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## Reflecting on “A Supervision of Solidarity” Réflexions sur « Une supervision de solidarité »

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### ABSTRACT

Vikki Reynolds' article, “A Supervision of Solidarity,” presents a supervision approach that addresses some challenges of working with clients who live with social injustice and extreme marginalization. The approach foregrounds “collective ethics” in the spirit of fostering sustainable practice within difficult client contexts. In this reflection piece, I view Supervision of Solidarity as an opportunity to reveal and clarify a socially constructed ethics that places the contextual needs of clients at the forefront. Drawing from Reynolds' example of Don, I highlight process observations of a Supervision of Solidarity gathering that helped to transform Don's work and to invite a thickening of collective ethics within his professional community. I end with thoughts about accountability and fostering collective ethics outside of the supervision process.

### RÉSUMÉ

L'article par Vikki Reynolds intitulé « Une supervision de solidarité » décrit une approche de supervision qui examine les défis inhérents dans le travail avec les clients qui vivent avec l'injustice sociale et la marginalisation extrême. L'approche accentue une « éthique collective » dans l'esprit de promouvoir des pratiques durables dans des contextes de client en difficulté. Dans cette pièce réflexive, je considère la supervision de solidarité comme une occasion de révéler et clarifier une éthique construit socialement qui place les besoins contextuels du client au premier plan. À l'aide de l'exemple de Don proposé par Reynolds, je commente sur le processus d'une session de supervision de solidarité qui a transformé le travail de Don et qui a renforcé l'éthique collective au sein de sa communauté professionnelle. Je termine en offrant mes pensées sur la responsabilité et le soutien de l'éthique collective au delà du processus de supervision.

Traditional ways of supervision often appear to privilege conversations related to the problem, the client, or the counsellor. With serious intent, supervisor and supervisee seek to discern “the best thing to do for the client.” Focusing on the “what to do” is particularly heightened when violence and other forms of trauma are at the centre of the supervision conversation. Reflecting on my own past supervision experiences where clients living in the margins or living alongside trauma were the focus, I recall the sense of urgency that systematically set in. Buttressed by the belief that the “therapeutic solution” resides in figuring out the “what,” the intention behind urgency often pointed to ethics—a desire to help and, above all, do no harm. Yet when I think of Supervision of Solidarity, I am reminded that what is helpful to clients may be sometimes less about identifying an immediate “solution” to the “what,” and instead more about the counsellor's positioning with respect to the “what.” I am curious about the inner workings of Supervision of Solidarity in discerning ways participants involved in a client's care can advance

together amidst spiritual pain, using the community as the foundation from which a meaningful positioning toward the "what" can emerge.

That a therapist's spiritual pain in response to work with a client can indicate a departure from preferred ethics is intriguing. I derive solace from reframing wonderings about my own "usefulness to clients," welcoming an opportunity to revisit my ethics rather than putting my competency into question. When I find myself wondering about "usefulness," might it signify that I have departed from a place of ethic that honours that particular client? Might I be clinging too strongly to a "misguided" or a "displaced" ethic? Or perhaps my preferred ethics have slowly eroded over time. Regardless, it is time to pause for reflection.

When I think of "centring ethics," I think of how that implies an ethics that is fluid rather than static—changing and adaptive from community to community, context to context, circumstance to circumstance. "Beneficence" may look different depending on the environment, the stakeholders involved, and the cultural and systemic traditions in which a client's needs are embedded. The fluidity and context-dependence implied in centring ethics (and revealable through Supervision of Solidarity) leave me wondering how this compares to individual therapists engaging with their profession's established, static code of ethics or standards of practice. Centring ethics appear to foreground the idiographic over the nomothetic, the relative over the universal, where solutions to struggles that are context-bound reside relationally between people rather than within people. Drawing from recent social-constructivist approaches to ethical decision-making (Cottone, 2001; Lehr & Sumarah, 2004), I see Supervision of Solidarity as an opportunity to reveal and clarify a socially constructed ethics through relationship that puts at the forefront the varying needs of clients with reference to contexts of power.

I am curious about the origins of "raging against the machine." I perceive Don's initial stance on "rage" as "righteousness" emerging from his spiritual pain. By visiting "righteousness" through Supervision of Solidarity, Don further recognizes that the power of his pain overshadows the power of his client. I imagine a "power pendulum" of sorts when I think of Don's repositioning, letting go of "displaced power" in hopes of foregrounding the client's. "Raging with" becomes the mantra, rather than "raging for."

I also find myself thinking that "rage" would be a natural response to a perception that "others" (in this example, workers in education and children's aid systems) involved in the care of mutual clients might act in ways that are disempowering to those clients. The pendulum swings further: During the solidarity supervision process, perceived difference from "other" transforms into a recognition of Don's departure from his preferred ethics as a similarity to "other" is gradually unveiled. Unbeknownst to the "other," the shift in focus from difference to similarity seems to create an opportunity for joining—a joining that could occur without the "other" in the room. The joining emerges by virtue of a reflective process facilitated by an interviewer who works simply from a place of "not knowing" and "genuine curiosity." A parallel process of joining is also inspired with the help of witnesses as they further unpack "rage" and "righteousness" to help Don in his work with clients while simultaneously thickening their collective ethics.

The outcome of this particular Supervision of Solidarity gathering is Don's repositioning toward his client and toward other stakeholders in the client's care. I am left wondering about the process of Supervision of Solidarity. Is it a "repositioning enabled through joining" or a "joining enabled through repositioning?" Or perhaps both? It appears that Don's repositioning occurred by virtue of community members coming together to partake in the witnessing and the reflective process. Yet the process of his repositioning appears to have unveiled a preferred ethics concerning power that, in turn, has joined community members. I see "joining" and "repositioning" as synergistic, their contributions undiscernibly intertwined, with the whole greater than the sum of the parts. The mere structure of Solidarity Supervision seems to yield an enhanced outcome between, and for, Don and community members—an unlikely outcome if Don had addressed his struggle in isolation. I anticipate that Don's Solidarity experience will, in turn, foster "joining and repositioning with," rather than "power over," his clients if the temptation to "rage" surfaces again.

As the collective ethics of a community emerge through witnessing and reflecting on a participant's struggle, I am left wondering what a next step might be in the spirit of sustainability of, and accountability to, the collective ethics. Bearing witness and reflecting on an ethical struggle can be significant events that brings to light a preferred relational ethics. Indeed, identifying what a community wishes to sustain and be accountable to is quite powerful. I am curious about how (re)centred ethics will follow Don and his colleagues. How will accountability of the collective ethic be mutually and respectfully maintained over time? What will that look like? How will group members know they are interacting with clients in a manner congruent with their shared ethics? What might get in the way of such congruence? More importantly, what helps it along?

Building on the fruitfulness of the initial Supervision of Solidarity gathering, I imagine a revisiting of this conversation with Don and the community after they have had a chance to experience the repositioning. Where is "righteousness" now? How does it feel? Was there a time when "righteousness" could have snuck in but didn't? How was it kept at bay? What will Don and colleagues do if they see "rage" or "righteousness" getting in the way? How will they know that accountability has occurred safely and respectfully? In essence, I am curious about a deliberate thickening of the collective ethics as it is put into practice and maintained.

### *References*

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