



Practice Tool

What shapes you as a practice supervisor?

Introduction

Our identity and sense of who we are as individuals is shaped by many factors. These include our personal and professional life experiences, histories and stories about ourselves and others, and the cultures and communities we grew up in or with which we identify. In turn, these are influenced by time (when we were born), place (where we live now) and geography (where we grew up in the world). All of these factors combine in unique ways to create an individual who may have particular ways of seeing or interacting with the world.

As a practice supervisor, you have to be able to make sense of this so that you can understand the particular lenses (including any prejudices or biases) that might influence your responses to supervisees as well as the people who use your services. This awareness is essential to delivering reflective supervision with a diverse team.

You also have a responsibility to help the people you supervise make sense of their own experiences and understand where their own areas of bias or prejudice may arise if they are to practise in a socially-just, ethical way that meets the needs of diverse and changing communities.

In order to do so, it is important for you to reflect on your life experiences, notice their ongoing influence and make sense of this for yourself. This tool provides you with an opportunity to do just that. You will be asked to draw your own timeline, charting your journey from birth to now. You can design this as you wish noting the important ideas, people and experiences that have influenced you.

You will then be invited to reflect on your learning from this, with particular reference to your professional identity and work as a practice supervisor. There are a lot of questions for you to consider in this tool. For this reason, it might work for you to approach it in 'chunks' – considering each section of the tool separately or perhaps over a period of days.

We understand that everyone has different experiences and so we invite you to use this tool in a way that works for you. You might do all or only part of it as you see fit.

The social GRRRAACCEEESSS

The social GRRRAACCEEESSS provides us with a useful way to start to think about this.

The acronym social GRRRAACCEEESSS was developed by Burnham (2013) to help us think about aspects of personal and social identity which place us in positions of differential power in different contexts in society. These include gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, education, ethnicity, employment sexuality, sexual orientation and spirituality. The social GRRRAACCEEESSS helps us to think about aspects of identify which may be visible and voiced or invisible and unvoiced (see figure 1 below).

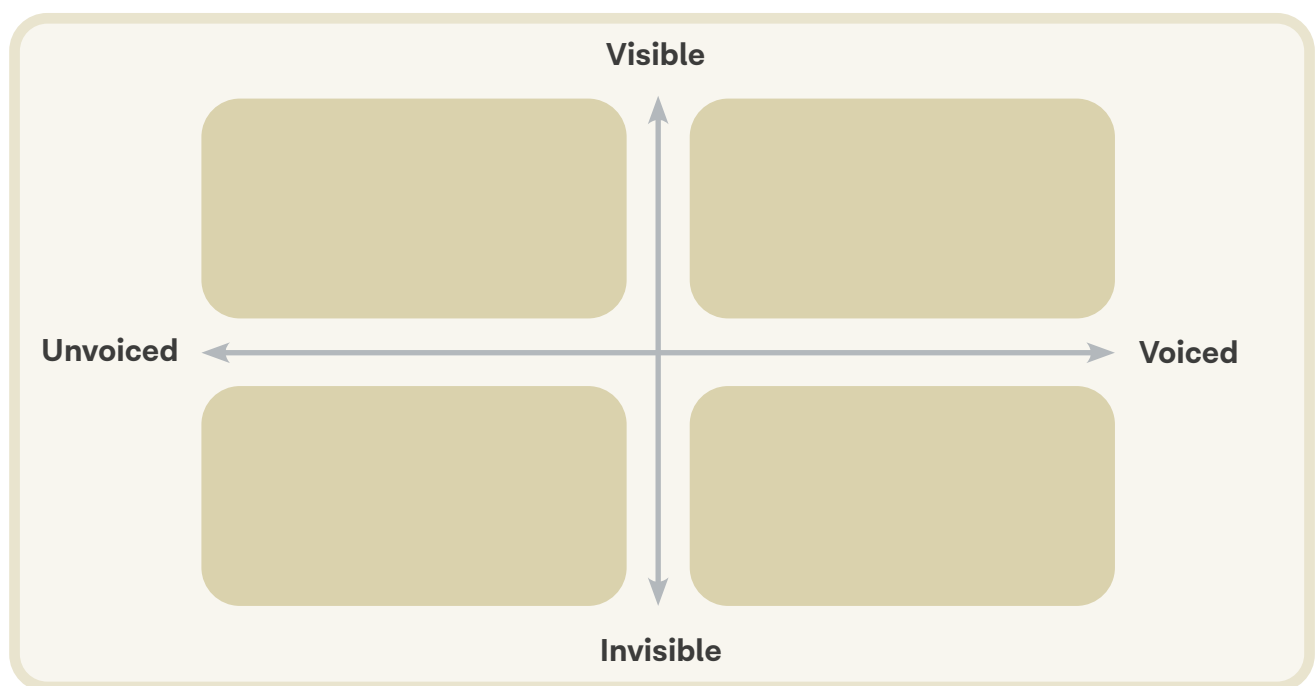


Figure 1 : *The social GRRRAACCEEESSS – visible and voiced*

The social GRRRAACCEEESSS are a useful way of thinking about different aspects of our identity which we publicly acknowledge or are evident to others, regardless of whether we choose to share this or not.

Conversely, they may describe aspects of our identity which are not immediately visible or known to others or which we prefer to keep hidden.

You can see an example of this in figure 2 below.

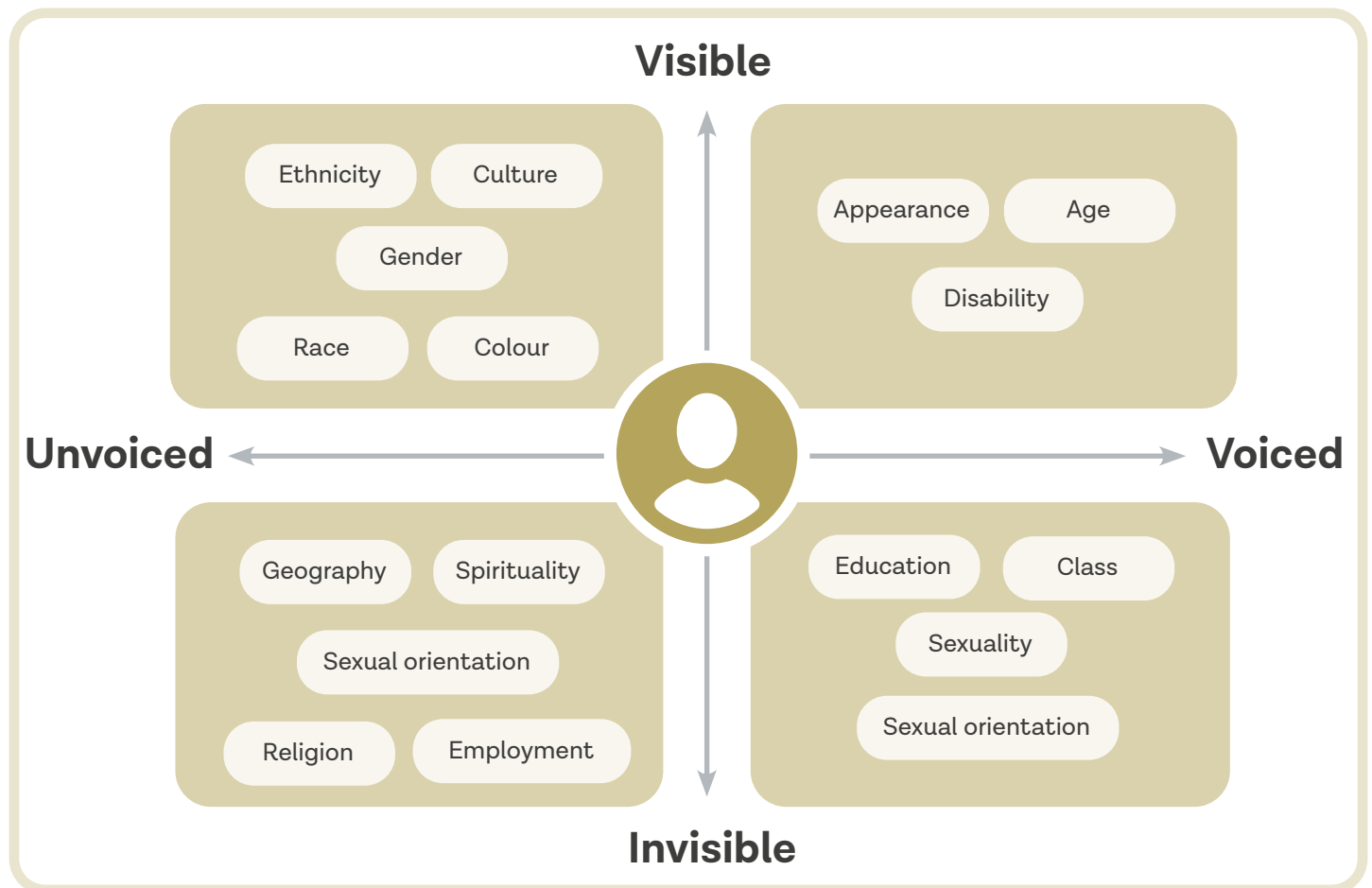


Figure 2 : *The social GRRRAACCEEESSS – visible and invisible*

The social GRRRAACCEEESSS intersects with the social and political contexts in which we live and work and vary from place to place and time to time, even during our own life experiences. Some of our own culture and values or sense of identity may be absorbed without conscious thought from the environments in which we live or grew up.

A key point to note here is that we often focus on thinking about the social GRRRAACCEEESSS in terms of bias or difference. However, they can also help us understand where we can have strong affinity with, or connections to, others based on these factors.

All of which means that it can, at times, be challenging to make sense of how aspects of our belief systems and identity can influence how we react to events and situations around us. When we work with people these identities and the beliefs they express may surface or may influence the meaning we ascribe to what people do and say.

Section one: reflective questions

The questions that follow are designed to facilitate your thinking about influential experiences over the course of your life so far.

When you look back, there were probably key junctions on your journey which influenced choices you made and paths you followed. You may or may not have had a choice about decisions you made at different points in your life. Similarly, how you felt about your life then may be different to how you feel now.

The questions start by asking you to identify any influences on you that originated in childhood. They lead to reflections which focus on your working life and professional choices you have made. The questions aren't chronological. They are meant to prompt you to reflect on aspects of your life and experiences.

If this activity involves thinking about experiences in your life which make you uncomfortable or are traumatic in any way, please make sure that you take care of yourself and only engage in this activity in a way that is safe for you.

To get started, it can be helpful to set an alarm and give yourself 20 minutes to think, respond to the questions and see where you get to. You can type directly into the boxes below the questions.

1. What did you learn or see in your family about power? Who held it, how it was exercised, how guidance was given / received?

2. How have your observations of power been affected by gender and sibling relationships? Or any relationships subsequently?

3. How would you describe your family of origin? How would you describe your family now?

4. What values or culturally based assumptions (e.g. religion, gender roles and sexuality) were you were aware of in your childhood? How have these influenced you?

5. Who have been significant role models for you and how did they influence you?

6. Have any of the social GRRRAACCEEESSS been an important influence on your identity?

7. What does community mean to you?

8. What do you think influenced your choice of work or profession?

9. What has influenced your desire to be a practice supervisor? What do you like about this role?

10. What professional aspirations do you have?

11. Who inspires you and why?

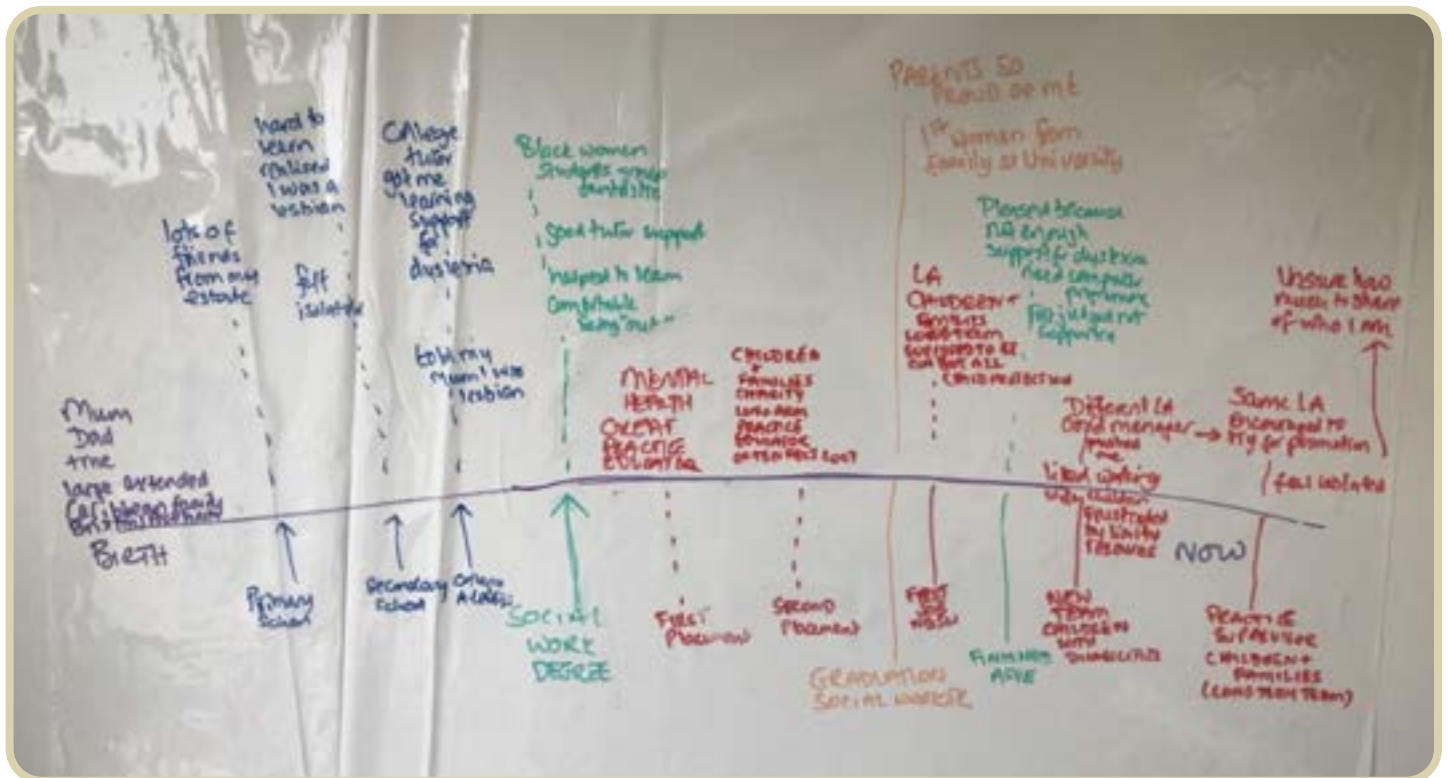
12. Is there anything that you dislike about being a practice supervisor? Do you talk about that with anyone and, if so, what do they say?

Section two: drawing your lifeline

Having reflected on the questions in section one, please now take a piece of paper and draw your lifeline from birth to now charting and depicting the significant experiences and people who influenced you. You can draw this in any way that makes sense to you. There is no right or wrong way to do this.

If you are aware that there were choices at certain points in your life, spend time noting why you chose one path and not another and thinking about what meaning you now ascribe to those decisions. You are encouraged to be as creative as you feel able to be using a range of pens / images / ideas. Again, if it's helpful, set a timer for 20 minutes.

When you have finished this, spend time looking at your lifeline and think about any patterns, connections or insights you have based on completing this activity.



Example of a lifeline

In the example lifeline for a practice supervisor in social work you can see that key learning events are outlined below the lifeline with commentary above. In this example, the practice supervisor reflects on:

- > How being an only child has affected her.
- > Being at secondary school when she realised she was the only lesbian.
- > The impact of being the only Black female manager in her local authority.
- > Key mentors who empowered her by giving her the tools she needed, for example in managing her dyslexia and encouraging her to try beyond her current role, and the importance of the peer support she had at university (and primary school).

Section three: So what? How have you got here?

In this last section we focus on what learning you can draw from these activities that apply to your role as practice supervisor. Please think about the following questions:

Having completed your lifeline, can you identify any connections or thoughts in relation to your professional life which explain things that give you satisfaction or frustrate you in your professional life?	What experiences have had the greatest impact on your professional identity?	What patterns or influences (positive or negative) do you need to be aware of in your role of practice supervisor? How do these patterns influence your supervision relationships?
How do you understand your professional journey so far?	Have you gained any new understanding about how you engage with others in supervision?	How do you integrate your self-awareness with the power and authority you have as a practice supervisor and what challenges do these pose for you?

You can record your thoughts in response to these questions in the box below

Finally, to draw together this activity, please spend some time reflecting on the following two questions:

What aspects of yourself do you find both valuable and helpful in your role as a practice supervisor?

What things 'press your buttons' that you need to be aware of?

References

Burnham, J. (2013). Developments in Social GRRRAACCEEESSS: Visible-invisible, voiced-unvoiced. In I. Krause (Ed). *Cultural Reflexivity*. Karnac.

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