EMBRACING THE GHOSTS IN THE COUNSELING ROOM: SELF-REFLECTION FOR COUNSELORS AND SUPERVISORS TO LEAD CHANGE BY UNDERSTANDING THE PAST



Presented by Dr. Erica Rhoads, LPC, NCC

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- *Participants will recognize systems factors that impact the development of their internal working model and presuppositions.*
- *Participants will identify the impact of these factors through the framework of Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling (MSJC) Competencies and Spiritual and Religious (S/R) Competencies naming their "ghosts" that could lead to countertransference or biases.*
- *Participants will evaluate the benefits of their "ghosts/angels" and ways in which their experience and past history can inform their work and integrate strengths from their personal narratives into the counseling room enhancing their MSJC and S/R competencies.*

SYSTEM FACTORS

Poverty

Trauma/Abuse

Marginalization

Spirituality/Religiosity

Ghosts of the Past



Systems factors create Ghosts that are…

- Visitors from the unremembered past of the counselor/client/supervisor
- Present for two or more generations
- Not invited but take up residence and rehearse family tragedy from a tattered script
- Representations of the repetition of the past in the present.
- Stories of abandonment and neglect reenacted on the next generation
- Uniform pattern: parents who in the extremity of childhood terror, formed a pathological identification with the dangerous and assaultive enemy
- Repeated behavior of what was not remembered through associative affective experiences
- Repressed affect becomes the ghost of the past, haunting the next generation

Fraiberg et al., 1975



Spot the Ghosts

MSJC COMPETENCIES:

Counselor Self-Awareness **Client Worldview**	**What ghosts are around due to attitudes and beliefs?** **What knowledge do you need to explore to discover ghosts in other cultures?** **What skills do you need to deal with your own ghosts and the ghosts of your clients/supervisees?** **What action can you take to transform those ghosts to angels?**
Counseling Relationship	***How might your ghosts impact the counselor-client relationship or supervisor-supervisee relationship?***
Counseling and Advocacy Interventions	**How might ghosts show up intra-personally?** **How might ghosts show up interpersonally (in system relationships)?** **How might ghosts show up institutionally (in community)?**

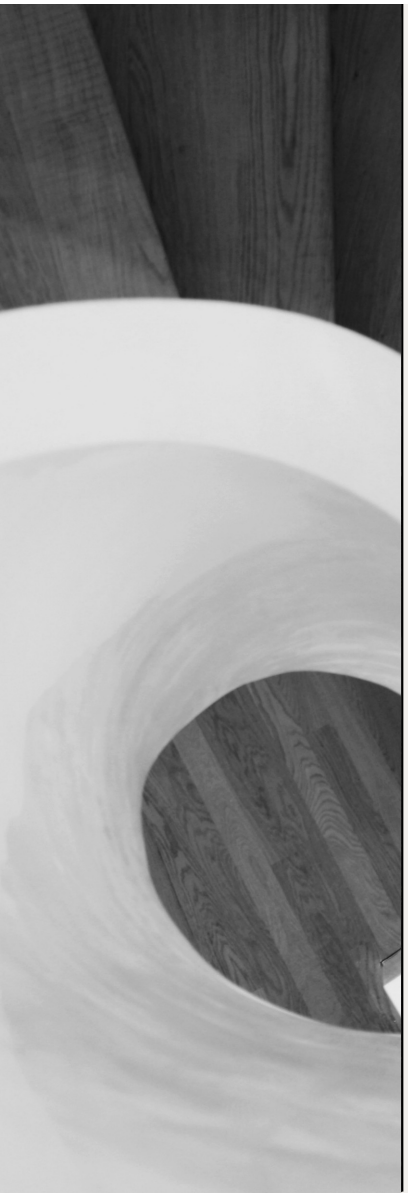
https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/competencies/multicultural-and-social-justice-counseling-competencies.pdf?sfvrsn=20

Spiritual/Religious Competencies

- Culture And Worldview
  - What ghosts from beliefs about culture and worldview might be involved?
  - How might culture and worldview influence the ghost's impact on clients?
- Counselor Self-Awareness
  - How might exploring ghosts help clients and counselors understand the impact of spiritual and religious attitudes?
  - Why is it important to understand and evaluate these factors?
  - Has someone been identified as available to help facilitate/consult about spiritual/religious factors?



https://aservic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ASERVIC-Spiritual-Competencies_FINAL.pdf



SEVEN-EYED MODEL

BY HAWKINS & MCMAHON (2020)

Mode 1: Focus on ***the Client***: awareness of the observed, experienced reality of the client (their language, metaphors, images, and the story of their life as told by them).

Mode 2: Focus on ***the Interventions***: attending to what, how, and why interventions were used (alternately, planning or rehearsing interventions and anticipating their impact).

Mode 3: Focus on ***the Client-Supervisee Relationship***: dynamics in the relationship (conscious or unconscious) with imagery and metaphor to create greater insight for supervisee.

Mode 4: Focus on ***the Supervisee***: explore the affect of the work on the supervisee (feelings, thoughts, actions, and countertransference), attend to supervisee well-being and professional development.

Mode 5: Focus on ***the Supervisory Relationship***: quality of the supervision, explore parallel dynamics in work with clients.

Mode 6: Focus on ***the Supervisor***: their own process: thoughts, feelings and images in connection with the supervisee and their work.

Continued:

Mode 7: Focus on the Wider Context (Possible Contexts)

7.1 The client context: their family, reason for referral, past experience of help seeking, current interests and resources.

7.2 The professional/organizational context of the supervisee's interventions: nature of organizations influence on the work and choices of intervention.

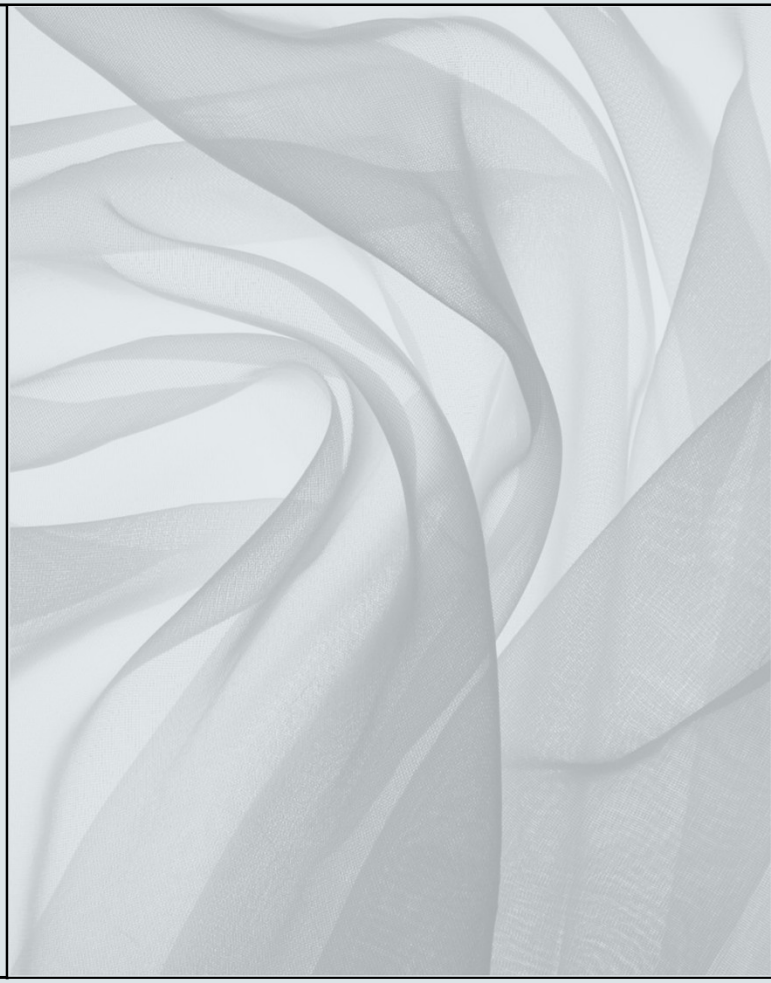
7.3 The context of the client-supervisee relationship: focus on how the client was referred, client and family members' expectations and impact on the relationship.

7.4 The wider world of the supervisee: potential personal circumstances and opportunities for professional development.

7.5 The context of the supervisory relationship: discussions of roles and responsibilities, review of supervisee's management of risks, caseloads, and case notes.

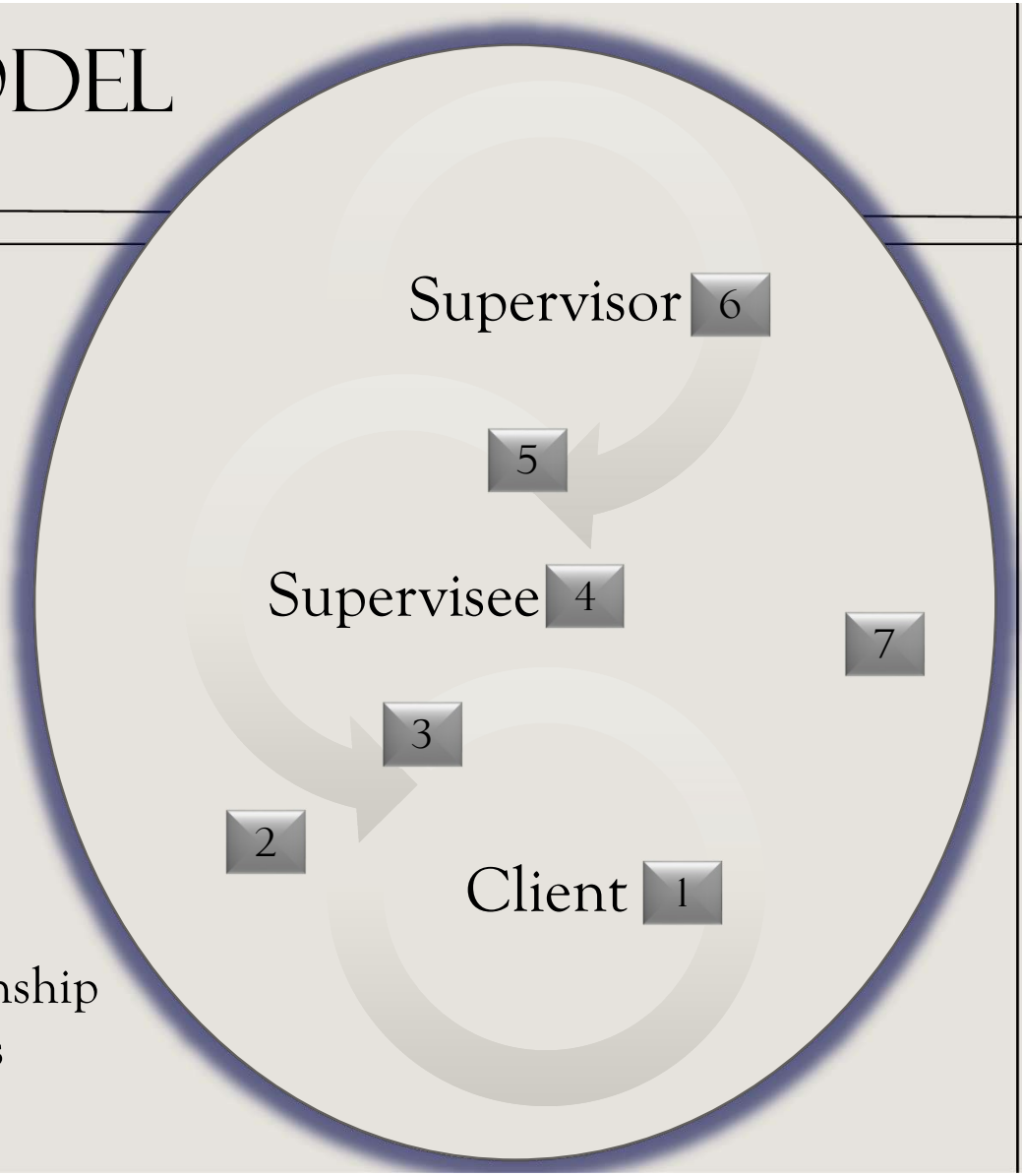
7.6 The context of the supervisor: their experiences in other contexts, the questioning of the personal-professional boundary.

McMahon et al., 2022



SEVEN-EYED MODEL INTERACTION

FIND THE GHOSTS



7: The Wider Context
6: The Supervisor
5: The Supervision Relationship
4: The Supervisee
3: The Supervisee-Client Relationship
2: The Supervisee's Interventions
1: The Client

William is a 15 year old young man adopted as a toddler from a Central American country into a White middle-class American family. Client presented with anger issues and relationship conflict with his family. Client struggled with his identity desiring to honor his Hispanic heritage while also believing that his adopted parents were good people.
He often fantasizes about being part of Hispanic culture and created fictional Hispanic friends as stand-ins for his parents, as he has difficulty acknowledging his adoptive parents as Mom and Dad. Client prefers to be called Chico even though his legal name of William was given by his adoptive family. What "Ghosts" might be present for Chico?

CASE STUDY: WILLIAM AKA: CHICO



MODE 1: THE CLIENT

The Birth Parents as Ghosts:

Children make up ghost stories about the birth parents

What are my parents doing now?

Do they miss me?

Did they want to give me up?

Ghost of the “what if they had not given me up”

Ghost of alternate life with birth parents

- Would I be a different person?
- Would I fit better in my birth-culture?
- What would my life be like?

Adoption Genogram - create a genogram of the family, including:

- Family structure and relationships
- Significant losses, separations, or disruptions
- Family narratives about belonging, loyalty, and identity
- Cultural or religious values related to family

PARALLEL PROCESS REFLECTION

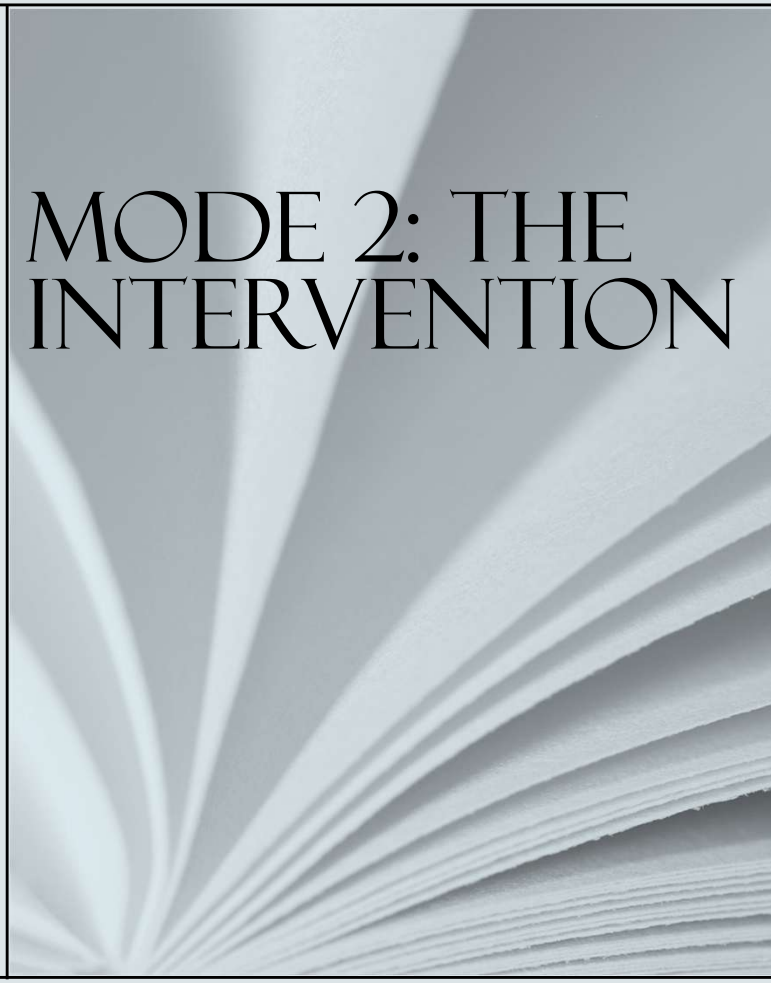
Supervisee creates personal genogram with same criteria then reflect:

- *"What ghosts from your own family are present in your clinical work?"*
- *"How might your family narrative be influencing how you understand your clients' adoption narratives?"*
- *"What assumptions are you making about family, belonging, or loss based on your own experience?"*

Ask supervisee to practice perspective-taking:

- *"If your client came from a completely different family structure or cultural context, how might their experience of adoption be different?"*

MODE 2: THE INTERVENTION



Reflect on the supervisee's internal working model of family, belonging, and loss shaped by their own developmental history.
Is there a **Ghost of the "Rescue Narrative"** shaping their beliefs about the adoption scenario? Do they:

- Unconsciously minimize an adoptee's grief or anger, interpreting it as ingratitude
- Over-identify with adoptive parents' "sacrificial" narrative
- Fail to validate the adoptee's legitimate loss of birth family, culture, and identity
- Pathologize normal adoption-related trauma responses as individual pathology rather than systemic impact

Option to reflect on where this narrative originated (media, family messages, religious teachings, personal values) and explore how it might be limiting their clinical perspective. Asking: ***What would change in your clinical work if you viewed adoption not as rescue, but as a lifelong process of integration and identity formation?***

Is there a **Ghost of the "Grateful Adoptee"** expecting adoptees to be perpetually grateful?
Option to reflect on the perspective: *What would it mean for your client to hold both love for their adoptive family AND grief for their birth family without having to choose?"*

MODE 4: THE SUPERVISEE

MODE 3: CLIENT-SUPERVISEE RELATIONSHIP

BIAS AUDIT

Reflect on recent cases and identify:	Evaluate and Act:
Which clients they feel most empathy for (and why)	*Where did these biases come from?*
Which clients they find most challenging (and why)	*How might they be limiting my clinical perspective?*
Which member of the adoption triad they most naturally align with	*One way I will challenge this bias in my next session…*
What narratives about adoption they hold (rescue, gratitude, loss, etc.)	*One question I will ask my client to deepen my understanding*

MODE 5: THE SUPERVISION RELATIONSHIP

The Ghosts of Parallel Process

- **The Ghost of Abandonment**
- **The Ghost of Control**
- **The Ghost of Invisibility**

Supervisors can reflect on their own ghosts when working with their supervisees:

- *"How am I showing up in this relationship? Am I present, attuned, and responsive?"*
- *"Are there ways I'm replicating dynamics that might mirror adoption-related trauma?"*
- *"How can I model a secure, attuned relationship that helps the supervisee internalize this as a template for their own clinical work?"*

MODE 6: THE SUPERVISOR

The Ghost of Clinical Authority vs. Lived Experience

The Risk: A supervisor without lived adoption experience may:

- Inadvertently validate a supervisee's clinical distance from the adoptee's experience
- Prioritize symptom reduction over identity integration
- Miss the nuanced, non-linear nature of adoption-related grief
- Fail to recognize when a supervisee is minimizing or pathologizing normal adoption responses

The Opportunity: A supervisor without lived adoption experience can also:

- Model intellectual humility and curiosity about the adoption experience
- Actively seek out adoptee voices and narratives (including your dissertation's participant voices)
- Acknowledge the limits of their perspective and invite supervisees to teach them
- Create space for supervisees with lived adoption experience to lead

MODE 7: THE WIDER CONTEXT

Supervisor's Role in dealing with Ghosts (not pretending they don't exist or eliminating them entirely, but to acknowledge them so they no longer haunt the therapeutic alliance or cloud clinical judgment):

1. **Name the ghosts** so they become visible and discussable

2. **Understand the ghosts** by exploring their origins and their influence

3. **Integrate the ghosts to become anels** by helping supervisees understand how their own narratives can inform (rather than distort) their clinical work

4. **Model reflexivity** by examining your own ghosts and demonstrating intellectual humility

Purpose: to provide **heuristic reflexivity** through the process of bringing unconscious patterns into awareness so they can be examined, understood, and integrated.

Let's Practice: Find the Ghosts

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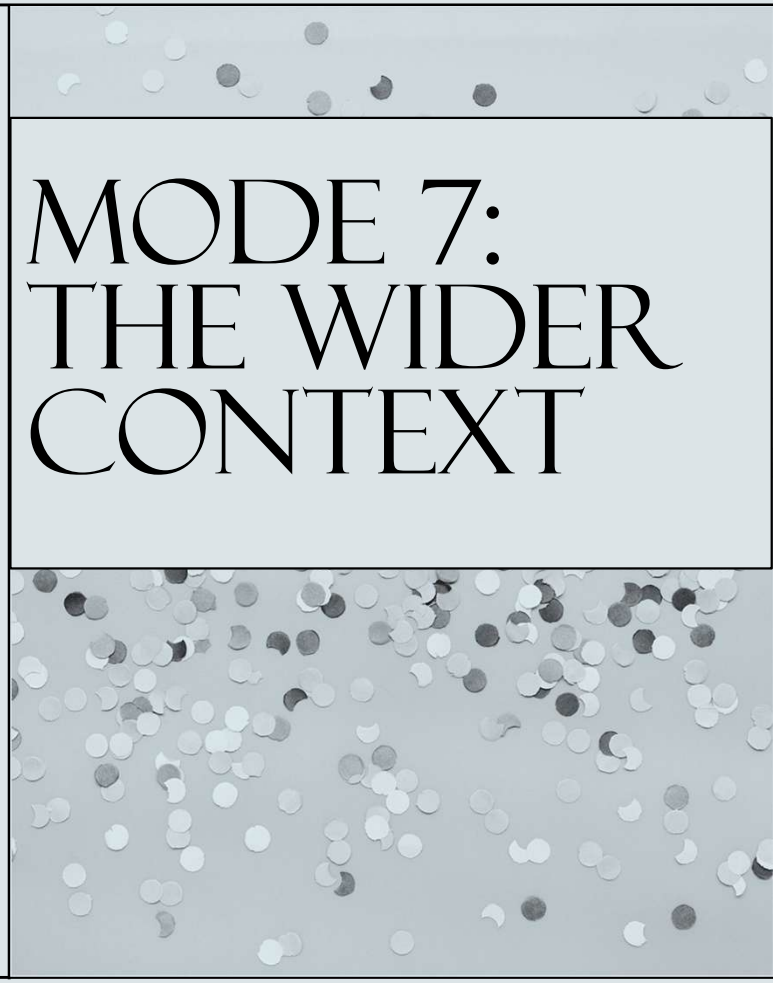

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Q&A

