



Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi

The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 6 Sayı: 26 Volume: 6 Issue: 26

Bahar 2013 Spring 2013

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

SUPERVISORS AND CROSS CULTURAL SENSITIVITY: NOT (ALWAYS) AS I DO?

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Abstract

This study utilizes focus groups to explore the understanding and practice of cross-cultural sensitivity among Israeli undergraduate field work supervisors. There appears to be a gap between prevailing conceptions and the relative lack of practices to actively promote cross cultural sensitivity in the supervisory relationship. While supervisors readily recognized cultural differences between their students and clients, they did not openly acknowledge such differences that existed between themselves and their students, nor did they integrate this into their work plan.

Keywords: Supervisors, Cross cultural, supervisee, focus group, field work.

Introduction

Cross-cultural sensitivity is in the forefront of contemporary social work scholarship, and has become an integral part of the mainstream professional discourse (Estrada, Frame, & Williams, 2004). Its importance is reflected both in educational curricula (Harper-Dorton & Lantz, 2007) and in formalized codes of ethics (NASW, 2001; Simmons, Diaz, Jackson, & Takahashi, 2008). The social work literature includes a substantial number of articles on how practitioners can increase their cross-cultural intervention skills (Ben-David & Amit, 1999; Julia, 2000; Mattis, 2002; Sewpaul, 2007).

Against that background, the present article deals with the convergence of culture and supervision. Its specific contribution lies in the attempt to examine the supervisors' perceptions of cross-cultural student supervision, and what they actually do to facilitate this approach. The existing literature has focused on the ideal concept of what supervisors should do, based on a theoretical understanding of culturally sensitive student supervision. The present study explored cross-cultural sensitivity in supervision of undergraduate social work students in the southern region of Israel. The region is characterized by a heterogeneous population, with a mixture of urban, small town, and rural Jews of European and North African origin (Jaffe, 1995a, 1995b), as well as religious and secular Jews (Witztum & Buchbinder, 2001), and relatively recent immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (Halberstadt, 1992) and Ethiopia (Kaplan, 1992). In addition, there is a large and highly distinctive Bedouin Muslim population in the region (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2007; Haj-Yahia, 1995). This marked heterogeneity offers an opportunity to conduct research on culturally sensitive student supervision.

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The study was conducted among focus groups of field work supervisors who work with second-year BSW students engaging in direct field work practice with individual clients and their families. The contribution of the study to the existing literature lies in its exploration of the field work supervisors' subjective perceptions of their understanding and practice of cross-cultural supervision. It acknowledges the crucial role that supervisors can play in practical application of the dominant professional discourse.

Literature Review

Social Work and Cross-Cultural Practice

Following the worldwide demographic changes in recent decades, the social work profession has become increasingly sensitive to the cross-cultural encounter that occurs in the context of practice (Estrada, et al., 2004; Harper-Dorton & Lantz, 2007; Nagy 2000; Sewpaul & Jones, 2004; Simmons, et al., 2008; Sue & Sue, 1999; Winkelman, 1999; Yip 2005). The professional code of ethics for social workers has been broadened in recognition of these developments, as reflected in a recent publication of the National Association of Social Workers which underscores the emergent professional commitment (NASW, 2001):

Social workers shall use appropriate methodological approaches, skills, and techniques that reflect the workers' understanding of the role of culture in the helping process (p. 4).

Moreover, according to the *Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Tradition* published by the International Federation of Social Workers, (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004), schools of social work are obligated to ensure that their graduates acquire:

...knowledge of how traditions, cultures, beliefs, religions and customs influence human functioning and development at all levels, including how these might constitute resources and/or obstacles to growth and development." (p. 6)

Definitions of Culturally Sensitive Supervision

The cross-cultural encounter occurs not only in social work practice but also in supervision, in relationships between students and field work supervisors. Supervision may become a cross-cultural encounter, with culture becoming an important topic for discussion. The relevance of this topic derives either from cultural differences between the supervisor and student or from differences between supervisee and client, or both. A growing number of researchers in the fields of social work, psychology, and counseling have begun to explore the complexity of cross-cultural supervision. These studies have contributed to increased recognition of the cultural aspects of the encounter between supervisor and supervisee (Burkard et al., 2006; Divac & Heaphy, 2005; Estrada, et al., 2004; Gardner, 2002; Haj Yahia & Roer Strier, 1999; Hernandez, 2003; Leong & Wagner, 1994; Tsui, 2005). According to a number of researchers (Brown & Landrum-Brown, 1995; Estrada, et al., 2004), cross-cultural supervision refers to:

... the analysis of contents, process, and outcomes in supervision in which racial, ethnic, and/or cultural differences exist between at least two members of the client-counselor-supervisor triad. (Estrada et. al., 2004, p. 310).

A similar definition appears for the related concept multi-cultural supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Garrett et al., 2001; Pedersen, 1994):

Multicultural supervision occurs when two or more culturally different persons...are brought together in a supervisory relationship with the resulting content, process, and outcomes that are affected by these cultural dynamics." (Garrett, et al., 2001), p. 149).

The Dynamics of Culturally Sensitive Supervision

The literature on cross-cultural supervision can be divided into two categories: analyses

of the dynamics of supervision in the context of cross-cultural encounters; and intervention models and guidelines for such supervision. Regarding the dynamics of cross-cultural supervision, some researchers have focused on differences between the supervisor and supervisee (Arkin, 1999; Daniels, D'Andrea, & Kim, 1999; Haj Yahia & Roer Strier, 1999), whereas others have examined supervision in contexts where the cultural difference exists primarily between supervisee and client (Burkard, et al., 2006; Fukuyama, 1994; Gardner, 2002; Young, 2004).

Haj Yahia and Roer-Strier examined the encounter between Jewish Israeli supervisors and Arab supervisees (Haj Yahia & Roer Strier, 1999). Their article sheds light on the social work encounter between majority and minority group members who co-exist within the context of conflictual relations. The researchers reported that although 75% of the supervisors participating in that study had experienced special difficulties within this supervisory relationship, all of the students reported that they had experienced difficulties. These difficulties related to language differences, differences in values and attitudes, and political tensions. All of the supervisees recounted at least one instance in which they had experienced difficulty with their supervisor, which they attributed to a lack of cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity. Arkin ,(1999) sheds light on the dynamics of supervision involving Israeli social work students of Ethiopian background and non-Ethiopian supervisors. The researcher emphasized that the supervisors perceived their Ethiopian supervisees as markedly different from students of non-Ethiopian origin in terms of knowledge, abstract thinking, initiative, and perception of time. The supervisors also reported that their Ethiopian supervisees were far less capable of analyzing their work in terms of complex theoretical concepts such as parallel process and projective identification. This difficulty often led to a stalemate in supervision.

Existing Models of Cross-Cultural Supervision

In terms of intervention models and guidelines, a number of researchers have focused on the experience of cultural differences between supervisors and supervisees (Arkin, 1999; Gardner, 2002; Garrett, et al., 2001; Killian, 2001; Tummala-Narra, 2004), whereas others have focused on intervention strategies for dealing with cultural differences between supervisees and clients (Divac & Heaphy, 2005; Estrada, et al., 2004; Garrett, et al., 2001; Hernandez, 2003). Garrett et al. (2001) developed the Vision Model of Culture, which relates to six realms of cross-cultural supervisory activity. The model highlights the need for the supervisor to clearly demonstrate that culturally-based differences in values and beliefs, including differences between the supervisor and student, play an important role in the supervisory dialog. Notably, the Vision Model includes several generic social work intervention strategies, which are combined with a strong focus on the cross-cultural encounter between supervisors and supervisees.

Estrada et al. (2004) outlined a number of assumptions that should underlie culturally sensitive supervision when there is a cross-cultural encounter between practitioner and client as well as between the supervisor and supervisee. These researchers stress that it is the supervisor's responsibility to initiate a discussion about ethnic and cultural diversity in order to ensure this topic receives due attention in the supervisory dialog. One tool that may be helpful here is the personal genogram, which is prepared by both the supervisor and supervisee. Such an exercise can help both participants in the supervisory relationship analyze their own cultural roots, uncovering related thoughts and feelings as well as complex dilemmas. The authors also recommend that supervisors and supervisees study the cultural characteristics of the supervisee's clients together. These practices are seen as contributing both to improved direct intervention skills and as well as to more productive supervisory relations.

Divac & Heaphy (2005) outlined a model for raising awareness and developing intervention skills among graduate students in the helping professions, which aims to sharpen and improve their ability to deal with cross-cultural therapeutic encounters. The group-based model takes a variety of personal characteristics into account, including gender, race, religion,

age, culture, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. It includes a workshop-based intervention that focuses on helping participants clarify their feelings and attitudes about their own ethnic and cultural origins. At the same time, participation in the group provides an opportunity for exposure to different ways of coping with dilemmas relating to cultural diversity. As in other models (Arkin, 1999; Fukuyama, 1994; Garrett, et al., 2001), some of the strategies used here are unique to the cross-cultural encounter, whereas others are commonly used in social work practice. Hence the question: How critical is it for supervisors to receive special training in order to cope with the emergence of cultural differences in the supervision process?

The professional literature reveals a general consensus regarding the conceptualization of cross-culturally sensitive supervision, even if different researchers have used slightly different terminology. However, it is not clear whether supervisors in the field actually have similar perspectives on cross-culturally sensitive supervision as those found in the literature. There is a lack of research on the perspectives of social work student supervisors of the cross-cultural encounter in supervision, as well as the professional strategies they adopt in order to promote culturally sensitive student supervision. In an attempt to fill that gap, the present study aimed to describe the subjective perceptions of supervisors with regard to their conceptualizations of cross-cultural supervision, as well as their professional behavior when supervision involves cross-cultural encounters.

Methodology

Two focus groups were established in order to collect data from student supervisors at the Sapir Academic College School of Social Work in Israel. The groups focused on exploring the supervisors' perceptions of cross-cultural supervision, and how they implement culturally sensitive student supervision. The use of focus groups is a common research method in a variety of disciplines (Asbury, 1995; Morgan, Krueger, & King, 1998; Wibeck, Dahlgren, & Öberg, 2007).

Eighteen second-year BSW student supervisors participated in the study, and they were divided into two focus groups. The second-year supervisors accompany students for the duration of the eight-month academic year. Supervision is conducted on an individual basis, in the context of weekly one-hour supervisory sessions. The supervision process is intended to help students evaluate their performance in the use of traditional social work methods, including casework and group interventions as well as family and community interventions. The supervisors participating in the study ranged from 30 to 50 years of age. Eight of them were supervising students for the first time, and were simultaneously enrolled in a year-long training course for new supervisors. Sixteen of the participants were female, and two were male. One of the male participants was Muslim, and rest of the participants were Jewish.

Research Instruments

The focus groups were based on a semi-structured interview, which consisted of two main questions that gave direction to the discussion and preserved its integrity (Asbury, 1995; Halcomb, holizadeh, Digiacomio, Phillips, & Davidson, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Supervisors were asked the following questions: 1. How do you define cross-culturally sensitive supervision? 2. What do you do in the process of cross-culturally sensitive supervision?

Procedure

The focus groups were conducted at the beginning of a routine meeting for supervisors during the 2006/07 academic year. The School of Social Work at Sapir College holds regular meetings for student supervisors, which aim to broaden their knowledge on relevant topics as well as to strengthen the bond among faculty members and the field. This was the third of four meetings planned for that particular academic year, and in order to maximize participation in

the study it was decided to hold the focus groups among the supervisors who attended those meetings rather than invite supervisors at another time. Thus, the 18 participants in the research constituted a convenience sample, and they represented half of the total number of second-year student supervisors. It is the authors' impression that the background characteristics of these supervisors (age, gender, and religion) were similar to those of the supervisors who did not attend the focus groups. The participants were invited to attend focus groups on the topic of "cross-cultural sensitivity in student supervision". All of the participants gave verbal informed consent to attend the focus groups, and were aware that they could opt out at any time without any negative repercussions. No compensation of any kind was offered for participation. Participants were randomly placed into two groups of nine participants. Each group was led by two faculty members from the School of Social Work. In order to ensure uniformity in the two groups, the researchers held a preparatory meeting for the facilitators, which outlined the goals of the research and the questions to be presented for examination in the focus groups. The sessions in each group were documented by a student at the College, who transcribed the entire group discussion. This detailed notation was used by the researchers for content analysis of the two focus group sessions. The focus groups lasted from one hour to an hour and-a-half. The facilitators participated in the discussion in order to encourage interaction between the participants and enable them to express a broad range of opinions. In so doing, they attempted to promote the deepening of ideas, and to ensure that the participants focused on the specific questions explored in the groups. At the same time, it was important that the facilitators ensure the integrity of the research by keeping their input to a necessary minimum (Morgan, et al., 1998).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on a qualitative model of focus group analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Rabiee, 2004). First, each of the authors briefly reviewed the records from both focus groups in order to achieve a general familiarity. Next, each author began to construct a thematic framework for this material, which related to the two research questions. Short memos were written in the margins of the text in order to develop initial thematic categories. Subsequently, in the shifting phase, each author identified relevant quotations, and made comparisons between and within cases. Finally, in the charting phase, each of the authors realigned the highlighted quotations in terms of the newly developed thematic content. Afterwards, the two written analyses conducted by each of the authors with respect to the material from both focus groups were integrated until an agreement was reached with respect to the main themes that emerged (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Findings

The findings gleaned from the narratives of the focus groups will be presented with respect to each of the two central research questions posed to the participants. Excerpts provided represent the authors' verbatim English translation of the statements made by the participants in Hebrew, relating to the two research questions.

Question 1: How do you Define Cross-Culturally Sensitive Supervision?

Supervisors conceptualized the notion of "cross-culture" from a comprehensive perspective. In their view, this concept referred to many kinds of differences between people, including ethnicity, religion, gender, and socio-economic status:

C: It is not only about culture, but also about (*economically deprived*) southerners versus (*economically privileged*) northerners - different kinds of cultures. It is much more complicated than country of birth.

A: I have male students, and I have encountered difficulties relating to the issue of gender. I hoped to have female students this year, and the fact that male students were assigned to complete their field work placement with me

compelled me to approach the supervision process in a different way. It was very challenging.

The supervisors did not differentiate between the cross-cultural sensitivity that they demonstrated as social work practitioners, and the sensitivity that they should be able to express in the context of supervision. The dominant view was that the generic values of the profession compel each and every social worker to be cross-culturally sensitive across settings. In addition, the supervisors claimed that the post-modern approaches that have prevailed in recent decades highlight the need to focus on the inherent uniqueness of each person as an individual. Hence, it is not necessary to formulate a separate definition of cross-cultural supervision:

B: I don't think the word supervision is appropriate. Rather, the appropriate word is culturally sensitive social work. The question is how each person perceives the scope of the profession.

That is to say, the supervisors claimed that there was no reason to emphasize the fact that we are referring to cross-culturally sensitive supervision in social work. Rather, they perceived cross-culture sensitivity as a generic professional approach and strategy:

C: On the one hand, the social worker comes with personal and professional perspectives and identity. On the other hand, the social worker has to be aware of subcultures. That is sensitivity, and it will necessarily connect us with the general perspective that we hold about being social workers.

These statements indicate that social workers need to have basic professional awareness of cross-cultural differences. According to the supervisors, if they have already developed this sensitivity as practitioners, it is reasonable to assume that this will be expressed in all their professional activities, including supervision:

D: Beyond that, as social workers we have a commitment to the profession, which emerges from the existing consensus that the profession is built on common values. We have a joint professional platform. In my opinion, cultural sensitivity is axiomatic. Every social worker needs to be culturally sensitive.

The supervisors appeared to support each other on the claim that there is no real need for a separate definition of cross-culturally sensitive supervision beyond the definition of general cross-culturally sensitive practice, particularly in light of the post-modern tradition that has gained great momentum in social work:

C: It is important to see matters subjectively, as post-modernism obliges us to do. Post-modernism is very relevant here. Every social worker conducts practice differently.

Question 2: What Do You Do when You Engage in Cross-Culturally Sensitive Supervision?

The supervisors' descriptions of their professional activities when they engage in cross-culturally sensitive supervision are particularly interesting. Their responses can be divided into two domains: cultural differences between the supervisor and supervisee; and cultural differences between the supervisee and clients.

Most of the supervisors made no references whatsoever to cultural differences with their supervisees. If they did, they were not able to provide any details about distinct professional skills they might utilize if they encountered cultural differences with their students:

E: When matters arise in supervision that conflict with my values, I may act differently, and am able to confront my own feelings. Because we are taught to be tolerant at the university, we feel the need to understand others. Sometimes I need to take time and examine how these differences influence me. I also teach my students that when they

encounter a value dilemma, they need to reflect on how it influences them. The big question is whether I as a supervisor need to put these things directly on the supervisory table? This always requires time and energy.

F: Once I had a male Bedouin student. I don't recall that we ever spoke about this, about him being Bedouin. I also don't recall that I felt a need to raise this topic. There were difficulties that were not related to culture. When I talk to a student about clients, this is a relevant topic. If the student doesn't raise the topic of culture in supervision, this is probably because the topic is not relevant. Therefore, I'm not going to raise it myself.

It is interesting to note that these two supervisors referred to an "internal dialogue" relating to dilemmas that emerge with regard to cultural differences with their supervisees. However, they failed to openly raise important issues relating to culture in the supervision dialog. Some supervisors did emphasize the difficulty they encounter in supervision of students from other backgrounds. They also mentioned the relative ease, the feeling of relief, and sense of closeness they feel with supervisees from the same background:

G: In terms of geography, I am quite similar to my student. Both of us immigrated to Israel from the Former Soviet Union. We have both experienced similar things. In joint meetings, I understand his responses. Other students responded differently.

Despite the virtual absence of references to cultural differences in the supervisory relationship, most of the supervisors described professional interventions that they conduct when there are cultural difference between the student and client.

Matching Clients

According to the participants, it is very important for supervisors to be sensitive to cross-cultural encounters, and to carefully examine the cultural fit between students and clients. This is a primary consideration when assigning clients to supervisees:

H: I have two students – one is secular, and the other is religious. I spent a long time thinking about whether the secular student would connect with a religious female client of Tunisian origin. In the end, I assigned her to the client. She wondered whether she should dress as usual when she visits the client, for example, whether she should wear pants. After a while, the student understood that dressing more modestly could be important to this particular client, and she dressed accordingly.

D: Last year I had an Ethiopian student. I did not give her an Ethiopian client, and this was intentional on my part. This was the first time I had made such a decision, and I was uneasy. I was unsure how the student would react to this, because it is not how we usually do things. This practice inherent in the Israeli social work establishment is that Ethiopian workers treat Ethiopians. There's no way around it. The colors paint the picture.

Thus, it appears that supervisors invest considerable time and effort in thinking about culture when they choose clients for their students. One of the variables taken into consideration here is the subject of culture.

Teaching Appropriate Intervention Techniques

It was very clear to the majority of supervisors that they are obligated to teach professional skills that conform to the cultural codes of the supervisee's clients:

H: Before the student began working, I gave her background on the client and we spoke about cultural differences.

I: In terms of my female student who worked with a young Bedouin man, I had to talk with her and prepare her for the encounter with another culture.

J: I think that helping out in this matter is part of my role...preparation for the therapeutic session. It is the direct responsibility of the supervisor to help develop the supervisee's awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences with clients prior to the actual therapeutic session.

A: One of my students loves to tell stories with a moral. We put this on the table in the supervision session. The message I conveyed to the student was that the use of metaphor can be problematic in work with clients of different cultures. For example, a Bedouin client raised the issue of family honor killing with my student. There is a major cultural gap between them, and the student must be cautious about using stories with a moral in this case.

Assistance in Coping with Conflicts that Emerge out of Cultural Differences between the Student and Client

The supervisors agreed that this is a major supervisory role, especially when the conflicts impact negatively on the treatment process:

H: I had a student who was very angry about the removal of settlers from localities in the Gaza area [following the disengagement plan law in 2005]. As a result, she became stuck in the therapeutic process with one of her clients, who was in favor of the disengagement.

This example shows how the Israeli political reality may enter into the therapeutic dialog and lead to an impasse in treatment. According to most of the supervisors, their role in such situations is to help the students gain awareness of their own sensitivities and the personal sensitivities of their clients:

K: For instance, a religious student needed to accompany her client through an abortion process. I tried to help her learn to differentiate between her world and the world of the client. Despite the preparation, a conflict arose between the two of them and I had to help solve it.

Along with this, there were supervisors who emphasized that despite their awareness of situations in which there is a high potential for conflict due to cultural differences between students and clients, they intervened only if and when the issue was raised by the student:

F: I work only with what the student brings up, just as I work only with what the client raises in the therapeutic relationship.

H. Student supervision is not therapy, and I don't need to delve into each and every matter. I just intervene when something interferes with the student's field work.

F: I would expect the student to raise such matters, for example, language difficulties that emerge because of language differences between students and clients. Students should be open enough to speak up, instead of being hurt because the supervisor didn't raise the topic... students also have responsibility, and I expect them to bring up these kinds of topics.

Discussion

This research attempted to examine the perspectives of social work supervisors regarding their definitions of cross-culturally sensitive supervision and their professional activities in this kind of supervision. The results suggest that there is a general similarity between the participants' broad and inclusive interpretation of "cross-culture" (Simmons, Diaz, Jackson, & Takahashi, 2008), and the way that the concept is discussed in the literature. The references to the concept of culture in the focus groups and in the literature relate to a broad range of elements such as socio-economic status and gender which go beyond ethnic and religious affiliation, (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2007; Ben-David & Amit, 1999; Haj-Yahia, 1995; Jaffe, 1995a, 1995b; Kaplan, 1992; Witztum & Buchbinder, 2001).

Another noteworthy finding is that the participants did not perceive a fundamental difference between culturally sensitive social work practice and culturally sensitive supervision. Many of them emphasized the similarity between cultural sensitivity in social work practice and supervision, and claimed that they have a professional obligation to adopt a code of ethics which emphasizes sensitivity to cultural differences in their role as social workers (Harper-Dorton & Lantz, 2007; Sewpaul & Jones, 2004; Simmons, Diaz, Jackson & Yip, 2005), a role that includes supervisory activities (Dorton & Lantz, 2007; NASW, 2001; Winkelman, 1999). In their view, the training that social workers receive, which emphasizes the need to be acutely aware of the cross-cultural encounters, also serves as a basis for continuing their professional development as supervisors. Hence, there is no need for further development of cultural sensitivity when a social worker assumes a supervisory role. However, this belief appears to contradict the wide gap that was found between supervisors' appreciation of cross-culturally sensitive supervision and the relative lack of specific supervisory activities to promote cultural sensitivity.

Most importantly, there is a need to further explore why supervisors tend to limit their intervention when they encounter cultural differences with their supervisees, whereas they become more involved when the differences are between supervisees and clients. When clear cultural differences emerged between the student and client, most of the supervisors believed that they played a vital role, in accordance with existing models of supervision (Divac & Heaphy, 2005; Estrada et al., 2004; Garrett et al., 2001). The literature clearly points out that when there is a cultural difference between the therapist and client, most professionals initiate discussions about this difference (Maxie, Arnold, & Stephenson, 2006). The supervisors who participated in the current study invested considerable time and energy in preparing supervisees for future encounters with clients who differ from them, as well as in teaching supervisees appropriate intervention skills and in helping supervisees solve conflicts that emerge as a result of cultural differences. In this process, the supervisors focus exclusively on the students. They play a distant role in the dialog, and their "cultural baggage" is not subject to critical reflection.

ven in instances where supervisors reported cultural differences with their students, they indicated that they had examined this difference by themselves and did not engage in open dialog with the student. It is possible that the supervisors were reluctant to deal directly with cultural differences as part of the supervisory relationship because it was difficult for them to expose themselves. Several researchers have recommended that social work supervisors become part of the reflective space (Arkin, 1999; Divac & Heaphy, 2005; Estrada et al., 2004). However, it seems that many supervisors, whether consciously or unconsciously, avoid entering this domain. Nonetheless, when a third party such as a faculty member is available to facilitate joint supervisor-student reflection on their cultural backgrounds and differences and the implications of these differences for the supervision process, the likelihood that they will engage in such examination might increase (Arkin, 1999). This reinforces the need for faculty members in social work training programs to develop close ongoing relationships with field practice sites and supervisors. After such a working relationship has been established, when the need arises for more focused examination of cross-cultural dynamics in the supervisory relationship, the supervisor and student may both continue to consult with that faculty member. It appears axiomatic that a genuine supervisor-student dialog with respect to cultural factors emerging in the supervision process will have a positive impact on the quality of the professional assistance that the student provides to clients.

The question of who is responsible for raising the topic of the cross-cultural encounter in the supervisory dialog was raised among the supervisors in the present study. A few of the participants pointed out that this is the responsibility of the supervisor, a perspective that is echoed in the literature (Arkin, 1999; Estrada et al., 2004; Garrett et al., 2001). However, other supervisors claimed that they only deal with cultural differences when the student raises these issues in the context of supervision. Sometimes the supervisors' avoidance of these issues was

related to their reluctance to slip into a therapeutic relationship with the student (Haesler, 1993). However, their position might also stem from their reluctance to touch on issues that may be complicated or even conflictual. Haj-Yahia and Roer-Strier (1999) found evidence of this kind of dynamic among Jewish Israeli field work supervisors and their Arab students. Students attributed significant difficulties in the supervision process to the supervisor's failure to openly acknowledge and effectively manage the complex cultural encounter between them.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the participating field work supervisors were aware of the concept of cross-culturally sensitive supervision, and that they had a broad understanding of the idea of culture. They viewed themselves as culturally sensitive practitioners, and believed that they would be able to help students develop culturally sensitive intervention skills for direct practice with clients. The supervisors almost unanimously perceived this to be a vital part of their role.

However, the emergence of cultural differences between the supervisor and student did pose a major difficulty. Although the supervisors appeared to be aware of the cultural differences in the supervision sessions, the most they could do was to think about the situation on their own. They had difficulty placing these differences on the table for discussion and reflection unless the student raised the issue.

Before concluding, several limitations of the study need to be mentioned. The research was conducted among a convenience sample, in that the participants had arrived at the Social Work School for a routine meeting and were asked to participate in focus groups right after that meeting. Furthermore, the sample was small, and it was relatively homogeneous. Another limitation of the study was that the group facilitators had a previous working relationship with at least some of the participants in the study, and this may have influenced their input in the focus groups. These methodological limitations can be addressed by increasing the sample size and selecting a more heterogeneous sample, especially with respect to age, experience in supervision and social work, and ethnic-cultural affiliation. It would also be worthwhile to conduct comparative research among participants from larger universities and colleges in different areas of the country.

The implications of the findings for field work supervisors appear to be significant. Notably, the findings suggest that supervisors can play an important role in developing a safe and secure emotional space in the university setting. Supervisors can begin by openly acknowledging and talking about the important cultural dynamics that occur in their interactions with supervisees. In addition, social work faculty members can actively help supervisors and students work together to examine culturally sensitive issues that had previously been avoided. This will be facilitated by developing and maintaining close and open relationships with field work supervisors.

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