.

MULTIPLE VOICES: PRODUCING POSSIBILITIES FOR PRACTICE

The storying of our professional lives is an active and ongoing process that unfolds through talk: the talk of therapeutic conversations and the talk *about* that talk, which occurs in counseling supervision. The following conversation is a reconstruction of the many reflective exchanges I am involved in through the practice of supervision. It illustrates the ways in which counselor author-ity is produced by invit-

ing multiple voices into the conversation—including not only the voice of the counselor but also the voice of the client. Ultimately our work should be accountable to the persons with whom we work; by inviting their voices into supervision conversations, we assist counselors in producing their work in accordance with their ethical commitment to clients.

COUNSELOR: Do you remember the time you interviewed me on tape about my work with Maureen? I'd been so determined to support her in the struggle against agoraphobia but it seemed that we were no longer making any headway. Sure, there'd been change, but she was still caught in an oppressive marriage relationship that seemed to be restraining further change, and it seemed that there was nowhere else for the counseling to go. Perhaps this was going to be as good as it was going to get for Maureen. I was losing hope. Your idea of bringing forth values made a difference to me then. You suggested we videotape a record of my work with Maureen as seen through my eyes. You interviewed me about the work so that I could kind of take stock. Making a taped record of this made a sense to me: I wanted Maureen to hear what I'd say. Our supervision wasn't just about you and me. More than merely taking stock with you of this work, I wanted to keep Maureen in authority over the value of the work we were doing. What would she say about these hard-won gains that I'd been thinking were not enough?

SUPERVISOR: Once you invited Maureen into the conversation, as it were, you began to see things differently. We began the interview having agreed that we'd review your understanding of what Maureen had sought consultation with you about, and the ground she had gained so far, so that you could take the tape back to Maureen and consult her about your understandings.

COUNSELOR: As I told the story of our counseling work together, my respect for Maureen, both in her resilience in the struggle and for the steps she had taken to make things different for herself, became more visible to me. The telling brought forth the regard I had for her. The sense of Maureen being with us in the supervision room as I told our story was productive of that respect. I became more and more interested to know what Maureen might have wanted to say had she been there. In the care of telling the story, I came to appreci-

of her counselor's assessment and treatment plans at the expense of the preceding conversations.

This is not to say that there is no place for a "quality assurance" role in supervision. However, I believe we may actually sacrifice that quality if the profession diminishes counselors' responsibility—their agency, their author-ity—by having supervisors assume full responsibility on their behalf. I have often heard counselors reflect on their early experiences as counselors in supervision, when it seemed that there was little space left for them to be responsible for their own practice because so much responsibility was taken up by the supervisor. There was little room for them to grapple with ethical questions, for example, when the answers were already being presented, almost before counselors could ask themselves the questions.

As a supervisor, I do not wish to abdicate responsibility, but I look to *share* it with counselors. After all, if they are to be in a position to share responsibility with clients in the therapy room, I need to share it with them in the supervision room. I think that when I make space in the supervision room for a counselor's capacities to be seen by us both, I can have more assurance that they are producing themselves in ethical ways. When a supervisor wears a cloak of responsibility that covers the work of counselors, too, it can obscure their capacities, and the voice of their knowledges. That cloak can act as a burden that renders supervisors unavailable to an understanding of what counselor and supervisor might produce together, squandering the generative potential of supervision conversations.

I am interested in using supervision as a forum for enlarging the capacities of counselors for knowing and acting, working with counselors to produce them as agents in their work. This way of working produces a different power relation, one that is productive of relational responsibility, and that includes responsibility to (rather than for) clients.

STORIES FOR ACTION: THE WORK OF SUPERVISION

There are many stories that produce the work of supervision. As supervisors, we are in a privileged position to determine which stories will be heard and which obscured. Too often a professional or regulatory story obscures many other potentially generative narra-

tives in supervision. This chapter has offered some ideas and examples of supervision conversations that make room for the voices of counselors, clients, and even problems, to create a space for counselors to produce responsible and ethical practice in accordance with their own situated author-ity. That author-ity is situated in work with clients, in the values and histories that have produced counselors' lives, as well as in professional knowledges. In many respects, these ideas are about applying to supervision the possibility-generating, competence-oriented practices which are hallmarks of respectful postmodern therapeutic practice.

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