

Challenges in Cross-Cultural Supervision



INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

Tamara L. Kaiser, Ph.D.

Carol F. Kuechler, Ph.D.

Angeline Barretta-Herman, Ph.D.

College of St. Catherine/University of St. Thomas

School of Social Work · Supervision Institute

About the authors:

All of the authors are faculty in the College of St. Catherine/ University of St. Thomas School of Social Work and trainers in the CSC/UST Supervision Institute. All are authors of scholarly work in the area of supervision. Much of the material in the manual was taken from Kaiser, T., 1997, Supervisory Relationships: Exploring the Human Element. The vignettes were created by the authors with the input of several practitioners in the field, many of whom also served as role players in the vignettes.

2021 NOTE: This film was created in 2000 to facilitate discussion among human services practitioners and their supervisors, where there are racial and cultural differences both between the supervisor and supervisee in the supervisory relationship and/or between either practitioner and the clients being served. The vignettes portray various dynamics that might emerge, and the Instructor's Manual provides both a conceptual framework for understanding those dynamics and some discussion questions. The discussion questions are aimed at helping professionals think critically about those issues, and to offer alternative approaches that emerge between supervisor and supervisee regarding their supervisory relationship and their approach to clients. Whereas awareness of the impact of race and culture on these dynamics have-evolved since the film was created, the issues presented here are as relevant today as they were then and can easily be explored considering current perspectives.

Table of

Contents

General Introduction	1
Vignette I: I hate paperwork	5
The scene	
First Session	
One Week Later	
Questions for Discussion	
Suggestions for Group Activity	
Vignette II: Don't you think I know anything?	7
The scene	
Latino Client	
Euro-American Client	
Questions for Discussion	
Suggestions for Group Activity	
Vignette III: In the best interests of the child	8
The scene	
Introduction of the Case	
Assessment: Is it Child Abuse?	
Reporting to Child Protection:	
Cultural/Community Implications	
Reporting to Child Protection:	
Challenges for the Worker	
Gender Roles	
Questions for Discussion	
Suggestions for Group Activity	
References & Credits	12

CROSS-CULTURAL SUPERVISION

A TEACHING VIDEO

Introduction

Diversity is increasing among agency clientele, among practitioners and among their supervisors. The purpose of this tape is to stimulate in-depth thought and discussion regarding the conflicting and complex issues involved in the cross-cultural supervisory relationship. The literature guides us to three major elements that are present in all supervisory relationships (Kaiser, 1997; Kadushin, 1992; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1994). These include:

1. The dynamics of power and authority
2. Shared understanding regarding the supervisory contract and approaches to treatment
3. The depth of trust between supervisor and supervisee

Although these elements are present and complex in all supervisory relationships, they become increasingly complicated when the participants are from different cultural groups. The phrase "cross-cultural" is one that has many definitions. We are referring primarily to differences in racial or ethnic background.

This tape consists of three vignettes demonstrating situations that can arise between supervisor and supervisee. The first vignette consists of two sessions between the supervisor and supervisee, in which an issue is first introduced and then pursued. The second vignette is shown twice with the same characters as supervisor and supervisee, but in one scenario the client is Latino and in the other the client is Euro-American. The third vignette is a demonstration of a group supervisory session. This one is divided into five sections. Although the entire videotape is 53 minutes in length, there is a pause between each section, allowing for discussion of the issues presented. The role players are all practitioners in the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota area.

There are many important topics to address. We picked a few that we think are important in terms of potential complexity and conflict. In the vignettes, we made an arbitrary choice about how the cultural dimension is presented and of the points of view represented by the supervisors and the supervisees. In discussions following the viewing

of the vignettes, you are encouraged to consider other possible interpretations of the situation. The questions and activities presented by this manual are designed to facilitate these discussions.

Power Dynamics

In any supervisory relationship there is an inherent power differential, because the supervisor's job is to hold the supervisee accountable for competent service to clients. The supervisor has the responsibility and power to evaluate the supervisee and to hire, fire, promote, give raises, recommend licensure, or certification. All of these acts have great impact on the supervisee. Each member brings to the relationship his or her experiences with and attitudes toward power, which affect the dynamics between the particular supervisee and supervisor in question.

Within cross-cultural supervisory relationships there are two important factors that need to be taken into account when evaluating the dynamics of power in the relationship. The first is the effect of the historical power differential between many people in minority groups and those in the mainstream culture. Those who have a history of being oppressed because of things like race, class or sexual orientation may well come to supervision with a mistrust of those in greater power. This mistrust might well be exacerbated if the supervisor is Euro-American, middle class and/or heterosexual (Cook and Helms, 1988; Kadushin, 1992).

The second factor is that one's own ethnic background may affect how one views the notion of power in general. For example, in the dominant Euro-American culture there is a belief (albeit mythical) that everyone is equal. People in the majority culture are often uncomfortable with the notion of power and tend to minimize or negate power differentials. By contrast, in many Latin and Southeast Asian countries, notions of hierarchy are embedded throughout the culture. For example, as discussed in the third vignette, traditional Hmong culture gives significantly greater power and authority to men than to women.

While it is impossible to assume that an entire group will share a similar attitude, sensitivity to the implications of cultural differences is useful in understanding power dynamics in supervision. In viewing and discussing the vignettes in this tape we recommend that you take

time to speculate about how each member of the relationship is experiencing the power differential between them and the effect that this experience might have on the interaction.

Shared Meaning

Shared meaning can be defined as both mutual understanding and, ideally, mutual agreement between supervisor and supervisee about the purpose of supervision and approaches to treatment. To the extent that understanding and agreement are occurring in the relationship, the supervisory process will operate more effectively. The mechanism by which at least understanding is achieved is that of clear communication. This includes such actions as offering clear feedback about the supervisee's performance and establishing clarity about the supervisory contract and expectations regarding job duties. It includes, as well, establishing an understanding between supervisor and supervisee about what is meant by both verbal and non verbal behavior, such as the use of particular words, tone of voice, and direct versus indirect styles of communication. Challenges of cross-cultural supervision are often evident in the area of shared meaning. The potential for complexity exists in any supervisory relationship, given the fact that both supervisor and supervisee bring a variety of assumptions, values and experiences to the table, all of which influence their attitudes towards each other and towards the job. The greater the differences between supervisor and supervisee, the greater the possibility for blocks in the achievement of shared meaning.

A major area which requires shared meaning in order for the supervisory relationship to operate effectively is that of beliefs about what is helpful in the approach to treatment of clients. There are many factors that contribute to the development of beliefs about effective treatment. Practitioners' theoretical orientations and practice experiences, their cultural and familial values and norms, as well as their personal life experiences will lead them to emphasize and support certain types of client behavior, offer particular kinds of help, and do so with a style that reflects their own personalities and backgrounds. In addition, the organization within which the service is being provided defines the parameters of what can and should be done on behalf of clients. Conflicts can arise when there is a strong difference of opinion between supervisor and supervisee about what approach should be

taken. Often it is difficult to discern whether the problem is only a difference in cultural norms or values, or one which is a limit setting issue - that is the supervisor believes that the supervisee's approach is outside of the ethical or appropriate parameters of the job. Conflicts and concerns regarding appropriate treatment of clients are a significant part of the discussion in both the second and third vignettes. You are encouraged to examine these conflicts and consider strategies for dealing with them.

Trust

As in any relationship, trust between supervisor and supervisee is developed through an experience of mutual honesty and respect. How the supervisor and supervisee deal with the power dynamics between them and the extent to which they establish shared meaning will effect the degree of trust in the relationship. A particularly sensitive and important issue in cross-cultural supervision is identifying racism. Like so many of the dynamics between supervisor and supervisee, this often appears to be in "the eye of the beholder." Racism is rarely blatantly expressed, particularly in a human service agency, where people are conscious of professional values and ethics which speak to the need to oppose discrimination and oppression and to honor diversity. An attempt to be color blind as well as ignorance, awkwardness, negative stereotypes about those who are different, lack of awareness of one's own unintentional racism and fear about how to proceed often lead to a rule of silence regarding racial tension. Beneath the silent surface is frequently a deep mistrust on both sides which complicates interactions and interpretations of behavior. This is fueled by feelings of rage, guilt, defensiveness, hurt and fear which have developed as a result of generations of racial tension. In a discussion of the vignettes, we suggest that you speculate on the variables that might contribute to both supervisor's and supervisee's feelings of frustration and fear and on the possible risks of taking an interaction with possible underlying racial tension to a more authentic level.

Tamara L. Kaiser
Carol F. Kuechler
Angeline Barretta-Herman

Vignette Number I: I hate paperwork (11:22 minutes)

The Players

Supervisor: Steve

Supervisee: Dewberry

The Scene

This vignette of a male African-American supervisee and a male Euro-American supervisor demonstrates the complexity of limit setting in the supervisory relationship. The scene begins with the supervisor introducing his concern that the supervisee's paper work is not submitted in a timely manner. In the following session, a week later, the issue is re-addressed and tension increases as they attempt to work toward a resolution.

First Session (2:44 minutes)

One Week Later (8:30 minutes)

Questions for Discussion

- Steve remains focused but are Dewberry's concerns being heard? Give specific examples.
- Support and refute the notion that leaving the note on Dewberry's desk was an oppressive/shaming gesture on Steve's part.
- To what extent are dynamics between these two individuals reflective of:
 - gender
 - age
 - agency context
 - culture
 - race
 - individual personalities
 - sexual orientation
 - role
 - style of communication/expression
- What facts/details are germane to this discussion? Evaluate to what extent Steve has enough details to address this concern. How does the amount of information Steve has affect the interaction?

- Dewberry complains about being referred only African-American clients. Discuss the pros and cons of this agency practice from the perspective of the agency, the supervisor, and the worker. What are the implications for Dewberry's professional development? What are the implications for meeting client needs?
- Discuss the differing cultural expressions and acceptance of anger in light of Dewberry's comment about being an "angry black man." On what basis would Steve make a judgement about the appropriateness of Dewberry's expression of anger? To what extent would you describe this as an issue pertaining to shared meaning?
- Discuss your response to Dewberry's comment that he feels victimized and to Steve's response that this is strong language given the situation.

Suggestions for Group Activity

- Divide into groups of four with two role players and two observers. Reenact this role play with changes in:
 - age
 - sexual orientation
 - race
 - individual personalities
 - gender
 - style of communication/expression

Debrief noting the obvious and subtle differences.

- Paper and pencil reflection. Divide the group in two. Assign half of the group to imagine themselves as Steve and the other half to imagine themselves as Dewberry. Instruct them to individually write down feelings and thoughts they might be having but are reluctant to share.

Debrief. Discuss the possible unsaid feelings and thoughts. What might be the result if the unspoken was addressed openly?

Vignette Number II: Don't you think I know anything? (10:54 minutes)

The Players

Supervisor: Teresa

Supervisee: Barb

The Scene

Two versions of this vignette between a Latina supervisor and a Euro-American supervisee illustrate the attempts by the supervisor to gain an understanding of a new, but experienced, employee's approach to treatment, to develop the supervisory relationship, and to educate the supervisee on agency policy and procedure. The case under discussion is a male client who is Latino in the first vignette and Euro-American in the second one to further highlight the impact of culture.

Latino client (6:43 minutes)

Euro-American client (3:56 minutes)

Questions for Discussion

- Identify techniques Teresa is using to develop rapport and to elicit more detail for a clearer understanding of the case.
- Speculate on the expectations of Teresa and Barb for this supervisory relationship. Discuss how they might achieve greater shared meaning about the purpose of the supervision.
- What comes into focus when the client is Latino? When the client is Euro-American? What is missed in each situation?
- Both Barb and Teresa appear to be seeking acknowledgement of their competence. Speculate about the assumptions each is making about herself and about the other. What are your observations about their competence?
- What differences can you identify in Teresa's and Barb's approach to the treatment of this client? What factors do you attribute to each of their perspectives?

- ❏ Barb shares a number of observations and interpretations as a result of her assessment of the client. Identify the observations and offer alternative interpretations.
- ❏ Does Barb have more legitimacy in arguing for an MMPI with a Euro-American client than with a Latino client? Explain.
- ❏ Teresa challenges Barb about her attitude toward her as a supervisor in her last comment about being a woman and a Latina. What is the justification for her challenge?

Suggestions for Group Activity

- ❏ Divide into two consultation groups, one for the supervisor and one for the supervisee. Generate and evaluate suggestions for how to continue the dialogue in the next supervisory session. Pick a member from each group and role play the next meeting between Teresa and Barb.
- ❏ Divide the group into groups of three or four and direct each group to sculpt (physically demonstrate) the power relationship between this supervisor and supervisee. Ask each group to explain their sculpture.

Vignette Number III: In the best interests of the child (25:45 minutes)

The Players

Supervisor: Diane and Dave

Supervisees: Xong, Ong, and Barb

The Scene

This is a group supervisory session in a community-based agency serving a multi-cultural population. The workers include a Hmong woman, a Hmong man, and a Euro-American woman. Both the male and female supervisors are Euro-American. The case under discussion is a Hmong family in which there is concern about possible child maltreatment. This vignette is presented in five segments.

Introduction of the Case (7:51 minutes)

Xong presents a case of a 9 year old Hmong boy who has told her that his mother is hitting him. Questions arise about the significance of this boy's lack of direct eye contact as well as about a distinction made by the mother between hitting and discipline.

Assessment: Is it Child Abuse? (6:04 minutes)

The group discusses how Xong might go about determining whether or not the child is being physically abused. The group debates the conflict between the importance of Xong's maintaining a good working relationship with the boy's mother versus the importance of ensuring the child's safety.

Reporting to Child Protection: Cultural/Community Implications (3:18 minutes)

Xong and Ong describe the strong distrust in the Hmong community toward Child Protection Services. The group discusses the practice implications of following the Hmong tradition of conferring with the family's relatives before going directly to Child Protection.

Reporting to Child Protection: Challenges for the Worker (2:19 minutes)

Xong discusses her discomfort with being the one to make a report to Child Protection and her fear that she will be seen as having betrayed the family. The group explores Xong's tension between her professional and her community obligations.

Gender Roles (6:37 minutes)

Xong and Ong describe the power differential between men and women in the Hmong community. Conflict arises in the group about how Xong should approach the family in light of this factor.

Questions for Discussion

- During the vignette, references are made to the length of time this family has been in the United States in an effort to determine the degree of acculturation that might have occurred for the family. A related issue for discussion is that of distinctions between refugee and immigrant status. How

do these distinctions inform the discussions about the cross-cultural factors addressed in this situation?

- Xong reports that the mother makes a distinction between disciplining and hitting the child based on her intention. Discuss your reactions to this distinction. This distinction is raised in other cultural groups. What are the implications for a supervisor and supervisee in the context of practice?
- The group discusses the meaning of the child's lack of direct eye contact. Discuss the complexity of sorting out the impact of cultural versus psychological factors on a person's behavior.
- The suggestion is made to involve the family's relatives in assessing and addressing this situation. Several members of the group voice concerns about taking this course of action. What factors must be considered before initiating a contact with the family's relatives?
- The supervisors' understanding of the limits of confidentiality differ from those of the Hmong workers. Discuss the practice implications.
- Both Ong and Xong express concern that Xong will lose face with this family and her community if she reports this mother to Child Protection Services. What strategies would you suggest to help her meet her professional and community responsibilities? Compare Xong's situation to that of a Euro-American practitioner in a small rural community, or of other workers in culturally distinct practice communities.
- Both Ong and Xong describe a power differential between men and women in the Hmong culture. Discuss how to be both respectful and challenging in working with this family. Discuss, as well, your reaction to Xong's statement that she is a professional woman at work, but at home she obeys her husband.
- Dave and Diane express conflicting views about the following issues. What are the practice implications of each point of

view?

- a) Teaming a male worker or a Euro-American supervisor with Xong for the next home visit.
 - b) Balancing protection of the child and mandatory reporting requirements with preserving Xong's working relationship with the mother.
 - c) Addressing Xong's conflict between her roles as a professional and as a member of the Hmong community.
- ☒ Identify issues of power and authority that are demonstrated throughout this vignette as they apply to institutions, cultural norms, professional roles and gender.

Suggestions for Group Activity

- ☒ Instruct the group to form pairs by asking them to choose an individual they assume to be most like themselves. Begin by inviting each member of the pair to individually develop a list of personal, familial and culture rules and/or practices about confidentiality, e.g., what is permissible to share with family, friends, colleagues, external authority figures, strangers? What is not? How does this differ from the rules of the profession?

Have each dyad share and compare lists. Discuss how the lists differ. What are the implications for supervision in a situation where the issues of confidentiality are complex and are integral to the intervention?

- ☒ Form small groups of 3-5 members. In each group identify and comment on the pace of the group supervision process. Would you extend or shorten any aspects of eliciting information about the client situation, detailing the policy implications and/or discussing the options for intervention. Create a role play in which you modify the pace of the group supervision process. Evaluate the impact of the modification.

References

- Cook, D. and Helms, J. (1988). Visible racial/ethnic group supervisees' satisfaction with cultural supervision as predicted by relationship characteristics. Journal of Counseling Psychology 35 (3). pp. 268-274.
- Kadushin, A. (1992). Supervision in Social Work, Third Edition. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kaiser, T. (1997). Supervisory Relationships: Exploring the Human Element. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole.
- Munson, C. (1993). Clinical Social Work Supervision Second Edition. New York: Haworth.
- Shulman, L. (1993). Interactional Supervision. Washington, D.C.: NASW Press.

Credits

**We thank the following people
for their contributions to this project,
as advisors and/or role players:**

Barbara Berger, MSW LICSW
Advisor, Role Player
Field Liaison and Supervisor
College of St. Catherine/University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work
St. Paul, Minnesota

Teresa Chapa, Ph.D.
Advisor, Role Player
Program Director
Chicanos, Latinos, Unidos En Servicios
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Rodney Dewberry, MSW
Advisor, Role Player
Psychotherapist
Community University Health Care Center/Variety Children's Clinic
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Diane Dovenberg, MSW LICSW LMFT

Advisor, Role Player

Director

Wilder Foundation Social Adjustment Program for Southeast Asians
St. Paul, Minnesota

Theresa Gomez, MSW, LISW

Advisor

Social Service Director

Neighborhood House

St. Paul, Minnesota

Ong Her, MSW Student

Advisor, Role Player

University of Minnesota, School of Social Work

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Xong K. Mouacheupao, BA

Advisor, Role Player

Senior Human Services Counselor

Wilder Foundation Social Adjustment Program for Southeast Asians
St. Paul, Minnesota

Stephen Maxwell, MSW LICSW

Advisor, Role Player

Mental Health Supervisor

Community University Health Care Center/Variety Children's Clinic
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Darina Siv, MSW

Advisor

Director

United Cambodian Association of Minnesota
St. Paul, Minnesota

David M. Thompson, MSW

Advisor, Role Player

Child Protective Services Manager

Ramsey County Human Services Department
St. Paul, Minnesota

**A special thank you to Tom Davy, Studio Manager,
University of St. Thomas, who edited this film and offered us support
and guidance throughout the process.**

THE COLLEGE OF
ST. CATHERINE
UNIVERSITY OF
ST. THOMAS



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK