# Cross-Cultural Supervision: Guiding the Conversation Toward Race and Ethnicity

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The following article examines the importance of meaningful discussion of race and ethnicity in cross-cultural supervision. They identify common errors in cross-cultural supervision. Through a case illustration, the authors showcase problems that may arise when racial and cultural factors are inappropriately addressed. Strategies for effective cross-cultural supervision are presented.

It is expected that over the next 50 years, the population of the United States will become increasingly racially diverse, and that this racial and ethnic diversity will be reflected in client populations as well (Sue & Sue, 1999). Much of the counseling literature of the last 2 decades has addressed the need for multiculturally competent counselors, and has detailed key dimensions of multicultural counseling competence (Arredondo, et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). While considerable attention has been given to cultural competence in the counseling arena, an area that has been addressed far less frequently is cross-cultural competence in supervision.

Bernard and Goodyear (1998) defined supervision as an evaluative relationship between a senior and junior member of the counseling profession whose purpose is to "enhance the professional functioning" of the supervisee (p. 4). Their definition portrays the senior member of the supervision dyad as responsible for directing and nurturing the development of the supervisee's skills and professional identity. It is clear that in a context of increasing client diversity, an essential feature of supervision would include the supervisor's ability to raise and guide analyses of race, ethnicity, and culture with the supervisee as part of the critical process of honing the supervisee's multicultural skill.

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That the cross-cultural aspects of supervision have remained largely unexplored may be explained in part by O'Byrne and Rosenberg's (1998) socio-cultural analysis of supervision. These authors describe supervision as a process whereby the supervisee is acculturated into the profession of counseling. They characterize counseling as a "culture" with a common language, rites of passage (e.g., "trainee" to a "mentor"), and defined socialization practices. This "culture" of counseling has only recently begun to shift and broaden its perspective in recognition of diverse client variables such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and spirituality. Although cultural variables have begun to be acknowledged, the counseling field's focus on the aforementioned cultural variables remains scattered, superficial, and marginalized" (Lappin & Hardy, 1997, p. 42). This lack of a consistent, cohesive approach to cultural context is the case especially with regard to supervision. A brief examination of traditional models of counseling supervision reveals little systematic attention to cultural factors.

## models of counseling supervision

Traditionally, supervision models have focused on theoretical skill learning (Bernard, 1979; Halloway, 1995; Reiner, 1997; Thomas, 1994) and developmental factors that impact the growth of supervisees (Stoltenberg, 1981). Many supervisory theories center on the same principles as those of counseling theories. Parallel processes between the supervisory relationship and the therapeutic relationship are assumed (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987). For example, the psychoanalytic model of supervision focuses on the therapist's understanding of psychoanalytic principles and application of theoretical skills (Reiner). Solution-oriented supervision aims to facilitate and co-construct "expertise from the life, experience, education, and training of a supervisee/therapist rather than deliver or teach expertise from a hierarchical, superior position" (Thomas, p. 11). This collaborative and parallel perspective of supervision is also embraced by the social constructivism theory of supervision. According to Anderson and Goolishian (1990), "The training system, like the therapy system, is one kind of meaning-generating or language system" (p. 1). In the postmodern learning system, a collaborative, non-hierarchical relationship exists that allows the supervisor and the supervisee to create stories through conversation with each other that organize the learning tasks in supervision.

The focus on skill building approaches to counselor training is also evident in models not necessarily based on counseling theoretical approaches, such as Bernard's (1979) discrimination model of supervision, and in developmental models of supervision such as Stoltenberg's (1981) counselor complexity model, and Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Delworth's (1998) integrated developmental model of supervision. These skill building models link the supervisor's stance with the particular skill process a supervisee is experiencing. Clearly, most supervision

models identify levels of skill development based on theoretical factors that, until recently, have neglected cultural and ethnic factors. Few supervision models address diversity issues in supervision (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987), and even fewer have developed conversations on the "how to" of placing issues of diversity at center stage. This marginalization of cultural variables mirrors the broader social context in which race and ethnicity are silenced or rendered taboo (Helms & Cook, 1999; Lappin & Hardy, 1997).

In the last decade, cultural issues in supervision have increasingly been topics of empirical investigation. Leong and Wagner (1994), for example, report on three empirical studies that addressed racial and cultural issues in supervision. Fukuyama (1994) studied 18 psychology interns' positive and negative critical incidents with regard to multicultural issues in supervision. She found that positive clusters described openness and support, culturally relevant supervision, and involvement with multicultural activities. Negative clusters described supervisors' lack of cultural awareness and the questioning of supervisor competency. Wieling and Marshall (1999) studied cultural factors that influence family therapy supervisor-trainee relationships when one of the individuals is from an ethnic minority group. Seventy-nine percent of those who had a same-race supervisor indicated they would have benefited from a supervisor of a different race. The four supervisors who had supervised a student of a different race reported that the cross-cultural supervision demanded that they address issues of personal bias.

Daniels, D'Andrea, and Kim (1999), using a case study approach, explored supervisory relationships in which cultural issues are not addressed. The problems that surfaced included different cultural values, different counseling goals that developed as a result of cultural difference, and divergent expectations of supervision based on cultural background. Constantine (1997) investigated multicultural competency in supervision among pre-doctoral psychology interns at American Psychological Association (APA)-approved internship sites. She found that supervisors were interested in having more ethnic minority clients for their interns, more processing of racial differences in the supervisory relationship, more exploration of the intern's ethnic background, and more readings on multiculturalism for both supervisor and intern. Strikingly, 12 of the 30 interns (40%) reported that the supervisor seemed reluctant to bring up and discuss multicultural issues. Taffe (2000), in an examination of how race and cultural factors are incorporated in clinical supervision, found that supervisees perceived they were adequately trained to use race and culture in their work, and that supervision contributed highly to their ability to work with these factors in counseling. Lawless (2001) explored how talk about race, ethnicity and culture was accomplished in supervision using conversation analysis. The researcher discovered that four domains of conversation emerged: bypassed opportunities, self of the therapist issues, cross-cultural issues in the therapeutic relationship, and cultural issues affecting the supervisory relationship.

It is clear from this review of the empirical literature that race and culture are emerging as focal points for discussion in supervision and that cross-cultural competency in supervision has increased. Nevertheless, in the authors' experience as counselor educators and supervisors, counseling trainees frequently are provided little and sometimes no direction in supervision about how to address race, ethnicity, and culture in counseling. Indeed, it is our observation that the unspoken tension, fear, and lack of knowledge about these issues on the part of supervisors perpetuates the marginalization of race and ethnicity in counselor training, and thus does little to prepare counseling trainees for the realities they will face as professionals serving a diverse clientele.

Supervisors who wish to provide positive modeling and direction to supervisees with regard to dealing with racial issues have few resources to which they can turn. Empirical research in this area, as we have shown, is scant (Brown & Landrum-Brown, 1995; Leong & Wagner, 1994), and, although there have been a number of theoretical publications in the last 10 years on cross-cultural supervision, few offer concrete guidelines for initiating and exploring race and ethnicity in supervision. In the next section we differentiate between multicultural and cross-cultural supervision. We also address the lack of sufficient attention to factors of race and ethnicity between supervisor, supervisee, and client.

# definition of cross-cultural supervision

Brown and Landrum-Brown (1995) drew a distinction between multicultural and cross-cultural supervision. They defined multicultural supervision as the study of cultural models or patterns of supervision. For example, an inquiry into what the supervisory process would look like from an Afrocentric perspective would be within the scope of multicultural supervision. Cross-cultural supervision, on the other hand, refers to the analysis of contents, processes, and outcomes in supervision in which racial, ethnic, and/or cultural differences exist between at least two members of the client-counselor-supervisor triad. We adhere to the latter definition in our discussion of racial and ethnic factors in supervision.

# errors in cross-cultural supervision

This focus on the racial, ethnic, and cultural dimensions is in response to the frequency with which we observe resistance to addressing these factors on the part of supervisees and supervisors. A "color blind" rationale often is invoked to justify the avoidance of racial factors in counseling and supervision (Helms & Cook, 1999; Sue & Sue, 1999). Yet, empirical evidence exists that suggests that multicultural counseling competency is enhanced when supervisees are instructed by supervisors

to attend to clients' racial issues (Ladany, Inman, Constantine, & Hofheinz, 1997). Nonetheless, according to several experts in the field of multicultural counseling, "race" still appears to be such an anxiety-arousing topic that when it is referred to, it often is couched in more comfortable euphemisms such as "culture" (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994; Helms & Cook; Landrine, 1995; Stone, 1997; Sue & Sue).

There are, however, some significant differences regarding the definitions associated with the terms "race" and "culture" despite the tendency of some persons to view them as static and interchangeable terms. Some writers believe "race" emphasizes "innateness or the inbred nature of whatever is being judged such that whatever is inheritable is also permanent and unalterable ...whether it be body size...or color" (Smedley, 1993, pp. 39-40). Others, such as Helms and Cook (1999) propose that the word "race" has both socio-political and psychological dimensions. They use the term "sociorace" to apply to societal groupings of people that are used as the justification for differential treatment (Helms & Richardson, 1997). They use the term "psychorace" to refer to the person's internalized racism and other effects of socialization (Helms & Richardson). "Culture," on the other hand, typically has referred to the "patterned regularities" of certain groups including customs, language, traditions, beliefs and values (Stone, 1977). "Culture" is a broader term that may embrace "race" and other factors that describe a person's self-identity and experiences. Despite the interrelationship between the terms "race" and "culture," "race" (especially as denoted by skin color and other physical features) remains a significant psychosocial variable in the supervision process. As Lappin and Hardy (1997) stated, "Although race is one of the principle ways in which the self is defined, it is often ignored in virtually all areas of clinical practice" (p. 48). Even when avoided, its presence can nonetheless have an impact on the therapeutic and supervisory relationship.

In Leong and Wagner's (1994) extensive review of the empirical, clinical, and theoretical literature on cross-cultural supervision, they concluded that race and ethnicity profoundly influence the cross-cultural supervision process in ways that often are not explicit. For example, unmentioned racial and ethnic issues may distort the supervisory relationship and negatively impact the counseling process, or there may be a tendency to "overindulge" in racial and ethnic issues that were previously denied (Hunt, 1987). Leong and Wagner stated further that when addressed at all, race and ethnicity often are examined in a simplistic manner that fails to capture their nuances and complexities. They mentioned the lack of emphasis on personality dynamics and the interactions of these personal characteristics with cultural dynamics. Also, they recommended in-depth examination of race and ethnicity as multidimensional psychological variables, rather than as discrete nominal variables. Moreover, they advocated an investigation of institutional factors that may impede or support the development of cross-cultural supervision (Leong & Wagner).

One of the ways that supervisors may fail to understand the above-mentioned complexities is to assume racial differences between counselors and clients must be addressed early in the counseling process (Helms & Cook, 1999). Such an approach may result in counselors inappropriately making race an issue before the client is comfortable talking about it, and/or before the counselor has considered whether and how it is salient for the client. Rather than prescribing that counselors discuss race right away when working with racial or ethnically diverse clients, we encourage an initial conversation prior to beginning the supervisory relationship. In this conversation, supervisors and counselors engage in a multifaceted discussion of the complex and subtle ways race and ethnicity have had an impact on their lives, and how these experiences influence their views, expectations, and anxieties about the supervisory relationship. We recommend that supervisors caution counselors about stereotyping, invite on-going dialogue about the intersection of race, ethnicity and culture with clinical concerns, and take steps to remove institutional barriers to effective cross-cultural supervisory relationships. While empirical evidence for this recommendation is still needed, the body of multicultural literature suggests that intentional, thoughtful, and in-depth discussions about racial issues in supervision are imperative (Helms & Cook; Lappin & Hardy, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1999). Ultimately, as supervision is grounded in meaningful examination of racial dynamics, we believe that rich possibilities for the therapeutic relationship are tapped.

Another error in cross-cultural supervision we have observed repeatedly is related to misinterpretations of the constructivist perspective. A constructivist approach claims that reality is shaped by meanings individuals bring to their experiences (Gergen, 1999). These meanings, or interpretations of reality, are grounded in people's relationships within a sociocultural context. As Gergen stated, "From this perspective there could be as many realities as there are minds to conceptualize or construe" (p. 236). This perspective has been taken by some to mean that all values are equally valid; that is, that any culture's behaviors and practices are as "true" as any other. When supervisors and counselors eschew value issues because they may be culturally derived, they may miss the point of counseling entirely: facilitating change. Sometimes that change involves challenging clients' assumptions and values, even culturally-based values.

A problem with this approach is that supervisors and supervisees may fail to challenge clients' cultural practices, even when these practices limit clients psychologically or result in harm, in a misguided notion that to challenge a client's values is tantamount to imposing one's values on the client. From this perspective, supervisees would be constrained from exploring with, for example, their African-American clients, the difference between "healthy cultural paranoia" and pathological distrust (Aponte & Johnson, 2000; Jones, 1990).

In the next section, we present a case in which several opportunities for effective cross-cultural supervision were missed. Strategies for addressing race and ethnicity in cross-cultural supervision are identified.

# case illustration

Sun-Li is a 20-year-old first generation Chinese American who was referred to counseling by one of her professors. Dr. Cohen noticed that Sun-Li's usual high quality academic performance had dropped substantially. Reluctantly, Sun-Li agreed to see a counselor on her college campus. In the first session, Sun-Li reported that she was distressed because her brother was terminally ill, and her family had decided that she was to be the primary caregiver for him. Sun-Li was open to helping her brother in this way, however, she was worried about her ability to care for her brother adequately without training, lost time in her college degree program, how such a role would affect her relationship with her boyfriend, and whether or not she could resist her family's wishes.

Joanne, a Caucasian counselor, established rapport well with Sun-Li and was able to get her client to clarify the issues that had resulted in such inner turmoil and had affected her academic performance in such a drastic way. When Joanne began to inquire about the role of Sun-Li's family in the critical decision, Daniel, (also a Caucasian), Joanne's supervisor, redirected the session and encouraged Joanne to support Sun-Li's individual wishes and to promote her autonomy and personal decision-making power (cultural encapsulation). Daniel said to Joanne, "This client needs to gain independence from her family, and to make her own choice in the matter. Allowing her family to dictate her course of action would be to enable dependency."

In this case, Joanne, the counselor, is caught between her interest in Sun-Li's family and cultural expectations and in pleasing her supervisor. Daniel, the supervisor, is operating from a culturally encapsulated perspective, offering treatment goals that are based in the western values of autonomy, independence, freedom, responsibility, and individual choice. He has not considered Sun-Li's cultural context and how her family's values and expectations impinge on her. As a Chinese American, it is likely that Sun-Li's family expects her to conform to her parents' desires, and to act in ways that support family welfare, not individual freedom. A conversation inviting Joanne to explore the ethnic values of the client would have been helpful at this juncture. Furthermore, an exploration of the supervisor and supervisee's own ethnic values and their impact on their perceptions of the client's behavior would have enriched the cross-cultural experience in the supervisory and therapeutic relationship. Unfortunately, Daniel has not helped Joanne assess Sun-Li's level of acculturation, nor has he assisted his supervisee in accurately identifying the source of Sun-Li's inner conflict. These glaring omissions on the part of the supervisor limit greatly Joanne's competence as a cross-cultural counselor. In addition, they compromise Sun-Li's well-being and set her up for increased personal distress as she is forced to choose between the directives of her counselor and the demands of her family. Failure to capture the nuances and

complexities of race and ethnicity in Sun-Li's life increase the potential for harm in the therapeutic relationship.

# strategies for enhancing cross-cultural supervision

## MAKING SUPERVISION SAFE

By virtue of their responsibilities to ensure quality counseling and to hold supervisees accountable for their work, supervisors possess an enormous amount of power. Acknowledging their personal and professional power is a first step in building a safe climate for the supervisee. The challenge, then, is for supervisors to use their power appropriately. They must avoid using power in arbitrary and destructive ways (Horner, 1988; Jacobs, 1991) and must be intentional about addressing the power inherent in the supervisory relationship (Thompson, Shapiro, Nielson, & Peterson, 1989).

In order for supervisees to grow personally and professionally, they must be free to make mistakes, to speak openly about their fears and failures, and to allow themselves to be personally vulnerable in the supervisory relationship. Therefore, it is up the supervisor to create a climate of honesty and trust wherein supervisees have the opportunity for honing their counseling skills as well as addressing the personal and contextual issues that arise as a result of their work with clients. These conditions are especially important in cross-cultural supervision. Not only do most supervisees bring their anxieties about being evaluated into the supervisory relationship, they also bring their racial and ethnic backgrounds and experience. The historical relationships between ethnic groups, the interpretation of tone of voice, language patterns, and the approach to silence all create opportunities for misunderstanding and mistrust (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989; Sue & Sue, 1999).

Thus, it is the duty of supervisors to raise the issues of racial and ethnic difference, of expectations, and fears. When such openness is established, when delicate issues such as race are addressed, and when supervisees feel that they are engaging in collaborative work with a supervisor, the supervisory process is more likely to be satisfying and effective (Kaiser, 1997; Usher & Borders, 1993), and increase the supervisee's range of responses to issues of race in clinical practice (Lappin & Hardy, 1997).

In the case of Sun-Li, Daniel, Joanne's supervisor, had not had a conversation with Joanne about issues of power, trust, and safety in their supervisory relationship. Neither had Daniel raised the issue of how the two of them, both White, would work with clients of color. Joanne's difficulty arose from being caught in a double bind between her client and her supervisor. She wanted to do what was in the

best interest of her client, but she was aware also of her supervisor's evaluative role and was eager to please him. If Daniel had taken the initiative to talk with Joanne about the nature of supervision, his view of his role as supervisor, her needs and expectations as a supervisee, and their various perspectives on cross-cultural counseling, their relationship may have been enhanced. Moreover, if Daniel had made an effort to create a safe environment in which Joanne could be herself, Sun-Li's needs may have been better served.

## CONDUCTING SUPERVISOR AND SUPERVISEE SELF-ASSESSMENT

When working with diverse clients such as Sun-Li, it is critical for both supervisors and supervisees to consider their own racial and ethnic backgrounds and belief systems and how these may impact the supervisory relationship, and ultimately the effectiveness of the counseling (Aponte & Johnson, 2000). Aponte and Winter (1987) advocated exploration of the "person-of-the-therapist" issues in supervision, arguing that counselors must not only learn how to do counseling, but also how to be a counselor and a person. We contend that the "person-of-the-supervisor" issues also impact counselor training, and are legitimate topics to address, especially when working in cross-cultural counseling situations.

One strategy to increase awareness of racial and ethnic identity is for both the supervisor and supervisee to prepare cultural genograms (Hardy & Lazloffy, 1995). This process enables supervisors and supervisees to explore their culture of origin, pride and shame issues, and culturally-based beliefs and assumptions (Hardy & Lazloffy). Other avenues for exploring racial and ethnic identity issues include the use of racial identity inventories. These scales, developed for use by Whites and persons of color, help individuals to assess their awareness and sensitivity with regard to racial, ethnic, and cultural issues (Helms, 1990). Supervisors and supervisees working with racially different clients are encouraged to self-administer the racial identity inventories (e.g., the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale and the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale) and discuss the results in supervision. Disclosing this information assists both the supervisor and supervisee in identifying personal and cultural perspectives that may shape their interventions with clients. As a result of sharing material generated by cultural genograms and the racial identity scales, supervisors and supervisees can ask themselves the following questions: How do my beliefs and my own thinking about this client organize how I might tend to work with her? How can I step outside of my culture-bound beliefs and assumptions to help her? What will I need to do to keep myself from working against her cultural values, but rather to use her cultural realities to construct new possibilities?

The answers to these self-addressed questions may signal supervisors and counselors that they will have to give up previously conceived notions about

both the counseling and supervisory enterprises. Supervisors who take an authoritative stance may consider suspending the assumption that supervision and counseling are about "experts" who identify deficits and use interventions to "fix" problems. Instead, they may need to adopt a position of "not knowing" (Andersen, 1991; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, 1991) but of being willing to risk partnership as a venture with this client into a different culture and value system.

## EMBRACING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Another important strategy in cross-cultural supervision involves both supervisors and counselors taking responsibility for learning about the racial patterns and practices of their ethnically diverse clients. Working with clients from a position of "not knowing" (Andersen, 1991; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, 1991) does not mean that counselors and supervisors are to expect clients of color teach them about their culture. To do so would be to place an inordinate burden on clients who are already encumbered with emotional distress.

We recommend that supervisors and supervisees mutually undertake the task of learning about clients' racial and ethnic context. They may do this through conversations with colleagues of a similar racial background as the client, through reading professional literature, and through immersing themselves in the stories, music, and community of clients of color. In order to avoid the error of racial or cultural stereotyping, supervisors must take the lead in enabling supervisees to assess the acculturation level of their clients (Paniagua, 1994) in order to determine appropriate interventions that embody racial and cultural sensitivity.

In the case of Sun-Li, a Chinese American who was still very immersed in the values and traditions of Chinese culture, it would have been useful for Daniel to have guided Joanne in helping her client explore the conflicting demands of family expectations vs. individual autonomy. Daniel could have consulted with leaders of his city's Chinese community regarding how they manage such loyalty issues. At the very least, Daniel should have given Joanne permission and encouragement to explore the cultural realities that were impinging on Sun-Li's dilemma. If Daniel had made issues of racial and ethnic diversity safe and inviting for Joanne, Sun-Li may have received the help she needed in resolving a difficult decision.

## conclusion

Cross-cultural factors in supervision have not been fully explored in the counseling literature. The recent emergence of this topic in the literature signals hope, especially in light of an increased need for culturally competent supervision in diverse practice settings. Racial and ethnic variables in particular frequently are avoided or treated superficially. Through the case of Sun-Li, a Chinese

American woman steeped in ethnic traditions juxtaposed with western expectations, we present an argument for the importance of examining race and ethnicity in supervision. It is, in our view, the supervisor's responsibility to facilitate this examination in a climate of safety, trust, and comfort. Guiding the supervisory conversation toward racial and ethnic variables is a fundamental step toward cultural competence.

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