Supervision Vignettes
Ethics & Risk in Supervision—Carey S. Edney, Ph.D.

Vignette #1

An LPC Supervisee asks his supervisor if he should attend a Sweat Lodge Ceremony his client has invited him to. The Supervisee states he has always been interested in indigenous healing practices and needs the multicultural experience.

When a counselor–client nonprofessional interaction with a client … may be potentially beneficial to the client… the counselor must document in case records, prior to the interaction …the rationale for such an interaction, the potential benefit, and anticipated consequences for the client…

Using this guideline, should the Supervisee attend the ceremony?

If acting ethically is defined as doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason, Should the Supervisee attend the ceremony?

Personal experience—details changed to de-identify the individuals involved.

Vignette #2

Ms. J is a Clinician working with Tribal members in a Native community. They so appreciate her care for them that they invite her to participate in a Ceremony usually reserved for tribal members, and will make her an extended member of the community. She feels uneasy about accepting the invitation, but realizes she will offend the community if she refuses.

What should she do?

Credit to Michael Bricker, (2012)

Vignette #3

A young and enthusiastic new graduate from a Master’s program in counseling psychology was very devoted to her clients, mostly children. She saw herself as an advocate for her client’s needs, and often referred to her client’s as ‘my kids.’ She sought advice from the more experienced clinicians in the clinic. On one occasion she brought a picture drawn by a young child to one of the clinicians, who had a dual master’s degree in Art and Psychology. Although the elder clinician was not yet licensed and was under supervision himself, he was viewed as a mentor by the new graduate. The mentor interpreted the drawing for the new graduate, saying that the drawing suggested that the child had been abused by an adult male familiar to the child.

The mentor referred the new graduate to her supervisor with the instruction to talk about what the next step should be. The new graduate did talk to her supervisor who told her to NOT document the interpretation in the chart and to take no other action until their next supervision session. The new graduate was torn between wanting to follow her supervisor’s direction and wanting to advocate for her child client, whose parents were locked in a custody battle. In the end, she opted to protect her client [as she saw it] and gave the notes she took from her meeting with the mentor to the child’s
mother for use in court against the father. The mother’s attorney contacted the new graduate’s supervisor with a concern. What might that concern have been?

Was the new graduate acting ethically?

Does the new graduate’s supervisor have any liability?

Does the mentor or his supervisor have any liability?

*Personal experience—details changed to de-identify the individuals involved.*

**Vignette #4**

A practicum student was cautioned to be very careful of the boundaries she maintained with one of her patients. Against the knowledge and advice of the supervising psychologist, the practicum student developed a social relationship with this patient that soon went sour. When responding to the investigator from the licensing board, the supervisor was able to produce notes relevant to this particular patient that documented her explicit instructions to avoid any boundary crossings.

Was the student acting ethically?

Does the student’s supervisor have any liability?

*Taken from Bennett, et al (2006)*

**Problematic situations (Adapted from Falender and Shafranske, 2004):**

- Trainee flatters supervisor’s brilliant insights; supervisor finds it difficult to supervise or give corrective feedback because of the emotional feedback and the gratification of being seen as omniscient. Or trainee reveals personal information, asking omniscient supervisor for advice.

- Trainee gradually redefines supervisory relationship by continuing to invite supervisor for coffee or lunch, transforming relationship into friendship versus supervision.

- Trainee makes a point to refer to areas of knowledge (specific skills or theories) or experience (parenting, addiction recovery, etc.) unknown to the supervisor, thereby changing the power differential and leading to supervisor covering up ignorance.

- Trainee asks so many questions that the supervision hour was insufficient to include case discussion.

- Trainee reports rigorously following supervisor’s suggestions and that they did not work, or that other supervisors have made different suggestions, challenging supervisor to defend her position.

- Trainee so berates herself for her self-described mistakes that the supervisor is pressured to support, reassure and praise trainee at the expense of reflective analysis of the ‘errors.’

Bricker, Michael, MS, ICADC, LPC, SAP, (2012) Basic Ethics for Clinical Practice, 38th Annual School on Addiction and Behavioral Health, Anchorage AK  May 7-9, 2012
