

Culturally Sensitive Supervision and Training

Diverse Perspectives and Practical Applications

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TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTICULTURAL RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE IN TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

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In the increasingly diverse world in which we live, it has become imperative for us to examine the myriad of contextual variables such as race, class, gender, religion, and sexual orientation (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008; Schulz & Mullings, 2006; Frey, 2015) that give meaning to our lives and shape what we consider to constitute an undisputable truth. Nowhere are these struggles and sensitivities more critical to consider than in the process of supervision and training. The psychosocial and sociocultural landscapes upon which we, as clinicians, practice require each of us to engage in the process of rethinking and re-visioning the field of psychotherapy. The re-visioning of our field, for example, requires us to consider the ways in which both complex inter/intra-personal dynamics as well as the processes of training and supervision are profoundly shaped by the nuances of race, class, gender, and a host of other contextual variables. This re-visioning will assure that effective trainers and supervisors must not only understand and master the complex rudiments of psychotherapy, but must also possess a comprehensive understanding of how cultural factors shape the lives of those we train, treat, and supervise.

Possessing a comprehensive understanding of all of the nuances of every cultural group with whom we might possibly interact is often a desirable but unfortunately impossible and improbable feat to accomplish. The richness and complexity of diversity is such that it would be a daunting task to fully comprehend all of the subcultural variations that might exist within the same cultural group. For example, it is possible for two people to identify as Black and share many cultural commonalities, and yet also have vast and countless differences between them. I was born in the northeastern corridor of the United States to parents who were raised and socialized in the rural and racially segregated South. Their lives were permanently scarred by the insidious, inexplicable, and inhumane treatment that accompanied growing up Black in the racially segregated, Jim Crow, residuals of slavery-infested South. Growing up on a steady diet of stories saturated in racial suffering opened my young, innocent, and naïve eyes to the abject potential of humans' ability to treat others inhumanly solely on the basis of race. My conception of what it means to be Black, as well as the race-related values, mores, and perspectives that I subscribe to have been sharply influenced by where I grew up, my parents' experiences, and the racial climate of the country in the era in which I spent my formative years. On the other hand, I have a Black colleague who was born in Nigeria to Nigerian-born parents who migrated to the United States in their mid-forties and when she was thirteen. Her experience as a Black person has been markedly influenced by her experiences as an African, an African immigrant of immigrant parents, whose socialization and education have been split between two continents. Her experience of being Black, unlike mine, has been profoundly shaped by four devalued identities: Black, African, immigrant, and female.

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Despite efforts to the contrary, it is virtually impossible to simplify culture or to employ reductionist thinking by neatly codifying it into discrete measurable entities. Unfortunately, many supervisors and trainers try to promote cultural sensitivity by attempting to simplify culture. In their efforts to do so there is a tendency to (over)focus on the central tendencies of discrete groups, followed by a “cultural prescription” for how they should be treated or supervised. A notable example is the propensity to mainly describe the characteristic of Latino males from the lens of *machismo* as a “cultural prescription,” which often creates a narrow focus on hypermasculine relational interactions among Latino men in treatment and supervision (Sue & Sue, 2013; McGoldrick, Giordano & Garcia-Preto, 2005). While the intent and many efforts to prepare culturally sensitive clinicians and supervisors are laudable and timely, we believe the approach requires a more systematic, comprehensive, and ideologically driven approach. That is, rather than focusing heavily on the cultural proclivities of specific groups, we believe an approach that encourages and nurtures perpetual curiosity about the multifaceted role of culture is a more thoughtful and comprehensive path to explore. We believe that developing a *multicultural relational perspective* is a critical and necessary precursor to increasing sensitivity and inviting the type of perpetual cultural curiosity that we envision.

Toward the development of a Multicultural Relational Perspective (MRP) to training and supervision

A Multicultural Relational Perspective (MRP) is a metaframework that can be used to facilitate a shift in how supervisors and supervisees begin to think about clinical work and how it seamlessly interfaces “culture” in both the broadest and narrowest sense of the word. Hardy and Laszloffy (2002) describe the MCP (Multicultural Perspective), as referred to at that time, as “a worldview, an epistemology or way of thinking about the world and where we place ourselves in it” (p. 569). According to Hardy and Laszloffy (2002), “it is not a codified set of skills or tasks” that one performs with this type or that type of client or supervisee. Instead the MCP is a worldview that recognizes how the nuances of culture and all of its appendages are contaminants, informants, and meaning-makers throughout virtually all aspects of our lives. In this regard the MCP is predicated on the following assumptions:

1. Culture is a broad-based multidimensional concept that is comprised of, but not limited to, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, gender, family of origin, ethnicity, age, regionality, and so forth;
2. Culture is simultaneously dynamic, fluid, and static—because culture is broadly based and multidimensional, it is also multidirectional and fluid. Each dimension of culture potentially influences the other in a way that is active and ever changing. For example, my sexual orientation as a heterosexual informs how I think of and behave as a man. My gender identity as a male helps to shape and inform how I negotiate my heterosexuality. Both my gender and sexual orientation are influenced by my racial identity and the meanings I attach to being a Black, heterosexual male. Yet there are also aspects of culture that can be static. For instance, when I think of myself racially, how I think of myself now (racially speaking) is not different from how I have at any other points of my life. The specific meanings that I attach to being Black may have definitely changed throughout my life but not the fact that I think of myself as Black.
3. Culture is a pervasive and potent organizing principle—culture is pervasive and influential. Everyone belongs to “a culture,” whether it is recognized or ignored, claimed or disavowed. Furthermore, there is no aspect of our lives that is completely walled off from the influences of culture. For example, how we manage intimacy and conflict, express emotions (or fail to), as well as rituals that we embrace/reject, and/or how we think of ourselves are all experiences that are significantly shaped by culture. Although in contemporary parlance the terms “culture” and

“cultural” are often used to refer to those who are not a part of the “mainstream,” the fact of the matter is that each of us is embedded in culture.

4. Culture is multifaceted and multipurpose—it serves many varied functions in our lives. It can provide a sense of rootedness, a source of identity development, a coping resource, “rules of engagement” dictating who is included/excluded, and be a marker of pride and/or shame, etc.
5. Culture is timeless—it transcends past, present, and future. In many ways culture can serve as a connective tissue to our past, situate us in the present, and provide a foundation for and/or give direction to how we envision our future.

Given our view about the omnipresence of culture and its concomitant influences, we believe that attempting to ignore or exorcise it from any aspect of our daily lives is myopic. We believe that making an effort to do so within the context of therapy is even more egregiously shortsighted. Thus it is our contention that preparing therapists to consider culture within the context of their clinical work is of paramount significance. The execution of this goal requires therapists, trainers, and supervisors to think differently about both their work and themselves. Supervision should minimally achieve two major objectives in this regard: 1) assist supervisees in seeing the ways in which human suffering and the appendages of culture are virtually inextricable; and 2) highlight the ways in which the supervisor-supervisee relationship is powerfully shaped by the intricacies of culture. This is a very significant and rudimentary step to help facilitate the development of a multicultural perspective.

Key foundational principles

Taking progressive steps toward the development of a multicultural relational perspective requires familiarity with and some degree of mastery of the following interrelated principles. While each principle is discussed individually, there is a rich synergistic interplay between and among them that defies separating them. Hence the segregated discussion of the principles during the ensuing pages is done solely for the sake of explanation and clarity.

1. **Promote relational thinking.** The essence of relational thinking is that it encourages us to think about how all *matter* is potentially connected, particularly *matter* that at first glance seems disparate. For instance, it helps us to consider the powerful relationship between the “haves” of the wealthy and the “have-nots” of the poor. It is through relational thinking that we are able to consider how past, present, and future are intertwined, for example. Or how human suffering can be the culmination of the delicate interweaving of many different domains of one’s life. Relational thinking positions us to seek “connection” in the face of disconnection. When we develop some degree of mastery in relational thinking, we begin to realize that “disconnection,” for example, is a symptom not of an independent condition; it is a consequence, not just a cause. Relational thinking frees us to see how our fates are interconnected. It helps us to shift our view from a polarizing and static either/or position of “self” or “other” to the relational position of *Self in Relationship to Other* (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002). The visionary Martin Luther King (1963) spoke of the importance of Self in Relationship to Other over forty years ago when he famously noted that “the rich man can never be all that he hopes to be until the poor man is all that he wishes to be”—another powerful reminder that we all are interconnected and “entangled in a web of mutuality.”
2. **Embrace Both/And Thinking.** Thinking Relationally and Embracing Both/And are interwoven concepts. In many ways one cannot exist without the other. However, this principle is so germane to the development of an MRP that it warrants special highlighting here. Embracing Both/And enables us to authentically hold seemingly offsetting, contradictory, and incongruous

positions. It is through the embrace of both/and thinking that we are able to not only see the potential relationship between one's behavior as a perpetrator and one's victimization, but also we can actually genuinely validate the existence of the coexistence of these two opposing aspects of self. We are able to comprehend with greater clarity how one can be simultaneously oppressed and oppressive, privileged and subjugated, or "good and evil." Hardy and Laszloffy (2002) explicate that "embracing both/and thinking not only invites us to think about the ways in which these phenomena may be connected; it also encourages us to respond in ways that place these interconnections at the forefront of what we *do*" (p. 571). In this case, "what we *do*" from the viewpoint of an MRP is authentically held by embracing both the oppressed and oppressive, or privileged and subjugated, aspects that coexist in a person.

3. **Advocate thinking culturally.** As human beings, we are cultural beings, and it is the various dimensions of culture (ethnicity, ability, nationality, etc.) that offer contextual meaning to our lives. When we begin to think culturally, it facilitates our ability to think of others and ourselves more broadly and complexly. We begin to think of others and ourselves in terms of the various cultural locations in which they/we are embedded. We believe that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to fully understand the essence of one's being without knowing something about one's cultural context. Thus thinking culturally ultimately means that we remain perpetually curious about the ways in which culture is a major organizing principle throughout our lives.
4. **Encourage the development of a multidimensional view of the self.** The process of thinking culturally should ideally start with thyself (which is generally true for all principles associated with the MRP). Developing a Multidimensional View of the Self is the first crucial step toward beginning to see others more complexly, that is, culturally. Developing a deeper and more complex understanding of the self paves the way to understanding others similarly. The development of a Multidimensional View of the Self challenges the notion that what is typically thought of as *the self* is actually comprised of many *selves*. For example, each of us has a gendered self, a racial self, a religious self, an ethnic self, a sexual orientation self, and Family of Origin (FOO) self, as well as a host of others. Since many of our selves are socially constructed, they are imbued with varying degrees of power, powerlessness, privilege, and subjugation as they are reified in the larger culture. Many of us are equipped with both privileged and subjugated selves. As a Black, heterosexual, middle-class male, I possess several privileged selves—gender, sexual orientation, and class—while also possessing a subjugated self, which is my racial self. As each of us begins to see ourselves through the prism of our multiple selves, including those that are privileged and subjugated, we are much better equipped to see others similarly. The more comprehensively we can see ourselves and others, the greater the degree of compassion, understanding, and humility we can have for each other.
5. **Encourage an intense focus on the "Self."** One of the major hallmarks of the MRP centers on the development and understanding of the self. There are three interrelated components of "Self"-oriented work that warrant highlighting: Knowledge; Interrogation; and Location or Use of Selves. These are critical and essential components of the MRP. "Self" knowledge refers to the developing sense of awareness that one has and remains committed to exploring with regards to one's multiple selves. Self-interrogation, on the other hand, refers to the process of actively questioning one's developing sense of self-awareness. This process may involve unpacking and critiquing unexamined internalized messages that may be harmful or beneficial to the self and others. The Location or Use of "Self" refers to the facility with which one can draw from the knowledge one has of one's self that can be accessed as a potential interpersonal resource to promote connections. The Location or Use of "Self" is predicated on the effective use of "Self" disclosure, which is an important component of a Multicultural Relational Perspective.

The term “self” is used here for the ease of reading; however, it is done so with the understanding that the Self is conceptualized as a multidimensional concept. Thus the use of “self” in quotes throughout the remainder of this chapter is to remind the reader of this distinction.

6. **Focus on social justice by promoting awareness of and sensitivity to the dynamics of power and powerlessness, privilege and subjugation.** Social Justice and Diversity are often thought of interchangeably. While the two concepts share a powerful connection, we maintain that there are discernible noteworthy differences between the two. Diversity attends to issues of inclusion and focuses on WHO is included. Social Justice, on the other hand, while also attentive to WHO is included, is also concerned about HOW one is included. In other words, Social Justice is concerned about issues of equity, especially the equitable distribution of power. It is possible to succeed at achieving high levels of diversity and fail the social justice goal of ensuring that power is shared equitably. When social justice is a focal point, it places the issues of power, powerlessness, privilege, and subjugation under careful scrutiny. Power and powerlessness have a profound effect on how relationships are transacted. Despite the widespread influences of power and privilege within relationships, the impact and effects of it are seldom, if ever, recognized and/or acknowledged. When either the existence of power or its unequal distribution in relationships is denied or unacknowledged, the potential for misuse and/or abuse increases substantially. It is difficult to examine the dynamics of power and powerlessness without also lending consideration to the two closely related phenomena of privilege and subjugation. Power and powerlessness as well as privilege and subjugation are intricately fused and seamlessly coexist. Whereas privilege refers to the status that an individual or group possesses that confers power upon them, subjugation is an assignment to a position or status that is devalued and systematically stripped of power, influence, and privilege. Promoting a greater understanding of the dynamics of power, powerlessness, privilege, and subjugation is essential to the development of a multicultural relational perspective.
7. **Promote awareness of and sensitivity to the anatomy of socio-cultural oppression.** When power, powerlessness, privilege, and subjugation become calcified in relationships, it invariably contributes to the creation of oppressive conditions. Oppression is a pervasive and debilitating condition that systematically “suppresses” the emotional, psychological, spiritual, and interpersonal life experiences of those who are affected. It is unnamed, often unacknowledged, but insidious and infectious in the lives of the marginalized, the vulnerable, and the powerless. In many ways, oppression and trauma are interchangeable—two different terms essentially describing the same experience. In describing African Americans’ experiences with the legacy of trauma from slavery to present-day encounters with racial oppressions, DeGruy Leary (2005) emphasizes the interconnection between oppression and trauma as well as the ways in which the legacy of trauma negatively affects the lives of marginalized communities. She states, “While the direct relationship between the slave experience of African American and the current major social problems facing them is difficult to empirically substantiate, we know from research conducted on other groups who experienced oppression and trauma that survivor syndrome is pervasive in the development of the second and third generations. The characteristics of the survivor syndrome include stress, self-doubt, problems with aggression, and a number of psychological and interpersonal relationship problems with family members and others” (p.124). Thus, she further defines the circumstances that produce Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), specifically in the lives of African Americans and by extension other oppressed groups as “multigenerational trauma and continued oppression plus a real or imagined lack of access...to the benefits of the society we live in” (p. 125). Virtually all experiences involving oppression are traumatic, although not all traumatic experiences involve oppression. An oppression-sensitive approach to

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understanding the intricacies of human interaction is endemic to an MRP. Understanding the world through an Oppression Sensitive Lens (OSL) heightens conscientiousness of the critical interplay of power, powerlessness, privilege, subjugation, and trauma.

8. **Highlight, deconstruct, and make visible the invisible trauma wounds of sociocultural oppression.** Perpetual experiences with oppression often leave those who have been affected by it with an array of invisible wounds. These wounds are often invisible to both the Self and Other and are relegated to invisibility because they are unnamed and therefore unacknowledged. Since many of these wounds have not been incorporated into the classical mainstream psychological nosology, they essentially don't exist. Chronic and debilitating conditions that routinely affected those who are non-white, non-Christian, non-middle class, gender non-forming, non-abled body, etc. remained unnamed and invalidated. For example, the hampering effects of devaluation, psychological homelessness, assaulted sense of self, and internalized oppression, just to cite a few, are not a part of current mental health lexicon (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002). It is possible, however, for a phenomenon to exist even when it is not named.
9. **Enhance cultural awareness and sensitivity and promote the distinctions between the two.** Both awareness and sensitivity are much needed and essential properties of the MRP. Awareness is important because it is a metric to determine how much and "what" we know about another culturally, while sensitivity gauges "how" we interact with or actually treat another culturally. The concepts are intertwined; however, some distinction between the two is warranted. According to Hardy and Laszloffy (1992, 1995), cultural awareness is a cognitive process. It is akin to having an intellectual knowledge of culture. Its counterpart, sensitivity, on the other hand, is an affective experience. Sensitivity is an affective, or intuitive sense, of knowing where an acute "feeling" of conscientiousness exists with regard to self in relationship to other. As Hardy and Laszloffy (1992, 1995) noted, cultural awareness can exist void of sensitivity; however, the reverse is not true. We believe that the knowledge that is inclusive of "others" is most effective when it translates into how "others" are actually treated. This is both the beauty and the effectiveness of demonstrating both awareness and sensitivity.
10. **Promote the recognition of the co-existence of multiple realities.** The Multicultural Relational Perspective espouses the notion that reality is relative and context is significant. Thus when our contexts are different, oftentimes so are the realities that govern our lives. Context is a major marker of reality. The subjective and contextual nature of reality is what makes it possible for two people to gaze at the very same phenomenon and yet affix very different meanings to the observed. As we prepare this chapter there is an intense debate unfolding in the United States regarding what it means for States to fly the Confederate flag from government buildings. Many southern Whites argue that the Confederate flag is a symbol of history and legacy, while many Blacks and other people of color view it as a symbol of hatred and racism. This is a potent, highly emotionally charged, contemporary illustration of two groups observing the same phenomenon and extracting diametrically opposed meanings. Unfortunately, when our conflicting realities cannot occupy a place of peaceful co-existence, neither can we as a people.

Implications for supervision

These principles provide a conceptual foundation for the types of changes that are necessary to operationalize supervision within an MRP framework. In the spirit of the MRP, the following is a list of some sample "self"-directed questions that we believe are important for supervisors to ask themselves:

1. What are the dimensions of the "self" that significantly inform how I think about myself? What is my dominant privileged self? How does it shape what I look for and what I tend to see?

2. What are the Selves of the Supervisor that inform my approach to supervision? What is my dominant subjugated self, and how does it contribute to my role as a supervisor and the supervisory process?
3. What role does power and privilege play in my approach to supervision? What role does power and privilege play in the Supervisory relationships in which I participate? To what extent, if any, do I encourage supervisees to explore the impact of power, privilege, and oppression within the auspices of their clients' lives and their relationships with clients?
4. How often and under what clinical circumstances do I initiate conversations about the dimensions of culture? What dimensions are most difficult to talk about? What dimension is the easiest to discuss?
5. How often and under what circumstances do I encourage supervisees to explore cultural dynamics within the context of their clinical work?
6. What is my current philosophy of supervision, and what role does "self"-disclosure play? To what extent, if any, might I explore the multiple selves of the supervisee? How often do I encourage supervisees to consider how their multiples selves may impact their participation in supervision and their therapy with clients?
7. How would I describe my supervisory style?
8. To what extent do I explore or encourage exploration of the signs and symptoms of sociocultural trauma within the context of my work as a supervisor?
9. What strategies do I routinely employ to assist supervisees in sharpening their skill in thinking relationally? Culturally?
10. What specific strategies do I employ to enhance cultural sensitivity in both my supervisory relationship as well as within the clinical work of my supervisees?

Implications for training

Similarly, we believe that it is also important for clinical educators and trainers to engage in a process of "self"-interrogation with regard to their efforts to move toward the development of a Multicultural Relational Perspective within training. As a preliminary litmus test, we think it would be important for educators and trainers to ponder the following sample questions:

1. What is the philosophy of our training program? Are we advocates for diversity, social justice, both, or neither? How is our training philosophy operationalized in terms of what we say and what we do?
2. Are issues of social justice and diversity integrated throughout our curriculum, or are these issues relegated to a specific course or seminar?
3. Whose responsibility is it to carry the mantle for diversity and social justice? Is the responsibility for teaching from a social justice and diversity informed lens shared by all faculty, or does it rest solely with specific faculty?
4. Do our curriculum and pedagogical styles allow for experiential teaching and learning as well as traditional didactic approaches?
5. Does our curricular design enhance trainees' sense of cultural awareness and sensitivity? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. Does our curricular design afford the trainee the opportunity to develop a Multidimensional View of the "Self"?
7. What are the principle teaching and training strategies we use to enhance our trainees' ability to think relationally?
8. What are the principle teaching and training strategies we use to enhance our trainees' ability to think culturally?

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9. Do our training philosophy and practice support trainers engaging in a process of “self”-interrogation?
10. As a trainer, what are my privileged and subjugated selves? What are the ways in which these selves inform my relationship with trainees, what I teach, and how I teach?

Summary

The *one size fits all* approach to therapy, supervision, and training is no longer a viable approach to practicing effectively in our world of rapidly shifting demographics. Each of us has to be poised and prepared to work effectively with clients and trainees representing a variety of backgrounds, demographics, and life experiences, including those who represent the so-called mainstream as well as those who are gender nonconforming, religiously devout, racially and religiously oppressed, and those who are refugees and immigrants. In our view, devoting acute attention to preparing culturally sensitive clinicians is an ethical imperative. However, the pathway to doing so has to be more comprehensive than simply offering an isolated course or two in training programs or by having a supervisor discuss “culture” only when a person of color is involved. Instead, we believe that adopting an MRP in training and supervision holds a far greater promise for preparing culturally sensitive clinicians. The development of an MRP forges a paradigm shift that highlights the significance of “self” work, culture, attention to the dynamics of power, powerlessness, privilege, and oppression, and a worldview that values the incessant examination of “Self” in Relationship to Other. The MRP is not only a way of looking at the world but also an invitation for each of us to be mindful of where we place ourselves in it, because where we stand often dictates what we see.

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