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Multicultural Competence in the Supervisory Relationship: An Inclusive Model

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Introduction

As the United States continues to become increasingly diverse, the number of underrepresented populations being served by child welfare agencies is also steadily increasing. Children of color comprise 33 percent of the children in the United States but represent over 55 percent of children in the child welfare system (Detlaff, 2015; Pew Commission, 2014). Therefore, in addition to being concerned about child safety, well-being and permanency, agencies must also be concerned with the cultural issues that arise when working with diverse populations (Nathaniel, Howze & Prince, 2009). Empirical evidence confirms that the race of a child and their family has a measurable impact on whether or not a child will be removed from parental custody, the length of time they are in the system and the services that they receive (Casey Family Programs, 2007; Cohen, 2003). In order to ameliorate biases associated with race and ethnicity it is imperative that child welfare workers become aware of their own cultural biases and the impact cultural differences can have on the counselor-client relationship. This can be achieved by providing child welfare workers with the resources needed to work towards becoming multiculturally competent.

The American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association, the National Organization for Human Service Education and the National Association of Social Workers have deemed that being multiculturally competent is necessary in order to be a proficient and effective child welfare worker (Burger, 2014). Multicultural competence means having the capacity to work effectively with people from a variety of ethnic, cultural, political, economic, and religious backgrounds (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). It includes being aware that values, beliefs, traditions, customs, and

parenting styles of the population being served can be distinctly different from the individual providing the services. Thus, culturally competent child welfare workers oftentimes have to set aside their personal opinions to best deliver services. Ideologies associated with multicultural competence are often introduced to child welfare workers during formalized coursework or training. However, oftentimes, these concepts are introduced and reinforced during supervision (Chopra, 2013; Hair & O'Donoghues, 2009; Inman, 2006; Soheilian, Inman, Klinger, Isenberg & Kulp, 2014).

Supervision is an integral context in which child welfare workers learn (Soheilian, Inman, Klinger, Isenberg & Kulp, 2014). As such, it is imperative that supervisors are multiculturally competent so that they may help educate supervisees on how to obtain the skills and knowledge necessary to be multiculturally competent. According to Fong (1994) and others (e.g., Chopra, 2013, Lawless, Gale & Bacigalupe, 2001), supervisors are expected to be culturally aware and have access to the knowledge and resources necessary to create working environments where supervisees are comfortable addressing and discussing multicultural issues. In situations where supervisees are not culturally competent, it is ultimately the responsibility of the supervisor to teach the supervisee cultural competencies they can use to better their work performance and ultimately better serve their clients (Chopra, 2013, Inman, 2006; Lawless et al., 2001). Thus, having a multicultural competent supervisor is extremely important in the supervisor-supervisee relationship within Child Welfare Services.

The important role that supervisors have in developing supervisees' multicultural competence is clear. What remains unclear is what multicultural supervision looks like in practice. This article will provide a brief summary of more recent research that was

conducted within a higher education administration setting that describes the behavior, skills and actions of supervisors who were recognized as multiculturally competent by their supervisees. Next, the authors will propose an inclusive supervision model that when translated into the field of human services may help enhance supervision practices.

Literature Review

The literature on multicultural supervision within the field of human services is limited. Scholars have focused on the multicultural competence of supervisors (Inman, 2006) or supervisee's perceptions of supervisors' multicultural competence (Soheilian et al., 2014) but the role of multiculturalism within the supervisory relationship has yet to be thoroughly explored (Inman, 2006; Soheilian et al., 2014). The current literature suggests that effective supervisors are culturally aware and have the knowledge and skills necessary to work with diverse populations (Inman, 2006; Sue et al., 1992). Research also reveals that a supervisor's multicultural competence greatly affects the supervisor-supervisee relationship (Green & Dekkers, 2010). When supervisee's perceive that their supervisor is multiculturally competent they report a higher level of satisfaction with supervision (Inman, 2006). When supervisors are multiculturally competent supervisees are also more willing to have discussions about diversity and power dynamics during supervision, which contributes to their ability to best serve clients. Despite this emphasis on multicultural competency and supervision in the literature, few scholars have examined "what supervisors say and do in supervision that translates into culturally responsible work with clients" (Soheilian et al., 2014, p. 380) or what multicultural supervision ilooks like with supervisees. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult to educate supervisors on how to engage in multicultural supervision. In fact, research

indicates that most supervisors have not been trained on how to supervise from a multicultural perspective (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1997). This phenomenon warranted scholars to explore the tangible acts that comprise multicultural supervision.

Seeking to understand the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and skills necessary to provide culturally competent counseling in a multicultural society, Butler (2004) reviewed theoretical and empirical literature on multicultural competence in the supervisory relationship amongst school counselors. His review summarized a multitude of characteristics that multiculturally competent supervisors should have. For example, multicultural supervisors should be flexible, critical thinkers and willing to work across diverse groups to learn and resolve differences. In addition to discussing characteristics, supervisors can use experimental learning to enhance supervisees' accuracy of judgments, attitudes, and assumptions about diverse clients (Butler, 2004; Pedersen, 2000). Supervisors should also embrace opportunities to learn from diverse populations (Butler, 2004; Hays, 2001; McGrath & Axelson, 1999).

Soheilian et al., (2014) surveyed 115 supervisees across a variety of fields within human services on their perceptions of culturally competent supervision. Supervisees suggested that culturally competent supervisors: facilitate exploration of cultural issues, discuss culturally appropriate treatment plans, facilitate self-awareness of supervisees within the supervisory session, challenge and encourage cultural openness, focus on alliances between supervisee and client, encourage learning, focus on general cultural issues, and self disclose personal information when deemed appropriate. This literature further supports the need for understanding how supervisors demonstrate multicultural competence and the impact it has on the work environment and satisfaction.

Inclusive Supervision Model

A qualitative examination of multicultural supervision within higher education and student affairs administration was conducted to further understand what supervisors specifically do that demonstrates their multicultural competence within the work environment. Higher education and student affairs administrators are typically responsible for student service areas of campus and largely responsible for advising and counseling college students. Supervision within higher education administration is similar to models employed in human services in that there are multiple layers of supervisory relationships, both fields are based in counseling and helping skills, and both fields serve increasingly diverse populations. It could also be said that the staff within both of these industries is also becoming increasingly diverse, justifying a more inclusive approach to supervision.

Multicultural competence has previously been defined in student affairs as a tripartite model of multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). This definition informed the present research on multicultural supervision, which sought to explore and identify the skills and practices of multiculturally competent supervisors. A sampling of student affairs administrators was invited to participate in the study if they identified their supervisor as multiculturally competent. Participants participated in a semi-structured interview in which they were asked to articulate what their supervisor does that demonstrates their multicultural competence. In general the results demonstrated the intentional efforts of supervisors to embody the values of diversity and multiculturalism in every action and interaction, moving beyond multicultural competence to a more comprehensive philosophy of inclusion. Hence the

authors have identified this model of supervision as *Inclusive Supervision*, to represent

both the intended goals and the intentional approach to effective supervision. The four

major tenets of the model are Supervisor Vulnerability, Creation of Safe Spaces, Capacity

Building in Others, and Cultivating the Whole-Self (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Supervisor Vulnerability

While multicultural knowledge has been identified as an important piece of

multicultural competence (Pope & Reynolds, 1997), a supervisor's willingness to admit

to their lack of knowledge is equally important in demonstrating multicultural

competence in the supervisory relationship. Inclusive supervisors are open and honest

about their areas of deficit, willing to admit they may not know everything, and most

importantly, are willing to demonstrate this with those they supervise without fear of

appearing incompetent. Supervisors who admit to lacking knowledge or expertise related

to areas of diversity, facilitate more trusting relationships with supervisees, particularly when this is coupled with a desire to learn. Inclusive supervisors openly ask questions related to diversity and enhancing their understanding of their staff and are perceived as more multiculturally competent than those who appear to know everything. In fact, a supervisor's inability to admit to one's lack of knowledge may be seen a potential barrier to demonstrating multicultural competence in the supervisory relationship. Acts of vulnerability are of particular importance in senior management and leadership, where positional authority may create unintended barriers in communication and interaction. A supervisor's vulnerability is critical for establishing open and trusting supervisory relationships where cultural mistakes can be made.

Creating Safe Spaces

Supervisors are responsible for the culture of their departments and therefore responsible for creating safe spaces where all staff are comfortable engaging in discussions about diversity and differences. Inclusive supervisors are open, approachable and personable, and facilitate an environment where questions can be raised and differences can be discussed without fear of judgment. Safe spaces are generally the result of supervisor vulnerability, where supervisors model the ability to make cultural mistakes and create a space to ask questions and gain clarity. Creating safe spaces also involves neutralizing the hierarchical structure of the organization so that everyone feels as though their voice is valued and that aspects of their identity are valued in the work environment. This may involve one-on-one conversations to get to know individuals and understand perspectives, or it may mean inviting more individuals around the table to ensure inclusion and contribution. Supervisors who create safe spaces are not confined to

the walls of their own department, but are seemingly able to re-create these spaces

throughout the organization by recognizing, affirming and valuing the voices of all

creating more open dialogue and room for critical conversations. Inclusive supervisors

who create safe spaces in turn enhance the multicultural competence of those they

supervise.

Capacity Building in Others

Capacity building in others refers to the impact that multiculturally competent

supervisors have on their supervisee's competence and capacity for inclusive supervision.

Capacity building can be the development of soft and tangible skills that will facilitate the

supervisee's multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills, particularly as it relates to

inclusive supervision. Supervisors build capacity by helping supervisees navigate their

position in the organization and helping them understand the organizational climate. This

involves connecting supervisees with others in the department, or the organization, who

might be a resource or mentor, particularly related to aspects of their identity in which the

supervisor may not be knowledgeable.   Capacity building also refers to supervisors who

encourage supervisees to find their voice and have agency in the organization. This

means allowing supervisees to be the architects of their own experience, capable of

making mistakes, and learning from those experiences. This of course is possible within

the context of a safe space and a trusting supervisory relationship. Capacity building in

others can be accomplished both formally and informally. Formal means involve the

supervisor's intentional provision or encouragement to participate in professional

development focused on diversity or intentional conversations within the supervisory

one-on-one that link to professional goals and competency related to diversity. Informal

aspects of capacity building include a supervisor's modeling of ethical behavior, their ability to facilitate impromptu conversations about diversity, and their general approach to day-to-day interactions that reflect an ethic and inquiry of care. When supervisees make cultural mistakes or use language that is not inclusive, multiculturally competent supervisors are careful to educate vs. correct, which further enhances the supervisee's multicultural awareness and knowledge and models the skills for creating safe and inclusive environments.

Cultivating the Whole-Self

The final tenet of inclusive supervision is cultivating the whole-self, which refers to a supervisor's ability to recognize and value the multiple intersecting identities of their supervisees and work to create environments that are supportive of individual differences. This singular approach to supervision considers an individual's culture, hobbies, personal obligations and values and how those may intersect with one's professional self. Inclusive supervisors create spaces in which their supervisees can openly celebrate and discuss the various aspects of their identity and bring their whole-self into the work environment without fear of judgment. Inclusive supervisors successfully navigate the personal and professional boundaries of the supervisory relationship, understanding how individuals who are truly able to be themselves in the workplace will be more satisfied and productive. Cultivating the whole-self implies supervisor's must get to know the staff they supervise to understand their individual cultural values. Inclusive supervisors are great relationship builders because they employ a person-first approach understanding the value and impact this will ultimately have on task and productivity. Supervisor's committed to cultivating the whole-self find ways to assist supervisees in their personal

and professional development, all of which can be done informally or formally, through one-on-one's, staff development initiatives, or simple interactions in the office. The ability to get to know staff individually and personally is more easily facilitated in an environment where trust has been established and where staff feel comfortable expressing themselves, making supervisor's vulnerability and their ability to create safe spaces critical elements of inclusive supervision.

Implications for Practice & Future Research

The above model of *Inclusive Supervision* provides a framework through which to assess supervision practices, develop further training, and educate future professionals in the field of human services and child welfare. While the model was developed within the context of higher education and student affairs administration, it has potential for transferability within multiple industries that work with diverse populations and have a commitment to supporting and helping. The disproportionate number of children of color in the child welfare system (Detlaff, 2015) has multiple implications and considerations for professionals in the field. Specifically, are staff and counselors multiculturally competent in the way they work with clients in the system and how is this modeled in supervisory practices at all levels? If supervisors are not demonstrating multicultural competence through inclusive supervision practices then what values are being modeled for staff? To create a culture and environment where everyone lives a philosophy of inclusion, supervisors must model the skills and behaviors they wish to see in others. In addition, staff satisfaction and retention are of importance in an industry in which burnout is common (Johnco, Alloum, Olson, & Edwards, 2014). Previous research has suggested that poor supervision is a factor in staff turnover and intentions to leave (Augsberger,

Schudrich, McGowan, & Auerbach, 2012) while good supervision has been linked to increased staff retention (Smith, 2005). Much of the research cited previously indicates the value of supervision from a multicultural perspective, yet little research has provided ways in which to operationalize this philosophy. While it may be argued that all supervision should be multicultural supervision, the *Inclusive Supervision* model provides a foundation for understanding what multicultural competence looks like in the context of a supervisory relationship.

Future research might examine multicultural supervision specifically within human services and child welfare to determine the relevancy of the *Inclusive Supervision* model specifically within this field. Additionally, an examination of barriers to demonstrating multicultural competence in the supervisory relationship may further enhance understanding of how to practice inclusive supervision, and finally, more specific research should be conducted to understand what factors impact an individual's ability to practice inclusive supervision. This combined research would provide a comprehensive understanding of what inclusive supervision looks like and how best to train and prepare future supervisors.

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