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Supervision With Asian Counseling Students: Cross-Cultural Supervision Challenges

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Abstract

Limited knowledge about cross-cultural relationships along with personal and institutional discomfort contribute to misunderstandings and problems in Caucasian-Asian supervision dyads. Improving cross-cultural supervision needs to take place in three areas: at the program level, with the supervisor, and with the supervisee. Program improvements include diverse faculty with cultural knowledge, experiential cultural learning opportunities for students, mandatory multicultural courses, and mentoring programs. Supervisors need to exhibit flexibility in techniques and approaches and facilitate supervisee cultural awareness. Supervisees must demonstrate a willingness to develop their cultural identity and address self-growth issues. A discussion of each is included.

Keywords: supervision, Asian, cross-cultural supervision

To understand cross-cultural supervision, it would be helpful to begin with a definition. Leong and Wagner (1994) defined it as “a supervisory relationship in which the supervisor and the supervisee are from culturally different groups.” Daniels, D’Andrea, Kyung, and Soo (1999) expanded the definition to include “those situations in which the supervisor and supervisee come from different cultural, ethnic, or racial backgrounds, or a combination of all three.” This differs from multicultural supervision, where cultural issues pertinent to effective counseling are addressed, along with developing cultural awareness, exploring cultural dynamics in supervision, and looking at cultural assumptions in counseling theories (Ancis & Marshall, 2010), but the supervisor and supervisee are not from markedly different cultural, ethnic, or racial backgrounds.

Cultural differences may surface in styles of language, expression of feelings, time perspective values, goal orientations, interactions with other people, self-exploration, and self-expression (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989). Cultural influences also shape personality (Daniels et al., 1999). Caucasian supervisors have been shown to perceive Asian, Black, and Hispanic supervisees as less able to accept constructive criticism, less open to self-examination, and having more problems keeping appointments (Cook & Helms, 1998). Cross-cultural supervision dyads are more conflicted than

racially homogenous dyads (Cook & Helms, 1988). In fact, supervision approaches developed for Caucasian, middle-class Americans could be inadequate with ethnic minority students (Jordan, 1998).

Supervision With Asian Students

With an increase in globalization, there has been an increase in international students, and especially Asian students, coming to the United States for education (Overzat, 2011). According to Reid and Dixon (2012), counseling programs need to maintain diverse training and supervision models that can be used with international counseling students as programs become more heterogeneous and international student enrollment increases, such as it did in 2009 by more than 40,000 students.

And yet the term “Asian” incorporates much more than international students from Asian countries enrolled in a counseling program. Understanding Asian students and culture is essential for counseling supervisors. The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) has committed to, “Affirm and deliver education and supervision related to counseling in a culturally diverse society” (ACES Strategic Planning Committee Report, 2007). Unfortunately, this aspect of supervision has received limited attention. Ryan and Hendricks (1989) suggested several factors that have contributed to this: limited knowledge about cross-cultural relationships, lack of understanding about the effects of race on power relationships in supervision, scarcity of Asian students and workers, heightened resistance to racism implications, and personal and institutional discomfort, projection, and rationalization.

Although multicultural concerns in supervision have been addressed in the literature, very little recent research has been devoted to cross-cultural Asian counseling supervision. For example, in a March 2013 search of the PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES databases using the search terms “Asian AND Supervision”, only four references from the last 10 years pertaining to this topic were listed, and only one – a self-reflection – was from a peer-reviewed journal.

What Does It Mean to Be Asian?

“Asian” is a broad term incorporating 29 distinct subgroups (Chang & Myers, 1997) with no distinction between recent international students, immigrants, and acculturated American citizens. Understanding Asian supervisees requires what Chang and Myers (1997) called a macro perspective and a micro perspective. The macro perspective reflects the commonalities across Asian groups while the micro perspective addresses the extreme diversity between and within Asian groups.

Asian Commonalities

Asians have values, spiritual beliefs, communication styles, and bicultural issues that tend to transcend the diversity of the population. Supervisors need a basic understanding of these to provide quality supervision. Some misunderstandings and communication problems could be prevented with cultural knowledge.

For the Asian student, four important values include education, family, hierarchical roles, and interdependence. Education is believed to bring a happy,

successful life, and the teacher is viewed as the expert who imparts knowledge and develops values, morals, and ethics (Miller, Yang, & Chen, 1997). Therefore, teachers are respected and esteemed in Asian families, and education is highly treasured. Another value is the family. The family is given primary consideration over the individual (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989). Three generations of a family may live together and exert pressure on the individual to make decisions (such as choosing a mate) with which the family approves (Miller et al., 1997). Asians value harmony in interpersonal relationships, and behavior outside the norm is viewed as bringing shame upon the family (Chang & Myers, 1997). Family harmony relies on authority, structure, and the role behavior of each individual (Miller et al., 1997). Hierarchical relationships guide the individual's behavior. For example, in Chinese culture, the five hierarchical relationships are national leader and subjects, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend and friend (Miller et al., 1997). Finally, Asians value interdependence, communicating in supervision in a more formal and polite manner than their Western peers (Carter, Pak, & Goodyear, 2000). Collectivism contrasts with individualism, and interdependence with independence (Chang & Myers, 1997).

Spirituality also plays an important role in Asian cultures. Confucianism philosophy has been the predominant tradition among Asians (Chang & Myers, 1997). It examines ideal human relationships (Miller et al., 1997) and emphasizes spiritual fulfillment to achieve harmony and the qualities of selflessness, modesty, patience, friendliness, self-discipline, moderation, and compassion (Jordan, 1998). For Asian Indians, though, Hinduism is the dominant religious tradition, along with indigenous medicine and mysticism (Chandras, 1997).

Communication styles in Asian cultures are quite different from Western styles and could be problematic in supervision. For example, Westerners often interact in a direct and confrontational style, yet Asians prefer indirect and less confrontational styles of interaction and are socialized to display humility in personal interactions and defer to those in authority positions (Daniels et al., 1999). Asian cultures value self-control, restraint, and deference, not assertiveness (Chang & Myers, 1997). When a supervisor promotes open expression and interaction in supervision, Asian students may feel a great deal of discomfort (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989). Western supervisors value the ability to express feelings and ideas openly, so they may encourage supervisees to bring up problems during supervision; yet for Asians, admitting a problem may be seen as a lack of self-control, willpower, and determination (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989).

Finally, acculturation and immigration issues may surface. Asian supervisees could be recent international students, natural-born American citizens, or somewhere in between. Chang and Myers (1997) described three patterns of acculturation. Nonacculturated students are resistant to American culture and maintain their parent culture. Acculturated students have assimilated to American culture. Bicultural students maintain both American and Asian cultures. The challenge of biculturalism for the Asian supervisee is resolving the conflicts of managing values and norms from two different cultures (Jordan, 1998). Miller et al. (1997) described how passivity, internal shame, and isolation could result from bicultural conflict, and lack of clarity may exist about how to resolve it. International students in a foreign culture may deeply miss their families and extended families and feel isolated because of a language barrier, speaking with an accent, and a different physical appearance (Chandras, 1997). Supervisors need to assess

supervisees' levels of acculturation, bicultural conflict, and isolation since identity confusion could create barriers to professional development and productivity (Chung & Lu, 1996).

Asian Diversity

While broadly Asians have many similar characteristics, it is important to note that many differences also exist. The term *Asian* refers to people of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, Thai, Hmong, Pakistani, Korean, Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian, Indonesian, Ceylon, and Indian descent, among others (Chang & Myers, 1997; Jordan, 1998). These countries are scattered around the globe and represent many between and within group differences.

Supervisors need to understand their Asian supervisees as individuals, not as stereotypes. Although the stereotype of Asian Americans as the model minority exists (Chang & Myers, 1997), differences permeate. This whiz kid myth may even be harmful because it could serve as an excuse for justifying the exclusion of Asian American students from governmental programs related to education, health, housing, and employment (Chandras, 1997).

What Are the Challenges in Supervision?

Supervisor uncertainty about how to address cultural problems and using single culture lenses and ethnocentric theories are two problematic areas when working with Asian students. With Asian international students, misunderstandings that occur between the dominant Western culture of the U.S. and the culture of their countries of origin can cause significant stress (Overzat, 2011) and should be addressed in supervision. Yet because supervisors may be uncertain about how to behave with supervisees from different racial or ethnic groups (Cook & Helms, 1998), they may choose to ignore the issue altogether. While some supervisors practice avoidance and never explore cross-cultural issues at all, others may overly accept whatever the student offers in an attempt to circumvent appearing racially biased (Chung & Lu, 1996). This concurred with Daniels et al.'s (1999) report that two problems that affected learning in cross-cultural supervision were not discussing racial or ethnic issues that distorted the supervisory relationship and over-interpreting the influence of culture and race in supervision. Failure to confront issues of culture and failure to elicit the supervisee's feelings about ethnicity could potentially lead to a supervisory impasse, which could impede the educational process (Chung & Lu, 1996).

Supervision theories steeped in dominant culture thinking without addressing cross-cultural needs could be problematic. Daniels et al. (1999) expressed that many theories of supervision were monocultural and ethnocentric and offered two reasons to support their premise. First, based on a review of the literature, they concluded that supervision theorists failed to address the distinctive challenges and dynamics commonly occurring in cross-cultural supervision. Second, supervision theories mirrored values and beliefs that reflected European American traditions because the theories emerged from within the dominant culture group in the United States. They concluded that while those theories may be valuable when both supervisor and supervisee come from European American backgrounds, they may cause frustration and confusion when used in cross-

cultural supervision. Yet many culturally encapsulated supervisors believe that their approaches can be culturally generalized (Jordan, 1998).

What Does the Literature Provide?

Research pertaining to supervisee ethnicity has been limited (Jordan, 1998), and most studies examining the quality of counselor supervision have ignored the potential influence of cultural factors (Cook & Helms, 1988). While many studies have examined multicultural supervision (Ancis & Marshall, 2010), the area of cross-cultural supervision remains scarce (Leong & Wagner, 1994). Very few studies have addressed cross-cultural Asian supervision in the last decade. A few studies (Bang, 2006; Cook & Helms, 1988; Daniels et al., 1999) have examined cross-cultural supervisee satisfaction, cross-cultural conflict and communication problems, and applying the Integrated Developmental Model of supervision with Korean trainees.

Cook and Helms (1988) explored the multicultural aspect of cross-cultural supervision in a study identifying and testing the five relationship characteristics of supervisor's liking, emotional discomfort, conditional interest, conditional liking, and unconditional liking. The authors collected 225 usable questionnaires from non-Caucasian students enrolled in clinical or counseling psychology programs. Most of the supervisees (88.9%) described relationships with Caucasian supervisors. Their results indicated that the variable identified as supervisor's liking accounted for the largest percentage of variance in satisfaction, and African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students felt significantly lower levels of multidimensional liking from their supervisors than Asian students. A combination of supervisor's liking and conditional interest contributed to greater supervisee satisfaction in cross-cultural supervision. Asian Americans held generally positive views of supervision relative to other groups. Because of limited numbers of multicultural supervisees in the programs, supervisors from this study may have had few opportunities to participate in cross-cultural relationships, and the study did not offer behaviors that would contribute to a positive supervisory environment because the measures they chose examined supervisee perceptions of supervisors' attitudes, not behaviors. However, the study did add valuable information about the importance of supervisor liking and conditional liking in predicting supervisee satisfaction.

Daniels et al. (1999) sought to investigate conflict and communication problems that occurred in cross-cultural supervision settings through a case study. After observing supervisory meetings between an Asian supervisee and a Caucasian site supervisor, Daniels documented issues, concerns, and problems raised by both. Cultural values, biases, and worldviews were never discussed in supervision. The researchers then collaborated to identify three major areas that explained the problems that occurred between the supervisor and supervisee in this study: different cultural values manifested in their interpersonal interactions, cultural differences reflected by the way they conceptualized counseling goals, and different expectations of supervision influenced by different cultural backgrounds. One of their conclusions, which differed from other cross-cultural theorists, was that discussing cultural differences with a faculty member increased supervisee understanding and enhanced confidence to work with the site supervisor. Most emphasize that the supervisor has the responsibility to take the lead in

initiating cross-cultural discussions. The study reinforced the importance of discussing multicultural counseling issues, preferably early in supervision.

In a more recent study, Bang (2006) examined the effects of age, gender, education, and counseling experience of supervisees in Korea on the three structures of the Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) of supervision. Self- and other awareness, motivation, and autonomy had positive relationships with age, education and counseling experience, so Bang concluded that his results lent support to the IDM (a model established in Western culture) for incorporating ethnic diversity and being useful as a developmental model for Korean students. Supervisee age may have been a significant factor in explaining self- and other awareness because dominant Confucian ideology in Korea reinforced the expectation that older people were more mature, more autonomous, and were role models for younger generations. This could have significant implications if a supervisor were younger than a supervisee.

More research is needed to both expand and corroborate the findings of these studies. Although Asian students in counselor training programs are rare, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs' (CACREP) Standards require that, "The counselor education academic unit has made systematic efforts to attract, enroll and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community" (CACREP, 2009, p. 4). Hopefully, this will translate to more Asian students in counseling programs in the future.

What Would Improve Cross-Cultural Asian Supervision?

Improving cross-cultural supervision must take place at three levels: the program, the supervisor, and the supervisee. Program improvements include diverse faculty with knowledge of cross-cultural concerns, experiential cultural learning opportunities for students, mandatory multicultural courses, and mentoring programs. Supervisors who cultivate culturally sensitive supervisory relationships, exhibit flexibility in techniques and approaches, and facilitate supervisee cultural awareness would also improve the effectiveness of cross-cultural supervision. Supervisees, too, play an important part by demonstrating a willingness to develop their cultural identity and address self-growth issues. A discussion of each follows.

Counselor Training Programs

Counselor training programs need a diverse representation of counselor educators with a knowledge base of Asian student concerns and strategic interventions (Chang & Myers, 1997). Bernard and Goodyear (2004) claimed that all interactions were multicultural and a constant, dynamic force in all supervisory interactions. By hiring culturally concerned faculty and creating culturally sensitive curriculum goals, the program can promote experiential cross-cultural learning opportunities, offer multicultural classes, and develop mentor programs to provide both structured and unstructured opportunities for Asian faculty and students.

By incorporating experiential cross-cultural learning through workshops, retreats, and studies abroad, counselors can be trained to adapt to the challenges of diversity (Chandras, 1997). Programs can enhance student experiences locally as well by creating a climate of understanding for the macro perspective of commonalities of Asian and other

cultures, such as sociological and historical influences, family values, communication and emotional expression, and effects of immigration, along with the micro perspective of differences, including distinct traditions, customs, and languages (Chang & Myers, 1997).

Chung and Lu (1996) recommended that psychiatric training programs develop and maintain at least an introductory and advanced course on cross-cultural psychiatry in the curriculum, and counseling programs could benefit from such classes as well. Effective multicultural counselors must be competent in three areas: 1) counselor awareness of own cultural values and biases, 2) counselor awareness of the client's worldview, and 3) knowledge of culturally appropriate intervention strategies (Chandras, 1997). Training programs are responsible for ensuring that students develop these competencies, and multicultural classes provide a formal way to train all counselors in a program.

Finally, mentor programs could aid Asian students in programs without Asian faculty. Programs can provide structured and unstructured avenues for meeting Asian and ethnic minority faculty from other programs who could offer guidance and mentorship (Chung & Lu, 1996). However, in one study (Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010) international students complained that they were always sent outside the department and program for support and resources, so including within department support is also important. By addressing these needs at the program level, students receive a strong message of the value of diversity.

Supervisors

Daniels et al. (1999) suggested the following five components to multicultural counseling issues that should be addressed by supervisors early in supervision. First, supervisors should initiate discussions about the supervisor's and supervisee's cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Second, they can explore ways in which values and traditions may influence counseling goals and expectations of supervision. Third, supervisors need to discuss multicultural counseling strengths and limitations of both the supervisor and supervisee. Next, they can review racial identity models from the professional literature. Finally, supervisors should discuss how racial identity development may affect the way each views counseling and supervision. In addition to their recommendations, supervisors need to cultivate a caring supervisory relationship, exhibit flexibility, and facilitate supervisee awareness of their own cultural influences and biases.

The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is a critical variable in the supervisee's education and training experience (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989). Supervisors working with Asian trainees may feel fear, distrust, and ambivalence toward each other, but direct discussion of racial content and experiences can be a tremendously powerful vehicle for exploring feelings, attitudes, values, and self-awareness (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989). Direct communication facilitates supervisory success through sharing of different views, beliefs, and meanings (Jordan, 1998).

Supervisors may need to practice flexibility. They may find it necessary to maintain the role of teacher-expert until Asian supervisees become more comfortable (Chang & Myers, 1997) and encourage them to reveal themselves to develop self-awareness (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989). They must be understanding of Asian students'

lower tolerance for ambiguity, preference for structured situations, and desire for practical, immediate solutions to problems (Chang & Myers, 1997), without attributing it to poor counselor development. It is the supervisor who creates a fit between traditional paradigms and the supervisee's ethnic minority reality as they explore together how their ethnic backgrounds impact their relationship (Jordan, 1998).

Counselor educators need to address issues of awareness and knowledge (Chang & Myers, 1997). Leong and Wagner (1994) recommended that supervisors learn techniques to help promote awareness, increase knowledge, and develop cross-cultural counseling skills in their trainees. They also need to provide a clear understanding of performance expectations, ways to proceed, and role expectations of each other both orally and in writing so that supervisees can experience the learning process as culturally sensitive (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989). To work effectively with clients, multicultural counselors must be aware of their own sociocultural backgrounds, assumptions, biases, values, and perspectives (Chandras, 1997). Supervisors must facilitate this awareness. By modeling appropriate self-disclosure and encouraging Asian supervisees to risk vulnerability, supervisors can develop the self-awareness that is expected in counseling practice (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989).

Supervisee

Although most literature focuses on the role of the supervisor, supervisees must be willing to develop their cultural identity and address self-growth issues. Indeed, Daniels et al. (1999) suggested that a supervisee's increased cultural understanding could enhance his ability to work with a site supervisor effectively, even when the site supervisor is not respectful of the cultural dynamics at play. To become competent counselors, supervisees must become aware of their own backgrounds, assumptions, values, and biases through critical self-examinations (Chandras, 1997). Supervisees may have a tendency to retreat from open discussion about cultural conflicts with both supervisors and clients (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989), but they must be willing to and learn how to initiate those discussions at times.

Implications and Conclusion

Addressing program level changes before students of Asian heritage are admitted to the program, such as experiential community cultural activities, a required multicultural class in the curriculum, and a mentoring program, creates an environment that values diversity. Supervisors who are willing to be flexible by consulting with other faculty, changing supervision approaches to include techniques that would make Asian students more comfortable, and bringing up cultural issues in a kind and sensitive manner throughout the semester can improve the supervision experience for both. And supervisee's willingness to discuss and develop cultural identity and become more self-aware invests the student in the process. These suggestions could improve Asian students' supervision and satisfaction by addressing needed changes with the program, supervisor, and supervisee.

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