Assessing Multicultural Supervision Competencies

Paul T. P. Wong
Trinity Western University
Graduate Program in Counselling Psychology

Lilian C. J. Wong
The University of British Columbia
Department of Counselling Psychology

Abstract

This chapter emphasizes the need for cross-cultural supervision competencies in training culturally skilled counselors. It then describes the development of the Multicultural Supervision Competencies Questionnaire (MSCQ) and presents initial evidence of reliability. The MSCQ is a 60-item questionnaire covering four multicultural supervision competencies: Attitude, Knowledge, Skills and Relationship. Twenty questionnaires were completed by graduate students in Counseling Psychology regarding their practicum or internship supervisors who were from a different ethnic cultural background. The results show that this sample of supervisors had rather low levels of cross-cultural competencies. The internal reliability of the MSCQ was high, with Alpha values in the .90s for all four subscales and the total MSCQ scores. The usefulness of the MSCQ in cross-cultural counselor education and supervision research was discussed.

Since supervision is the only way to prepare students for clinical practice, it is a vital part of counselor education. There is a burgeoning literature on supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Heppner & Roehlke, 1984; Holloway, 1995; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1993; Worthington, 1987), but there has been very little research on cross-cultural issues in supervision. The scanty literature on cross-cultural supervision reveals low levels of satisfaction in minority supervisees (Cook & Helms, 1988), and varying degrees of discrimination (McNeill, Hom & Perez, 1995).

Multicultural supervision competencies (MSC) deserve recognition for two reasons. Firstly, there is an urgent need for cross-culturally competent supervisors, because more and more graduate students come from diverse ethnic groups (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Leong & Chou, 1996). Culturally insensitive supervisors can unintentionally harm minority students (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998; Kaiser, 1997). According to McNeill, Hom and Perez (1995), there was a dearth of information on the training needs of racial and ethnic minority trainees. They also pointed out that "culturally diverse trainees are then faced with a struggle to assert their unique needs and make others aware of the multicultural implications of course material, counseling theories, and interventions. Most often, however, students are forced to attend to and

accept this insensitivity for fear of repercussion because of the power differential between professor and student" (p.253).

Secondly, it is difficult for majority students to acquire multicultural counseling skills when their clinical supervisors do not meet the minimal standards of cross-cultural competencies. Based on informal surveys of departmental and field supervisors, the majority of supervisors have not had any cross-cultural training, especially in the area of multicultural supervision.

There has been some discussion on cross-cultural training (Lonner, 1997; Pedersen, 1997; Sue, 1997). Generally, training approaches can be classified as either didactic or experiential. Pedersen's (1997) triad training model is an example of the didactic approach, whereas learning from face-to-face contact with other individuals from other cultures is a case of experiential learning. Lonner (1997) outlines three pathways to multicultural competencies: Experiential, Academic, and Formal Culture Training. What has been missing in the discussion is the role of clinical supervision. A cross-culturally competent supervisor provides both didactic and experiential learning. In addition, a mentoring-minded supervisor also provides modeling, guidance, encouragement, and friendship to promote trainees' professional and personal development.

The main purpose of this chapter is to describe the development of the Multicultural Supervision Competencies Questionnaire and to provide some empirical evidence on supervisors' levels of cross-cultural competencies.

It is interesting to note that while the literature on multicultural counseling continues to grow (e.g. Pedersen, , 1997; Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner, & Trimble, 1996; Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996), multicultural supervision has not received the same level of attention. Only in the last few years did psychologists begin to recognize ethnic and cultural issues in supervision (e.g., Leong & Wagner, 1994; McNeill, Hom & Perez, 1995; Priest, 1994). For example, Fukuyama (1994) explored critical incidents in multicultural supervision of interns and identified two major themes: 1) culture and cultural differences, and 2) racism and racial identity issues. Bernard (1994) concludes: "the development of the profession and the relevance of counselor education programs will be severely compromised if we do not advance the knowledge and practice of multicultural supervision" (p. 170).

Multicultural supervision needs to be researched in its own right, because it is more complex than multicultural counseling, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

The dynamics of interactions are much more complex in a multicultural supervision situation. This is because any one or two of the triad — supervisor, supervisee and client — may come from a different ethnic or cultural background. For example, a White professor may be supervising an Asian counselor who has a Black client. In such situations, more knowledge and skills are needed.

It is also important to recognize that counseling differs from supervision in several ways. (1) The goal of counseling is to facilitate change in the client, whereas the goal of supervision is to protect the welfare of the client and facilitate the professional development of the supervisee. (2) The major role of a counselor is counseling; teaching only plays a minor part. In contrast, supervision involves multiple roles: counselor,

teacher, consultant, and mentor; teaching plays a prominent role. (3) Counseling is concerned with assessing the client's condition, whereas supervision is concerned with both the evaluation of supervisee's competence as well as assessment of the client's condition. (4) Counseling requires clinical competence, whereas supervision requires both clinical competence and supervision competence.

Given the above differences in tasks and skill requirements, an experienced clinician is not necessarily a competent supervisor. Similarly, a multiculturally competent counselor does not automatically become a multiculturally competent supervisor without additional training.

In sum, multicultural supervision deserves a great deal of attention from the standpoints of counselor education and supervision research. We believe the development of a valid and reliable instrument to measure MSC will contribute to both cross-cultural training and research.

Currently, there are several instruments for assessing multicultural counseling competencies (please see Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995 for a review), but none of these is explicitly designed to measure multicultural supervision competencies. Among the reasons why it is important to develop the MSCQ are: (1) it allows the supervisee an opportunity to provide feedback to the supervisor, (2) it facilitates multicultural training of supervisor and counselor, (3) it determines the suitability of supervisor to work with culturally different supervisees, and (4) it facilitates quantitative research on multicultural competencies in supervision.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 15 graduate students from counseling psychology programs in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, British Columbia, Canada. Most of them had completed their practicum. A few had also completed their internship. They were allowed to evaluate more than one supervisor, if they had received cross-cultural supervision from two or three individuals during their clinical training. A total of 21 MSCQs were completed, but one was discarded because of missing data. Participants included Chinese, Japanese, and Indo-Canadians.

The Development of the Multicultural Supervision Competence Questionnaire

The MCSQ was primarily based on the three cross-cultural competencies described by Sue, Arrendondo and McDavis (1992), namely, Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills. Relationship was added to the MSCQ because the supervisory relationship is essential to effective supervision (Bradley, 1989; Holloway, 1995). The Multicultural Counseling Inventory (Sodowsky et al., 1994) also identified Relationship as a key factor in cross-cultural competence in addition to Awareness, Skills and Knowledge.

Differences in values, worldviews, and communication styles often lead to cultural conflicts and interpersonal difficulties. According to Pedersen's (1997) Interpersonal Grid, individuals from different cultures may have the same or different behaviors, and the same or different expectations, forming four quadrants. Congruence occurs only in the first quadrant where both individuals have the same expectations and

same behaviors. Conflicts occur in all other three quadrants. Different expectations and misperceptions can contribute to a multicultural conflict (Rubin, Kim, & Peretz, 1990). That is why the ability to develop a good relationship is essential in reducing and preventing cultural conflicts in supervision.

The four subscales of the MSCQ (Attitude, Knowledge, Skills and Relationship) represent four multicultural competencies. A total of 67 items were initially used to develop the four subscales. The items, generated by the authors, were based on the literature of multicultural counseling and supervision as well as the authors' experiences in this area. These items were then arranged randomly. Table 2 shows exemplary items for the four constructs.

```
------------------------
```
Table 2 about here
```
------------------------
```

Procedure

Respondents were contacted individually by telephone or in person. They were asked to identify a recent supervisor who was from a different ethnic or racial background as the object of evaluation. A 5-point Likert scale was used, where 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree, and 3=Undecided. Statements were worded both in the positive and negative directions; however, scoring was in the positive direction such that scores larger than 3 indicated the presence of cross-cultural supervision competence.

Results and Discussion

On the basis of Cronbach's Alphas and feedback from the participants, 7 items were eliminated: 3 from the Attitude subscale, 2 from Skills, and 2 from Relationship. Results were based on the final version of 60 items. The Alpha values and the means and SD of the MSCQ are shown in Table 3.

```
------------------------
```
Table 3 about here
```
------------------------
```

The results showed that the MSCQ has excellent reliability, indicating that all the items in the MSCQ indeed measured various aspects of the same construct. The high alpha coefficients in the four subscales confirm the internal consistency of these scales.

All the mean ratings were less than 4, suggesting a minimal level of multicultural supervision competence, because 3 is the mid-point, indicating Undecided. Some of the supervisors had ratings lower than 2 on most of the items, indicating a lack of multicultural competence.

Implications of Low MSCQ Scores for Minority Students

Interviews with three supervisees revealed that their supervisors abused their supervisory power and had harmed them both psychologically and professionally. For example, one Asian supervisee was severely criticized and terminated from her clinical training for no other reason than being "too directive and structured." No explanation was given why a directive approach constituted a severe impairment that warranted termination. Worse still, this Asian student was not given any opportunity to make adjustments in her counseling style. According to Berry et al.'s (1992) analysis, the action taken by her

supervisor represents the absolutist position, which imposes the values and criteria of the dominant culture on other cultures. Pedersen (1997) points out that this kind of cultural bias "leads to encapsulation and exclusionism, the consequences of which are hurtful and profoundly dangerous" (p. 228).

In another case, an Asian student was negatively evaluated for being weak in empathy skills, because she did not adequately reflect on her client's feelings. The main difficulty for this foreign student was that she did not have enough English vocabulary to express emotions; furthermore, she was not used to talking about feelings.

Sue and Sundberg (1996) observed that "Openness and the revealing of inner emotions thought to be indicative of good counselor qualities reflect a Western framework. Other cultures may not value these characteristics as highly, and successful multicultural counseling may require a different set of skills" (p.326). Ironically, by criticizing the Asian student's alleged weakness in empathy, the supervisor revealed her own deficiencies in cross-cultural empathy, which requires a genuine respect for the values and communication styles of different cultures.

The above examples illustrate how a lack of multicultural competencies can lead to ineffective and unethical supervision of minority students. Leong and Chou (1996) pointed out the danger of the training biases of Western models: "The mindless application of these models without taking into account cultural variables for international students will be doomed to failure with, and perhaps cause harm to, international student clients" (p.229). Their observation is equally applicable to cross-cultural supervision of minority trainees.

Implications of Low MSCQ Scores for Majority Students
The low average MSCQ scores of the present sample also raised the question of multicultural counseling training for majority students. If supervisors are incompetent in cross-cultural counseling, how can they teach others? Most students tend to treat clients according to the models to which they have been exposed. Given the strong Western biases in all aspects of counselor education, where do students acquire cross-cultural competencies? Some counselors may acquire multicultural counseling competencies through attending workshops and/or experiential learning. But if counselors acquire cross-cultural counseling competencies primarily through a process of trial and error, some minority clients may become casualties of culturally biased therapy.

The only way to ensure that all counselors possess an acceptable level of cross-cultural competencies is to make multicultural counseling an integral part of counselor education, especially in the area of practicum and internship training. To implement such a program would require supervisors who are competent in cross-cultural counseling and supervision.

The present findings may be indicative of a larger problem that many supervisors do not have adequate multicultural competence. This seems to be a widespread problem because most experienced supervisors received their graduate training before multicultural counseling was widely recognized. Faculty resistance to multiculturalism in counselor education and counseling compounds this problem (Sue & Sue, 1990).

Fong and Lease (1996) have identified four challenges in multicultural supervision: 1) unintentional racism, 2) power dynamics, 3) communication issues, and

4) trust and the supervisory alliance. The MSCQ can help assess how well supervisors have met these challenges.

Usefulness of the MSCQ in Cross-Cultural Counseling Training and Research
To our knowledge, there are no published scales on multicultural supervision competencies. The present findings suggest that the MSCQ is a promising instrument for improving multicultural counseling training. At the very least, the four-dimensional model of the MSCQ makes supervisors aware of the cross-cultural issues in supervision. Ideally, the MSCQ may be used by individual supervisors, institutions and accrediting agencies to systematically assess multicultural supervision competencies as perceived by counseling trainees. Such assessment will not only provide an indication of progress in multicultural competence, but also identify areas that require special attention.

In their recent review of assessment in cross-cultural counseling, Lonner and Ibrahim (1996) have made a compelling case that clients' cultural characteristics must be taken into consideration as an integral part of counseling. The same logic needs to be extended to supervision in order to produce cross-culturally competent counselors.

We also want to emphasize that the MSCQ can be used as a research instrument to discover the role of culture in supervision. For example, research is underway to investigate the relationship between the MSCQ and supervision functions as well as supervision effectiveness. There is also the need to study the linkage between the MSCQ scores of supervisors and the multicultural counseling competencies of supervisees.

Given the increasing diversity of our student population and society at large, the need for multiculturally competent supervisors will continue to increase. This is one of the urgent challenges facing counselor education — cross-cultural competence must begin with supervisors. Judging from the program of the 106th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association in San Francisco, August 1998, multicultural supervision has emerged as one of the focal points of research and clinical education. It seems perfectly logical that the next major step of development in cross-cultural counseling psychology is multicultural supervision competence. We have presented the case that the MSCQ can contribute to both research and education in this important new development.

References

Atkinson, D. R., Morten, G., & Sue, D. W. (1993). *Counseling American Minorities* (4th ed.). Dubuque, IA: Brown & Benchmark.

Bernard, J. M. (1994). Multicultural supervision: A reaction to Leong and Wagner, Cook, Priest, and Fukuyama. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 34*, 159-171.

Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (1998). *Fundamentals of clinical supervision* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Berry, J. W., Poortinga, Y. H., Segall, M. H., & Dasen, P. J. (1992). *Cross-cultural psychology: Research and applications*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Bradley, L. J. (1989). *Counselor supervision: Principles, process, practice*. Muncie, IN: Accelerated Press.

Cook, D. A., & Helms, J. E. (1988). Visible racial/ethnic group supervisees' satisfaction with cross-cultural supervision as predicted by relationship characteristics. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 35*, 268-274.

Corey, G., Corey, M. S., & Callanan, P. (1998). *Issues and ethics in the helping professions*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Fong, M. L., & Lease, S. H. (1996). *Cross-cultural supervision: Issues for the white supervisor*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Fukuyama, M. A. (1994). Critical incidents in multi-cultural counseling supervision: A phenomenological approach to supervision. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 34*, 142-151.

Heppner, P. P., & Roehlke, H. J. (1984). Differences among supervisees at different levels of training: Implications for a developmental model of supervision. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 31*, 76-90.

Ho, M. K. (1992). *Family therapy with ethnic minorities* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Holloway, E. L. (1995). *Clinical supervision: A systems approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kaiser, T. L. (1997). *Supervisory relationships: Exploring the human element*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Leong, F. T., & Chou, E. L. (1996). Counseling international students. In P. B. Pedersen, J. G. Draguns, W. J. Lonner, & J. E. Trimble (Eds.) (1996). *Counseling across cultures*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp.210-242.

Leong, F. T. L., & Wagner, N. S. (1994). Cross-cultural counseling supervision: What do we know? What do we need to know? *Counselor Education and Supervision, 34*, 117-131.

Lonner, W. J. (1997). Three paths leading to culturally competent psychological practitioners. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 21*(2), 195-212.

Lonner, W. J., & Ibrahim, F. A. (1996). Appraisal and assessment in cross-cultural counseling. In P. B. Pedersen, J. G. Draguns, W. J. Lonner, & J. E. Trimble (Eds.) (1996). *Counseling across cultures*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp.293-322.

McNeill, B. W., Hom, K. L., & Perez, J. A. (1995). The training and supervisory needs for racial and ethnic minority students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 23*, 246-258.

Pedersen, P. B. (1997). *Culture-centered counseling interventions: Striving for accuracy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pedersen, P. B., Draguns, J. G., Lonner, W. J., & Trimble, J. E. (Eds.) (1996). *Counseling across cultures* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pope-Davis, D. B., & Dings, J. G. (1995). The assessment of multicultural counseling competences. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.). *Handbook of multicultural counseling*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp.287-311.

Priest, R. (1994). Minority supervisor and majority supervisee: Another perspective of reality. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 34*, 152-158.

Ronnestad, M. H., & Skovholt, T. M. (1993). Supervision of beginning and advanced graduate students of counseling and psychotherapy. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 71*, 396-405.

Rubin, J. Z., Kim, S. H., Peretz, N. M. (1990). Expectancy effects and negotiation. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*, 125-139.

Sodowsky, G. R., Taffe, R. C., Gutkin, T. B., & Wise, S. L. (1994). Development of a multicultural counseling inventory: A self-report measure of multicultural competencies. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 41*, 137-148.

Sue, D. Multicultural training. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 21*(2), 175-193.

Sue, D., & Sundberg, N. D. (1996). Research and research hypotheses about effectiveness in intercultural counseling. In P. B. Pedersen, J. G. Draguns, W. J. Lonner, & J. E. Trimble (Eds.) (1996). *Counseling across cultures*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp.323-352.

Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural competencies/standards: A pressing need. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 70(4)*, 477-486.

Sue, D. W., Ivey, A. E., & Pedersen, P. B. (1996). *A theory of multicultural counseling and therapy*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (1990). *Counseling the culturally different: Theory and practice*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1987). Changes in supervision as counselors and supervisors gain experience. A review. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 15*, 457-461.

Table 1

Contrast Between Multicultural Counseling and Multicultural Supervision.

Multicultural Counseling	Multicultural Supervision
Needs to be aware of client's worldview.	Needs to be aware of client's and supervisee's worldviews.
Needs culturally appropriate counseling skills.	Needs culturally appropriate counseling and supervision skills.
Racial/cultural differences affect the relationship between counselor and client.	Racial/cultural differences affect both counselor-client and supervisor-counselor relationships.
Cultural biases may harm client.	Cultural biases may harm client and supervisee.
Involves conflicts of cultural assumptions and values.	Involves conflicts of cultural assumptions and values plus conflicts of theoretical orientations and counseling approaches.

Table 2
Exemplary Items for the Subscales of the MSCQ

I. <u>Attitudes and beliefs</u>
- Demonstrates openness and respect for culturally different supervisees.
- Does not seem to be aware of own implicit cultural biases in counseling and supervision.

II. <u>Knowledge and understanding</u>
- Shows some knowledge about the cultural traditions of various ethnic groups.
- Understands the worldviews of supervisees and clients from other cultures.

III. <u>Skills and practices</u>
- Takes into account cultural biases in assessments and clinical judgments.
- Is very rigid and dogmatic regarding what constitutes the proper approach of counseling.

IV. <u>Relationship</u>
- Is able to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers in working with minority students and clients.
- Is willing to advocate for minorities who experience institutional discrimination.

Table 3
Reliability Coefficients and Means of the Subscales of the MSCQ.

Level	Alpha	No. of Items	Mean	SD
Attitude	.9655	12	3.4917	1.08
Knowledge	.9266	9	3.3306	0.90
Skills	.9802	22	3.3636	1.04
Relationship	.9771	17	3.4471	1.16
Total	**.9924**	**60**	**3.4075**	**1.05**