

Issues of Multicultural Supervision in the Korean Context

Suk Yeon Jang-Lee

The International Counseling & Coaching Center in Seoul, South Korea, has a unique clinical setting. It was established two years ago to provide services to Seoul's increasingly globalized population and as a training site for international counseling students. Most of the counseling students in our supervision group are master or doctoral students majoring in pastoral counseling in the theological department of a nearby seminary and Christian university. Some of them have already finished their coursework in other countries and have joined our program to do their clinical training here.

As Korean society rapidly becomes globalized, the need to provide psychological help to individuals from other cultures living or studying in Korea has increased. As yet, Korean health insurance does not cover any psychotherapy or counseling services. In order to provide counseling and coaching services for the international community in Seoul, especially for international students and migrant workers who cannot afford counseling, our center has started to offer free counseling services. The use of "in-training" counseling students allows the center to provide these free services.

Suk Yeon Jang-Lee is an ordained ELCA pastor with a ThD from Yonsei United Graduate School of Theology in South Korea. She is director of the International Counseling and Coaching Center in Seoul, South Korea. Email: sukyeonj@gmail.com.

Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry

ISSN 2325-2847 (print)* ISSN 2325-2855 (online)

* © Copyright 2015 *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*
All Rights Reserved

The counseling students come from many countries. The mix of race, culture, language, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation is complex and diverse. The only commonality is that we are all Christians and use English in our group sessions. As a Korean-born Lutheran supervisor, trained in both the United States and Korea, the task of supervising such a diverse group has been an interesting journey for me. My purpose in this paper is to reflect on the multicultural dynamics of our supervision group and discuss several supervision issues that I have found challenging. I will accomplish this purpose through a series of vignettes.

THEOLOGICAL IDENTITY AND PASTORAL COUNSELOR IDENTITY

Vignette 1

Jin is a twenty-nine-year-old PhD student from China.¹ She is very intelligent but is a little depressed. In supervision, she presented the case of a female student from China who is very depressed. Her client is a new Christian and is going through some difficulties trying to balance the church's teachings and her desire to have a successful life. Jin herself had a similar experience to that of her client. Jin believed that if she became a good Christian, then God would bless her life and she would become very successful. But she feels that her reality does not meet these expectations.

Many new Christian churches in China have been established by Korean missionaries supported by evangelical churches in Korea. These new Christians in China are encouraged by church leaders to attend seminaries in Korea. However, their lives in Korea are often difficult. Most of them struggle with financial difficulties, stringent academic demands, and language. One popular theological concept in many Korean evangelical churches is *Ki-Bok* faith.² *Ki-Bok* means seeking worldly blessings through faith. In this view, becoming successful in this world is a sign that you have a strong faith and that God has blessed you. If you are not successful in this world, then, according to this view, your faith is not strong enough. At the same time, however, these churches also teach their members to love their neighbors and to make sacrifices for God. Jin has adopted some of this *Ki-Bok* thinking. The inner conflict that Jin faces is that she wants to be a pastoral counselor serving many wounded people and leading them to God, but at the same time she wants to be a successful pastoral counselor. Success versus service—this is her inner conflict.

Although Jin has taken many counseling classes, her personal faith often conflicts with her new knowledge. In church, she learned to preach the gospel wherever she goes and to whomever she meets. But in a counseling setting, evangelizing without the client's consent is considered very unethical. In our supervision group, she often raises questions about how to connect religion and psychology. Even though she has learned that pastoral theology is an operation-centered discipline and her theological convictions lead her to enter into the client's suffering, understand it, and respond accordingly, she feels apprehensive about applying this new knowledge to her therapeutic practice.

Since most of us in Korea live in a shame-based culture, there is an inherent resistance to openly confronting these issues in the supervision group. The fear is that such a confrontation might embarrass Jin and lead her to be more intimidated. Yet, as we reflected on her case in group supervision, she realized that her emotional responses toward her client came from a parallel process³ that included her identifying with her client's depression. Eventually, she started to share her own issues in the supervision group, according to the group norm that by sharing each other's concerns we all become better pastoral counselors. Jin was able to see that it is okay to fail sometimes and that God has been faithfully present in her life whether she has been successful or not.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PASTORAL IDENTITY

Vignette 2

Ken is a forty-year-old, single, White Canadian man who came to Korea eleven years ago. While living in Korea, he earned his MDiv in a Korean seminary and was ordained as an Anglican priest. He served a church for a while and then entered a doctoral program in pastoral counseling. In order to complete his degree, he needs to finish his clinical training in our center. He often states that the purpose of pastoral counseling is guiding people to Christ and that all the answers to life's difficulties can be found in the Bible. In group supervision sessions, he always wears clergy attire and carries his Bible. He occasionally makes negative comments when other students try to focus on a client-centered approach.

Ken told me that Christian counselors should focus on using biblical principles and God's law instead of applying secular psychology to clients.

I confronted him about not honoring our learning contract, and I recommended individual counseling. His presence in the supervision group significantly impacted Susan, a female White student from Australia. During our case presentation, Susan described how she had empowered a client who is trying to temporarily disconnect from her relationship with her mother because her mother had forced her to forgive the client's uncle, who had sexually abused her. Suddenly, Ken reminded the group about the importance of honoring one's parents and criticized Susan for accommodating her client's decision instead of guiding her with biblical principles. Later, in my personal supervision session with Susan, she shared how much she was hurt by Ken's comments.

Because Susan came from a conservative evangelical church, she had already been struggling with the progressive theological approach used in our center. When Ken, who is of the same race as Susan yet culturally quite different, questioned her faith, she felt vulnerable and became angry. She experienced Ken's judgmental attitude towards her as a threat to her newly emerging identity as a pastoral counselor. She also mentioned that Ken's arrogant and bitter attitude aroused fear and anxiety in her. She does not want to become an arrogant and judgmental White person who lives in Korea. She has been making a lot of effort to acculturate to Korean society and to the progressive theology of our center. She was clear that she did not want to be like Ken.

Ken's rigid and arrogant attitude and Susan's fear and anxiety taught me the importance of the cultural dimension in the process of identity formation as a counselor. Although in this vignette there was a very complicated power dynamic going on based on gender and race, both Susan and Ken were struggling with difficulties around acculturation. Although Ken has been living in Korea for eleven years, he could speak only limited Korean. He used to easily get hired as an English teacher because many Koreans preferred White English teachers. Yet, the privileges granted to White people have diminished as Korean society has become more affluent and diverse. Instead of allowing his cultural identity to develop, Ken defended his old cultural identity through religion. In contrast, Susan has made more of an effort to adjust to Korean society, in part because she is married to a Korean man and has a close relationship with her in-laws. Susan recognized Ken's rigid attitude and understood where he was coming from. This dynamic, as painful as it was, helped Susan to recognize that she was at a different stage in her cultural identity development process.

In a multicultural counseling setting, one of the key learning objectives is to explore one's cultural identity. Sue and Sue propose a minority racial/cultural identity development model.⁴ This model describes five stages of development that marginalized people experience as they struggle to understand themselves in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures. These stages are Conformity, Dissonance, Resistance and Immersion, Introspection, and Integrative Awareness. For each level of identity formation, the authors suggest four corresponding beliefs and attitudes that may help counselors to understand their minority clients better. According to this stage model, Ken could be understood as being in the stage of Conformity, indicated by his lack of self-awareness, discriminatory attitude towards others, and disparaging attitude toward Susan, who is of the same race. On the other hand, Susan, who is beginning to grapple with how to endorse various aspects of the dominant culture without being disloyal to her own heritage and culture, can be understood as being in the stage of Introspection. Sue and Sue developed this model in the context of a dominant White culture. It may not fit so well in our global context. When people with strong pride in their own culture, like Ken and Susan, come to Korea and experience a certain sense of superiority while also feeling excluded from the mainstream society, perhaps there should be a different model that can be applied to this situation. This paradoxical experience of Ken and Susan needs to be explored in the process of self-identity formation of pastoral counselors.

INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS

Vignette 3

Dai comes from a small town in the northern part of India. She finished her undergraduate degree in Korea and then married a Kenyan man whom she met at a seminary, and they have one son. Since both of them have yet to finish their graduate degrees and must work to meet their living expenses, it has been difficult for her to raise her child in Korea. So, she and her husband sent their child to her parents in India so they could raise him there for a while. As a mother, it is painful for Dai not to have seen her child for several years. Dai feels guilty about this decision. In our supervision sessions, she complains a lot about the lack of care from our staff and school. Her complaining seems related to her own internal guilt.

Since our students come from many different backgrounds, it is essential to learn each other's cultural practices, family structure, relationship patterns, communication styles, and historical background. As a supervisor, I was aware of Dai's family situation and wanted to be more supportive. I also wanted to maintain a good boundary between supervisor and supervisee. I did not want her strong hurt to subvert the supervisory process and turn supervision into personal counseling.

After some personal study of Indian culture, it became clear to me that her complaints were rooted in a cultural expectation about her relationship to her superiors. As Alan Roland observed in his work with Indian Americans, many Indians from traditional culture maintain a formal hierarchical relationship based on age and gender for all members of the extended family and other groups as well. When subordinates show respect, loyalty, obedience, and receptivity to their superiors, they expect their superiors to become emotionally involved and invested in their relationship, evidenced by freely giving advice, guidance, and direction.⁵ When Dai did not receive that kind of care from the school, center, and program, she began to feel hurt and angry. Understanding Dai's cultural expectations was the key that helped me relate to her in a supportive matter personally while maintaining a good boundary in the supervisory group.

CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Vignette 4

A Chinese student named Tan came to a personal supervision session one day and told me that he is gay and is living with his partner, whom he dearly loves. However, he had never told anybody else about his sexual orientation. He was deeply concerned about how his church community would judge him if they learned that he is gay. The LGBT identity development model⁶ was helpful for my reflection as I tried to support and supervise Tan. Gradually, he became more comfortable with his sexual identity, left his church, and started a Chinese LGBT fellowship. However, he could not disclose his sexual orientation to our supervisory group. Even though his supervisor was supportive of his sexual identity, he did not feel safe sharing it with his peers in the group, especially with his Chinese peers. He worried about his reputation in the small Christian Chinese community in Korea. When there was a case presented in supervision group about a gay

client, I noted that he got very nervous and did not come to the next group session.

As indicated in a paper by Joretta Marshall,⁷ marginalized people in a dominant society experience multiple oppressions from their own families, the church, and broader society. Tan feels that he cannot disclose his sexual identity to his mother; he thinks that such a disclosure would kill her. She regularly pushes him to get married and have children. In a similar way, churches are often places where lesbian and gay people experience not only marginalization but also deep and abiding judgment. Tan feels that his community of faith does not love him, and he also wonders at times if the Holy One cares about him at all. Not only does Tan struggle with disclosing his sexual identity to his family and the church, but he also feels that neither Korean nor Chinese society will support him. He wants to get married to his partner some day, but there is not much hope that they will receive the same civil and legal rights as heterosexual couples. Moreover, he has learned that in China there is no way for him to get a teaching job if he is openly gay.

As a supervisor, this case required a very delicate balance. I wanted to provide a very open and honest environment for our group while protecting Tan's secret, the disclosure of which might potentially harm his future. The theological attitude towards homosexuality in Korean churches and most churches in Asian countries is largely very judgmental. As I worked with this supervisory group, I wanted to be transparent and clear about where I stood on the issue of homosexuality. In order to create a safe and open environment for Tan for the future, my role as a pastoral counselor must not be limited to the clinical setting. Raising our voices for the marginalized members of our society is our responsibility. Promoting justice is not separate from the clinical work we do.

CONCLUSION

In a rapidly globalizing society like Korea, the traditional norms of individualism and collectivism cannot define our cultural identities. In our supervisory group, I have observed the complex identity formation process that has evolved through interesting mixes of religion and culture. The process of ethnic and racial identity development is not a static phenomenon but rather continues throughout the lifespan depending on the degree to which individuals have achieved a stable identity and, in part, on the degree

to which they have reflected on the meaning of race and ethnicity in their lives, perhaps in connection to their political ideology, occupational choices, relationship preferences, and so forth.⁸ To understand this complicated process and provide more effective supervision for our group, an integrative model of identity development theory, which incorporates traditional Western self-identity development theory with non-Western racial/ethnic identity theory, will be necessary.⁹ In the process of developing this integrative model, the participation of diverse groups of researchers from many different global contexts will be crucial. The work of non-Western scholars can provide valuable insights about the different power dynamics between the dominant culture and minority cultures instead of the traditional view of the dominant culture being equal to White culture and minority culture equal to non-White culture.

Korean American scholar Jung-Young Lee has developed a different paradigm of the identity formation process that is derived from the theology of marginality. He distinguishes three different kinds of approaches in understanding the marginal person's self-identity in relationship with culture: 'in-between', 'in-both,' and 'in-beyond.' When a marginal person is placed 'in-between' cultures, he or she feels like a non-being because they often are alienated from both cultures (the culture of their origin and the dominant culture). However, today's increasingly pluralistic society encourages us to affirm our own bicultural or multicultural heritages. He writes, "I am more than an Asian because I am an American, and I am more than an American because I am an Asian."¹⁰ If people are able to affirm their own roots as well as appreciate the origins of others, they will see themselves as belonging 'in-both' cultures and can have positive and self-affirming experiences. Lee notes that our self-identities as Christians should be as living 'in-beyond' our world. To transcend or to live 'in-beyond' does not mean to be free of the two different worlds in which persons exist but to live 'in-both' of them without being bound by either of them.¹¹ Jesus lived his life 'in-between' cultures and belonged 'in-both' cultures, but he was the one who lived 'in-beyond' racial, cultural, gender, and class divisions. His incarnation, death, and resurrection show that God is totally transcendent and totally immanent. Lee's new insight concerning self-identity from the perspective of the margin provides a creative way to understand our self-formation process as pastoral counselors. In our supervision group, we all are marginalized in different ways. By only emphasizing our cultural differences, we might become stuck 'in-between' cultures. As we celebrate our differences and em-

brace ourselves as well as others, we can learn how to live ‘in-both’ cultures. Furthermore, the Christian identity of our group eventually will provide a creative core for living ‘in-beyond’ any culture.

The supervisor’s self-understanding of “identity complexity” is crucial to maintaining open and inclusive supervision in a diverse group. One’s identity is not fixed or monolithic but rather fluid, multifold, and continually changing. Pamela Cooper-White mentions that “genuine identity complexity reaches beyond our conscious self-identifications (including our political identities) to the inner domains of our multiply constituted self-parts and affect states—many of which are outside our awareness for much or all of the time.”¹² Sometimes, my own progressive theological understanding makes it challenging for me to provide empathic support for students like Ken. When I deeply reflect on my uncomfortable feelings about him, it is clear that they are related to my own fear of authoritative White men. As a supervisor of a multicultural group, continuing reflection on my inner parts that have been silenced or ignored will reduce my own anxiety provoked by differences, allowing me to contain the ‘other’ voices of our group and understand the complicated dynamics of identity crossover.

There are many issues we have to resolve in our program, such as the language barriers of students who non-native English speakers, securing the financial resources to provide free counseling, and establishing clear guidelines for visiting counseling sessions in local multicultural agencies. However, as these vignettes illustrate, our supervision group helps us to become more aware of our own cultural, racial, sexual, and religious identities and to see the importance of these issues in the process of forming our self-identities as pastoral counselors. Clearly, pastoral identity is tied closely to self-identity as well as to cultural identity. As we struggle together to be more sensitive to each other’s cultural, racial, and religious differences, we will create an open and safe space for each other. We are also striving to reflect on the intercultural dynamics in our midst, which will lead us to live ‘in-beyond’ our cultural differences.

NOTES

1. All names in these vignettes have been changed to protect the students’ confidentiality.
2. Timothy S. Lee, *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2010), 121–22.

3. David A. Steere, *The Supervision of Pastoral Care* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), 84–85.
4. Derald Wing Sue and David Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory & Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1990), 107–21.
5. Alan Roland, *Cultural Pluralism and Psychoanalysis: The Asian and North American Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 28–33.
6. Brent L. Bilodeau and Kristen A. Renn, “Analysis of LGBT Identity Development Models and Implications for Practice,” *New Directions for Student Services*, 111 (2005): 25–39.
7. Joretta Marshall, “Pro-Active Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counseling with Lesbian Women and Gay Men,” *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 4 (2010): 423–32.
8. Joel R. Sneed, Seth J. Schwartz, and William Cross Jr., “A Multicultural Critique of Identity Status Theory and Research: A Call for Integration,” *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research* 6, no. 1 (2006): 76.
9. *Ibid.*, 61–84.
10. Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 61.
11. *Ibid.*, 63.
12. Pamela Cooper-White, “The ‘Other’ Within: Multiple Selves Making a World of Difference” *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 29 (2009): 25.