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Supervising East Asian international students: Incorporating culturally responsive supervision into the Integrated Developmental Model

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ABSTRACT

Supervisors' dismissal of cultural differences has been found to be detrimental to the supervisory alliance and therapeutic alliance. Although providing culturally responsive cross-cultural supervision is ethically important, supervisors may be challenged in this regard due to the limited amount of resources catered specifically for East Asian international students. In this article, the author aims to provide supervisors with some fundamental working knowledge of East Asian culture by exploring some philosophical beliefs of this culture. Then, methods to facilitate supervisees' growth in a culturally responsive manner, according to supervisees' development via the Integrated Developmental Model of supervision, are explored.

Over the past 15 years, there has been a steady increase in the literature regarding the supervisory and training needs of international students in counseling programs in the United States (Killian, 2001; Mori, Inman, & Caskie, 2009; Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013; Ng & Smith, 2009, 2012; Nilsson, 2007; Rasheed, 2015; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). This attention to the unique needs of international counseling students is timely, as the enrollment of international students in the United States has been increasing for the past 10 years (Institute of International Education, 2016). A few unique struggles of international counseling students prevalent in the literature include English-language proficiency (Gaballah, 2014), acculturation stress (Gaballah, 2014), transferability of knowledge and training to home country (Ng & Smith, 2009), and negative supervisory experiences (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009).

A few researchers have also examined the supervision experiences of international counseling students studying in the United States (Nayar-Bhalerao, 2013; Rasheed, 2015; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). One of the consistent themes across these studies was participants' report of supervisors' insensitivity toward cultural differences (Rasheed, 2015; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). For example, international counseling

students indicated that cultural issues and differences were often ignored or dismissed in supervision, which resulted in their feelings of frustration, confusion, and disappointment (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). In addition, a few international counseling students reported that ethnocentrism and dismissal of cultural differences could have led supervisors to perceive international counseling students as being less than professional (Rasheed, 2015). Another prominent finding were participants' reports about supervisors' stereotyping behavior, such as assuming that Asian students will agree with supervisors and pass the course, leaving international counseling students feeling insulted and hurt (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009).

Because international students possess unique struggles and supervision needs, supervisors need to tailor their supervision to meet their needs. A few researchers have found that cultural discussion within supervision predicted international counseling students' greater satisfaction with supervision (Ng & Smith, 2012; Yoko, Inman, & Caskie, 2009). Specifically, international counseling students indicated higher satisfaction with supervisors when they were engaged in cultural discussion (Ng & Smith, 2012; Yoko et al., 2009). In addition, supervisors' multicultural competence played a role in supervision satisfaction, in that supervisors' higher multicultural competence was correlated with stronger levels of supervision satisfaction for international counseling students (Yoko et al., 2009). Ng and Smith (2012), however, found that cultural discussion during supervision did not significantly predict international counseling students' self-perceived efficacy.

Together, results of these studies support the need for supervisors to address the topic of culture with international counseling students in the United States. Supervisors are encouraged to assess students' level of acculturation, engage in cultural discussion during supervision, create a safe environment where a strong supervisory alliance will flourish, and be clear and explicit about expectations (Ng & Smith, 2012; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004). Furthermore, Reid and Dixon (2012) created a culturally sensitive model of supervision for international students. They outlined four components: developing a strong trusting relationship with supervisees, addressing cultural differences and similarities, setting expectations for both supervisee and supervisor, and checking in with supervisees regarding the supervision process.

Although these recommendations are helpful, supervisors may find it challenging to implement these strategies in a way that might be helpful to further international counseling students' development. Their struggles could be compounded by the fact that international students are a heterogeneous group with different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. As such, what is culturally appropriate may differ among fellow international students. Indeed, Ng and Smith (2012) recommended that more attention be given to particular subgroups when conducting research on international students. I aim to address this gap in the literature conceptually by focusing on a

subgroup of international students and going more in-depth about ways to be culturally responsive to them within the Integrated Developmental Model (IDM; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). I focus on East Asian international students because it has been found that East Asian students have the biggest presence among all international students in graduate counseling programs (Snyder, 2007). East Asian international students are typically individuals from China, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, and South Korea.

Philosophical beliefs

There is evidence to suggest that East Asian international counseling students conduct themselves differently in comparison with Western supervisees (Killian, 2001; Park-Saltzman, Wada, & Mogami, 2012; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). Some examples of such behaviors include deference to supervisors (Killian, 2001), indirect communication patterns (Daniels, D'Andrea, & Kyung Kim, 1999; Leong & Lee, 2006), and abstaining from sharing in public (Mak, Chen, Lam, & Yiu, 2009). Thus, supervisors may occasionally be confused by East Asian supervisees' behavior when observed out of cultural context. As such, it is important for supervisors to understand the philosophical beliefs and values of East Asian students.

Following is a brief description of common philosophical beliefs shared among East Asian individuals. This description draws upon broad themes consistent within different countries in East Asia and could provide supervisors with some knowledge regarding supervisees from these countries. However, it would be wise not to overgeneralize these beliefs to all supervisees, because there are many within-group differences among East Asian cultures (Kim, Yang, Atkinson, Wolfe, & Hong, 2001).

Collectivism

One of the most defining features among many Asian communities, including East Asian, is the concept of collectivism, which is characterized by relational interdependence (Hsu, 1981; Triandis, 1995). The concept of collectivism may have stemmed from Confucius' teaching that the ultimate goal in Confucianism is achieving harmony within oneself and with others (Ho, 1995; Joshanloo, 2014; Lee, Lin, Huang, & Fredrickson, 2013). In an attempt to achieve the aforementioned goal, Confucius promoted the idea of individuals cultivating *ren*, an indigenous word which can loosely be translated as benevolence and compassion (Wang, Wong, & Yeh, 2016). Ren is an important value in Confucianism that provides individuals with guidance on different interpersonal relationships, such as between ruler and subject, young and old, as well as husband and wife (Tao, 1996). Ren is considered to be attained when individuals adopt appropriate behaviors based on the

relationship dynamics (Hwang, 1998). For example, rulers and elders are expected to treat others with a sense of benevolence, gentleness, and righteousness, and, conversely, citizens and children should act with a sense of loyalty, deference, obedience, and filial piety (Hsiao, Klimidis, Minas, & Tan, 2006). Therefore, in a collectivistic society, the need to maintain social harmony is often given priority over individuals' personal expression of values and opinions (Pearson, 1993).

Applying this knowledge to supervision, East Asian international counseling students are more likely to see the relationship with the supervisor as a hierarchical relationship. Thus, one behavior that supervisees from an East Asian background may demonstrate is a sense of deference to supervisors (Killian, 2001). Professors or supervisors may be considered the experts who bestow knowledge and instill morals, ethics, and values unto supervisees (Miller, Yang, & Chen, 1997). Although this may be frustrating for supervisors, deference is extremely appropriate for East Asian supervisees, as it denotes deep respect and honor toward individuals in authority. The opposite behavior of voicing one's thoughts and needs is considered as being extremely inappropriate, especially with an authority figure (Killian, 2001).

The concept of collectivism also influences ways East Asian supervisees may communicate. Daniels and colleagues (1999) noted that Asians tend to prefer a communication style that is indirect and less confrontational to display humility of oneself. One example of indirect communication is East Asian supervisees' inability to reject or say "No" to supervisors. Considered within the Eurocentric culture, this behavior may be viewed as unfavorable, passive, and unknowledgeable. Indeed, Rasheed (2015) found that some supervisors considered such behavior as unprofessional. However, viewed from a collectivist viewpoint, the purpose of indirect communication is to maintain group harmony. Therefore, supervisors' encouragement to openly share struggles in a direct manner during supervision may elicit feelings of discomfort in East Asian supervisees (Ryan & Hendricks, 1989).

Moderation

East Asians value the notion of balance and moderation (Ming, 2014). This concept could have stemmed from the Taoist concept of yin and yang in which opposite forces coexist peacefully (Ming, 2014). The ideal state of health would be a balance between the yin and yang energy and, conversely, illness would be attributed to the imbalance between the yin and yang. As such, many East Asians strive to live out a life of moderation (Ming, 2014).

One behavior that East Asian international counseling students may exhibit is the reluctance to display or disclose strong emotions (Chang & Myers, 1997; Killian, 2001; Tseng, Lin, & Yeh, 1995). Such nondisclosure may be misinterpreted as resistance from supervisees. However, culturally, the ability

to restrain one's emotions and cooperate with others is considered an index of social maturity and well-being (Wu et al., 2002). The purpose behind emotional restraint is to live in moderation and to maintain harmony with others by not shining attention on oneself.

In addition, moderation can also be manifested in upholding one's image. The concept of face is especially important for East Asian individuals (Gabrenya & Hwang, 1996; Liao & Bond, 2011). Maintaining one's face is linked to social responsibility and role expectations endorsed by society (Liao & Bond, 2011). Failure to meet one's social responsibility or expectation results in loss of face for oneself and the social group to which one belongs (Triandis, 2001).

Some behaviors to maintain one's face include putting pressure on self to excel, abstaining from sharing opinions publicly for fear of making mistakes, and observing group norms before participating in activities (Mak et al., 2009; Zane & Yeh, 2002). As such, supervisees may not openly share with supervisors their struggles for fear of appearing incompetent, which could lead to loss of face. Supervisees may also appear passive during individual or triadic supervision for fear of making mistakes.

These examples illustrate the intention and purpose of supervisees' behavior that supervisors operating from a Western perspective may find confusing. With some knowledge regarding the ways culture influences the behavior of East Asian supervisees, the next part of this article provides supervisors with culturally responsive methods on working with supervisees, nested within a supervision model.

Integrated developmental model

Developmental consideration is one of the most important factors when providing effective supervision to counselors-in-training (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Developmental models of supervision are based on the assumption that supervisees can progress from novice counselors to master counselors via supervisors' guidance (Salvador, 2016). Among the many developmental models of supervision, Stoltenberg and McNeill's (2010) Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) of supervision has been popular due to the description of supervisees' development and prescriptions of supervisors' action in respective phases (Salvador, 2016). A brief description of the IDM ensues.

The IDM consists of four levels: Levels 1, 2, 3, and 3i (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). In each of these levels, there are three structures in which to assess professional growth: self-other awareness, motivation, and autonomy. Self-other awareness is a continuum that provides an indication of supervisees' focus in counseling, whether it be on themselves, clients, or effectively utilizing their own awareness in relating to the clients' world (Stoltenberg &

McNeill, 2010). This structure encapsulates both the cognitive component, such as procedural knowledge of what to do, as well as the affective component, such as the ability to empathize with clients (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

The second structure of IDM, motivation, is an indication of supervisees' investment, interest, and effort in clinical training (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Generally, supervisees' motivations are high at the beginning of training, then oscillate with the function of time and clients, and culminate with a stable level of motivation (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Supervisees' motivation has a direct impact on their willingness to participate in the learning process in that, generally, higher levels of motivation result in higher willingness to learn (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

The last structure of the IDM, autonomy, indicates supervisees' level of independence over time (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Typically, supervisees are dependent on supervisors early in the relationship. As they progress through their practice, supervisees become more independent and autonomous. This change is accompanied by a shift in evaluation, from being more extrinsic during early phases to an intrinsic sense of evaluation during the later phases (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Stoltenberg and McNeill also outlined eight domains in which supervisees develop, and integration across multiple domains is the defining characteristic of Level 3i.

Although the IDM provides supervisors with suggestions for working with supervisees according to their developmental level, it fails to address cross-cultural aspects of supervision, which is crucial in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Therefore, supervisors who work from the IDM model may feel unprepared to discuss cultural issues with their supervisees, which may result in avoidance, denial, or rejection of this topic. A brief description of each level of the IDM will be provided, along with strategies supervisors can use to address issues of culture with East Asian international students.

Level 1

An example of Level 1 supervisees are counseling students early in the training program who may have knowledge of working with clients but limited applied experience and practice (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Due to their limited experience, Level 1 supervisees are characterized by possessing limited skills and training, being dependent on their supervisors for directions, and having high anxiety and motivation. As such, supervisees at this phase are usually highly self-focused, which may, in turn, result in limited awareness of clients (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

For East Asian supervisees, they may have similar characteristics of possessing knowledge of working with people, but not much clinical

experience. However, their presentation to supervisors may be somewhat different, probably due to cultural influence. It is possible that they will not exhibit much anxiety and motivation due to the need for moderation (Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). They may also value supervisors' input more so than Western students, due to the respect given to authority figures (Bang & Park, 2009). In addition, East Asian international counseling students may have a heightened awareness of self as compared to non-international students. In interviewing international counseling students, Rasheed (2015) found that many participants in his study focused on their language and accent presentation, which resulted in lowered focus on clients' stories.

For Level 1 supervisees, Stoltenberg and McNeill (2010) suggested supervisors provide structure to alleviate supervisees' anxiety and scaffold supervisees through the beginning process. One of the ways to provide structure and alleviate East Asian supervisees' anxiety is to build a strong working relationship by broaching the concept of culture (Reid & Dixon, 2012) and having cultural discussions (Ng & Smith, 2012; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004). Inevitably, supervisees may have doubts as to how culture may play a role in their relationship with clients, such as whether they will truly be able to understand clients' meaning in its entirety. Although supervisees may have thought about the impact of culture, they may not necessarily bring up the issue during supervision as they may look at supervisors as experts in the process, and thus rely on supervisors to bring up issues of culture if deemed important (Nilsson & Wang, 2008).

Supervisors may start the conversation by acknowledging the cultural influence of each person and request that supervisees share their thoughts about ways culture has influenced their perceptions of the world. Supervisors may also conduct an activity by which supervisees write down their cultural concerns with counseling clients and being in supervision before sharing with the supervisor. This activity provides supervisees with some time to formulate their thoughts, which hopefully minimizes the potential for loss of face and aids in sharing. Such broaching provides supervisees an avenue to feel comfortable bringing up issues of culture during supervision and it lets supervisees know that supervisors are comfortable with addressing multicultural issues. Most importantly, this broaching needs to be conducted in a supportive manner so that unconditional positive regard and empathy is conveyed by supervisors (Reid & Dixon, 2012).

Level 2

In Level 2, supervisees have gained more experience in the field and are in transition toward developing their own autonomy (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). The distinctive characteristic of this level is the vacillation of supervisees' motivation, autonomy, and self-other awareness. Supervisees in Level 2 have oscillating feelings of being confident to unconfident and possibly confused. Although supervisees possess increased counseling experience, supervisees may experience ambivalence in being independent and dependent on the supervisor. Last, supervisees may encounter the difficulty of maintaining a fine balance between being aware of self and client (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

Similarly, Level 2 East Asian supervisees may have similar characteristics, such as a fluctuation between feeling competent and anxious. One possible presenting difference between East Asian supervisees is their deference to supervisors' leadership. Supervisees' feeling of competence may not directly translate to being more autonomous. In fact, because they have succeeded due to supervisors' guidance, they may attribute the success to supervisors' guidance rather than their own personal accomplishment (Park-Saltzman et al., 2012). Supervisors expecting more autonomy from East Asian supervisees may be surprised and confused at supervisees' behavior.

In this phase, supervisors can further discuss and address the issue of culture in supervision. Setting and discussing expectations of supervision is one way to clarify supervisor-supervisee roles in supervisees' development (Ng & Smith, 2012; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Reid & Dixon, 2012). Continuing from the example of supervisees' deference, supervisors can discuss cultural similarities and differences with supervisees and supervisees' expectations for supervisors' guidance. Supervisees may share their joy in feeling more competent and continuing to grow under supervisors' care. It is recommended that supervisors listen without judgment and also share supervisors' expectation of supervisees growing in their level of autonomy. Having explicit permission from supervisors to be autonomous may be needed, considering the culture in which people in authority are extremely respected. It is believed that this conversation about expectations and explicit permission from supervisors will provide supervisees with the courage to pursue their own sense of autonomy.

Level 3

In Level 3, supervisees have an increased personalization of working therapeutically with clients (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Supervisees' motivation no longer fluctuates; instead, their motivation remains consistent. Self-doubts may occur occasionally, but without being paralyzing. With increased

self-efficacy, supervisees act more autonomously as they increase confidence in their clinical judgment (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Supervisees at this level have a good balance of self-others awareness. Supervisees are aware of their reactions in sessions and effectively use them therapeutically. If supervisees are able to reach Level 3 in multiple domains, such as professional ethics, client conceptualization, and theoretical orientation, then supervisees are regarded as having reached Level 3i.

Because supervisees in Level 3 are becoming seasoned counselors, supervision often shifts to a more mentorship style (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Supervisees may bring up issues and concerns regarding their work with clients rather than wait for supervisors to initiate discussion. In this phase, supervision is usually assisting supervisees with acclimating to a new environment such as a new counseling setting. Regression may occur even for seasoned counselors when entering a new environment such as internship. Supervisors' availability and support are important for Level 3 supervisees (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

Supervisees in Level 3 may be international doctoral students who have counseling experiences. For East Asian supervisees, they may regress to earlier phases, especially if it is a new supervision relationship. They may be more reliant on supervisors' direction and structure when entering a new relationship. It is also possible that East Asian supervisees at this level will have some reservations about supervisors' comfort in addressing issues of culture. More likely than not, supervisees at this level have a high awareness of cultural differences and ways it influences their work with clients. Similar to Stoltenberg and McNeill's (2010) suggestion, supervisors' availability and support are essential for East Asian supervisees at this level. Also important is supervisors' willingness and comfort in discussing the impact of culture on supervisees' work with clients. Throughout the supervision process, it is essential that supervisors solicit feedback from supervisees regarding the supervisory relationship and whether there are additional concerns from supervisees (Reid & Dixon, 2012).

Case study

Providing a case study may prove helpful in solidifying the concepts mentioned here.

Yin Fung is a 23-year-old male student from China who had decided to complete his master's of counseling degree in the United States. Even though he was generally quiet in classes, his grades were outstanding in didactic courses. He finally enrolled in the practicum course where he would see his first client. On the first day of triadic supervision, Yin Fung presented as stoic, quiet, and constantly deferring to his supervisor, Linda, a 43-year-old White female. Linda is in Level 3i of the IDM and has some

working knowledge of supervising Asian-American supervisees. Although this is her first time supervising an East Asian international student, she is open to incorporating cultural discussion into her supervision with Yin Fung.

When asked about Yin Fung's feelings of starting this course, he provided a brief answer: "I am feeling fine." Meanwhile, Yin Fung's triadic partner, a 23-year-old White female, dominated the supervision session with her feelings of anxiety and excitement in seeing clients. Yin Fung's behavior is typical of an East Asian international student who is not acculturated. His behaviors, such as presenting as stoic and reserved during supervision, are in line with values of moderation and collectivism. To Yin Fung, his behaviors are beneficial to the group because the attention is on his triadic partner and he does not lose face.

Yin Fung is probably a Level 1 supervisee; he has high motivation as evidenced by his grades in didactic classes. However, his motivation is tempered by his cultural upbringing and thus he presents as stoic. At this phase, Linda can be culturally responsive by initiating cultural discussions and building a strong supervisory alliance (Nilsson & Wang, 2008; Reid & Dixon, 2012). For example, the supervisor can say, "Yin Fung, I am aware that you are an international student from China whereas I am born in the United States. Our cultural upbringings have influenced the way we perceive the world. What are your thoughts about that as we start our supervision process?" As mentioned earlier, Linda can ask that both Yin Fung and his triadic supervisee write their thoughts prior to sharing. Supervisors' broaching of the subject and acknowledgment of cultural differences provide structure to Yin Fung because he now knows he can explicitly bring up the topic of culture in supervision. The supervisor can also provide structure by providing allotted time for Yin Fung and his triadic partner to share. Because Yin Fung may downplay his own needs during supervision, this structure is aimed at providing equitable time for both supervisees.

By broaching the influence of culture, Linda is laying a strong foundation for the supervisory relationship. She can then deepen the discussion on the impact of culture by discussing cultural similarities and differences between Yin Fung and his client. This can be another structure that Linda can incorporate to improve Yin Fung's self-other awareness. By examining cultural similarities and differences, Yin Fung can be aware of not imposing his values on clients and therefore be more capable of attuning to clients, a defining feature of a Level 2 supervisee. As an example, the supervisor can say, "What are some of the values you hold dear? How do you see those values being similar and different from values that your client possesses? How can awareness of these values help in your working relationship? How can awareness of these values help in your work with clients?" It is hoped that these explorations may also assist Yin Fung in being more autonomous

in his professional development by providing opportunities for him to voice his thoughts and emotions.

Due to the importance of collectivism and moderation, it can be helpful for supervisors to explicitly discuss expectations in the supervisory relationship (Park-Saltzman et al., 2012). Linda can communicate clearly to Yin Fung that he can bring up issues of culture when he deems necessary. In addition, Linda can encourage Yin Fung to share his feelings and struggles in supervision. Having permission from the supervisor to share his struggles may help Yin Fung open up during supervision. As this encouragement may be in conflict with Yin Fung's value of moderation and face saving, it may be helpful for Linda to share that the struggles he shares will be kept within the supervisory relationship. This reassurance is likely to minimize the face loss that Yin Fung may experience when sharing his struggles and voicing his feelings.

As weeks passed, Linda noticed that Yin Fung struggled to create a personal connection with clients although he executed the counseling skills modestly well. Linda shared her observation with Yin Fung and, with feelings of embarrassment, Yin Fung admitted that it was difficult to understand clients' stories as he had little understanding of the U.S. culture. Linda tried to encourage Yin Fung in devising ways to improve his personal connection, but Yin Fung deferred to Linda for ways to improve his connection.

When Linda challenged Yin Fung on his lack of personal connection with his client, Linda needed to be cognizant of Yin Fung's potential loss of face. By forging a strong supervisory relationship and setting clear expectations, it is hoped that Yin Fung's loss of face may be minimized. It is also recommended that the supervisor acknowledge Yin Fung's feelings of embarrassment as well as check in with him regarding an interaction where there is a potential for loss of face. To improve his interaction with clients, Linda needs to assist Yin Fung in understanding the nuances of the client's story. Furthermore, providing Yin Fung the permission to bring up such instances again in the future would be helpful.

Throughout the supervisory process, the supervisor needs to check in with Yin Fung to solicit feedback regarding their working alliance. It is important for supervisors to be open and not feel defensive. Yin Fung may share his feelings of not being understood, struggles in understanding clients' worldview, and feelings of loneliness living abroad. The supervisor should listen empathically, as this sharing is a strong indication that Yin Fung is trusting the supervisor. It is hoped that Yin Fung's sharing may increase his own autonomy and that the supervisor-supervisee relationship may be less hierarchical, indicating Yin Fung's development as a counselor.

Conclusion

It may be worth reminding readers that supervisors' acknowledgment of cultural differences and willingness to discuss cultural influences may be

the most important component in cross-cultural supervision (Duan & Roehlke, 2001; Schroeder, Andrews, & Hindes, 2009). It appears that supervisors' efforts to understand supervisees' culture are more important than supervisors' actual degree of competence (Schroeder et al., 2009). When supervisors are open, supervisees may feel supported in their growth and, as an extension, supervisors' willingness to address cultural differences can serve as good modeling for supervisees to broach the subject with clients, thus creating a strong therapeutic alliance.

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