

The Role of Humor in Supervision - Building Stronger Supervisory Relationships



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Bio – Dr. Robin Switzer

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Bio – Mr. Glen Roberts

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Agenda

- Section One –
Background & Theory
- Section Two – Ethics
- Section Three –
Discussion





Learning Objectives

- **Learning Objective 1 – Understand the benefits of Humor** (Ali & Bardaie, 2024; Fischer et al., 2021; Martínez, 2023; Tatum, 2021)
- **Learning Objective 2 – Develop practical skills** (Ali & Bardaie, 2024; Cadei et al., 2021; Vereen et al., 2006)
- **Learning Objective 3 – Enhance supervisory relationships** (Martínez, 2023; Tatum, 2021)
- **Learning Objective 4 – Create a humor toolkit** (Gheorghe et al., 2024; Wijewardena et al., 2024)



Rationale

- Supervision
 - essential in counselor education
 - can feel overly formal or intimidating (Ali & Bardaie, 2024)
- Humor
 - offers a transformative approach
 - fostering engagement, support, and effectiveness (Ali & Bardaie, 2024; Cadei et al., 2021; El-Sayed et al., 2024; Haydon et al., 2023)

Target Audience

- Counselor educators
- Supervisors
- Graduate students in counselor education programs



What pencil did Shakespeare
write with?

2B.

(<https://the-sage-page.com/2024/06/04/teacher-jokes/>)



Humor Theories

- Superiority Theory
- Incongruity Theory
- Relief Theory
- Psychoanalytic Theory (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2024)



Theoretical Foundations of Humor

- Cognitive Theories
- Social Theories
- Contextual theories (Sizemore & O'Brien, 2023)



Theoretical Foundations of Humor

- Cognitive, emotional, and social experience that can facilitate coping, insight, and bonding (Martin et al., 2003)



Theoretical Foundations of Humor

- Martin's (2003) Humor Styles Questionnaire identifies four types of humor:
 - Affiliative: relational, inclusive
 - Self-enhancing: resilient, optimistic
 - Aggressive: sarcastic, potentially harmful
 - Self-defeating: at one's own expense



Successful Humor

- **Cognitive Theories**
 - Works best when it creates a benign violation
 - Triggers an incongruity
- **Social Theories**
 - Evokes shared feelings of benign superiority
 - strengthening interpersonal bonds.
- **Contextual Theories**
 - Humor is less effective in goal-directed or overly serious situations
 - its success depends on the context being receptive to playful interactions. (Sizemore & O'Brien, 2023)

Imagine 2-finger Joe's sitting thar on that saddle. Waddya gonna say to him?





Benefits of Humor in Counselor Education and Supervision

- **Enhancement of engagement and learning** (Ali & Bardaie, 2024; Haydon et al., 2023; Tatum, 2021)
- **Reduction of Anxiety and Building Rapport** (Ali & Bardaie, 2024; Fischer et al., 2021; Martínez, 2023; Tatum, 2021)
- **Promotion of Resilience** (Cadei et al., 2021; Cronin et al., 2023)
- **Facilitation of Difficult Conversations** (Ali & Bardaie, 2024; Cadei et al., 2021; Vereen et al., 2006)



Benefits of Humor in Counselor Education and Supervision

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Benefits of Humor in Counselor Education and Supervision

- **Reduction of Anxiety and Building Rapport** (Ali & Bardaie, 2024; Altan-Atalay & Fatih Boluvat, 2024; Fischer et al., 2021; Haydon et al., 2023; Martínez, 2023; Tatum, 2021)



Benefits of Humor in Counselor Education and Supervision

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Benefits of Humor in Counselor Education and Supervision

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“No, I'm not interested in exploring the meaning of my existence; I just want to know whether I actually exist.”

Humor with Theory Based/Treatment Supervision Models

- **Psychoanalytical/Psychodynamic**
- Humor can be used as part of the relational model.
It can also be a reflection of the supervisee or a reflection of the client.
It can be part of unconscious drives such as creativity or defense mechanisms, it can occur as a part of transference/counter transference (Tummala-Narra, 2023)



A photograph of two young Black women laughing and walking on a waterfront promenade. The woman on the left has long braids and is wearing a white t-shirt with a brown stain. The woman on the right is wearing a white tank top and has headphones around her neck. The background shows a city skyline and the ocean under a clear blue sky.

Humor with Theory Based/Treatment Supervision Models Cont.

- **Adlerian**
- Adlerian supervision focused on encouragement, lifestyle, equality and strengths to foster a growth-oriented environment (Qu & Luke, 2022).
- Humor can be used to encouraged or can be a strength. It can equalize scenarios with normalization and can reflect cultural aspects of lifestyle.

Humor with Theory Based/Treatment Supervision Models Cont.


- **Constructivism**
- Supervision focus of supervisees exploring their own stories/meaning, sense of self, awareness of self and others, motivation and autonomy (Kim & Mumbauer-Pisano, 2021).
- Humor can be used on exploration of stories/meaning, sense of self, awareness of others.



A photograph of two young Black women walking outdoors on a paved path near a waterfront. The woman on the left has long braids and is wearing a white t-shirt with a brown stain and black pants. The woman on the right is wearing a white tank top and light-colored pants. They are both smiling and looking towards the right. In the background, there is a body of water, a railing, and some buildings under a clear blue sky.

Humor with Theory Based/Treatment Supervision Models Cont.

- **Humanistic**
- Supervision focused on humanistic principles of process vs outcomes, culturally sensitive, a non-threatening environment, connectedness, self-determination and an experiential focus (Holstun & Bohecker, 2024)
- It can incorporate humor or allow humor based on supervisees cultural norms, use to connect and as part of the process.



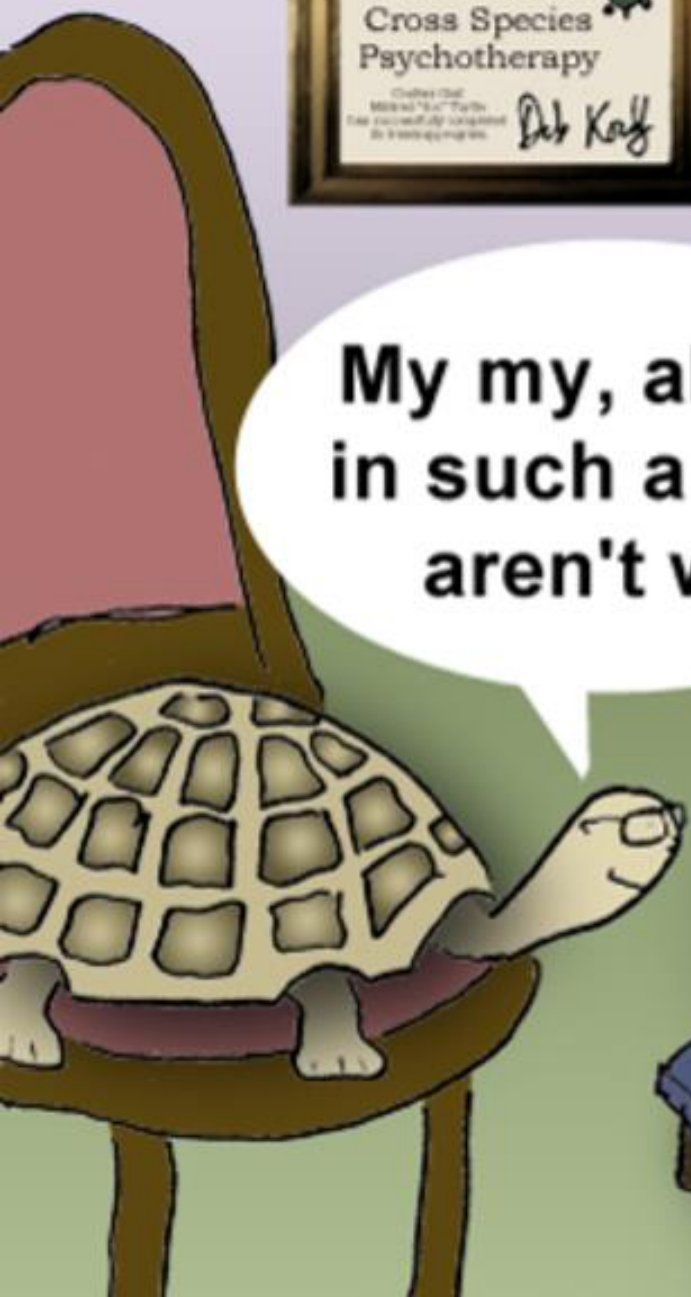
Humor with Theory Based/Treatment Supervision Models Cont.

- **CBT**
- Key aspects of autonomy, collaborative, agreed upon goals, schemas, specific task reviews and review of learning (Roscoe et. al., 2022).
- Humor can help create a collaborative environment, be a task or a part of learning.



My my, always in such a hurry aren't we?

C'mon Doc, when are we going to get to the bottom of this?



11/4/08

Insights on Implementing Humor

- **Cultural sensitivity** (Martínez, 2023; Morrison et al., 2024; Pomponi, 2024; Vereen, 2006)
- **Balancing humor with professionalism** (Sizemore & O'Brien, 2023)
- **Modeling humor** (Gheorghe et al., 2024)





Enhancing Supervisory Relationships

- Humor strengthens supervisor-supervisee bonds (Martínez, 2023; Kobayashi & Berge, 2022)
- Shared laughter fosters open communication (Pletscher, 2024)
- Promotes a culture of trust and resilience (Sizemore & O'Brien, 2023; Vereen et al., 2006)

Ethical Considerations (ACA, 2014)

- F2a Supervision Preparation: training and education are needed to conduct supervision and continue to provide supervision.
 - Before utilizing humor, what aspects should be considered?
 - Is humor a tool or a trait? Intervention or relating?
- F2b multicultural issues and diversity : supervisors are aware of and address diversity culturally.
 - How does humor vary culturally?
 - Is the use of humor culturally based?
- F4a Informed consent for supervision: supervisors provide details of service, rights, limitations of supervision to the supervisee.





Humor Toolkit

- Humor-based icebreaker
- Humor reflection exercise
- Role-playing scenarios
- Creating humorous teaching materials
- Develop a humor toolkit (Wijewardena et al., 2024)



Humor Toolkit

- Knowledge
 - Leaders must understand the humor process and the theoretical underpinnings of humor (e.g., what humor is, how it works, its effects on behavior).
- Skills and Abilities
 - Leaders need to develop the ability to create humorous content (e.g., recalling or crafting jokes, witty remarks, or anecdotes).
 - They must also master the delivery aspects such as timing, tone, facial expressions, and body language (Wijewardena et al., 2024)



Humor Toolkit

- Assessments – SHS-S
 - Short version of the sense of humor scale
 - psychometrically sound for assessing the six humor skills
 - can support evaluations of humor skills training (e.g., McGhee’s Seven Humor Habits Program) and contribute to the broader literature on humor and well-being
 - facilitates efficient assessment of humor skills across cultures and languages
 - offers a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of humor-based training interventions in various applied settings (Heintz et al., 2022)



"This baby announces 'Your time is up' in a warm but authoritative voice."



Practical Ideas & Activities

- **“Three Funny Things” Check-In**
At the start of supervision, invite the supervisee to name three things that happened since last time that made them smile or laugh (or that struck them as amusing).
- **Cartoon or Meme Prompt**
Use a therapy-relevant cartoon or meme (appropriate, non-derogatory) as a launching point: “What does this make you think about your work this week?”



Practical Ideas & Activities

- **Supervisee “Humor Inventory”**
Ask supervisees to reflect on times when they used humor with clients (or didn’t), what the outcome was, how they felt, boundaries they noticed. Then discuss together how humor might show up in their style and what the supervisee is comfortable with.



Practical Ideas & Activities

- **Role-play with a “Humor Option”**
In skill-practice segments of supervision, include an optional “humor” twist: e.g., supervisee practices a challenging client conversation & then practices a light humor-inflected version. Afterwards debrief: how did it land? What changed?



Practical Ideas & Activities

- **Supervisor Self-Disclosure with Humor**
Supervisors sometimes model humility by sharing a light mistake (appropriate) or a humorous anecdote about supervision work (without belittling others). This humanizes the supervisor and reduces power differentials.



Practical Ideas & Activities

- **Reflect on Humor Boundaries**
Make time in supervision to talk about “When humor didn’t land” or “When humor felt unsafe”. Especially important: discussing cultural considerations, power dynamics (supervisor → supervisee), and client context.



Practical Ideas & Activities

- **Group Supervision Laughter Awareness**
In group supervision, have a brief “laughter check”: ask group members to notice when they laughed/shared humor and what function it served (bonding, relief, topic shift, avoidance?). Use as a learning tool.

Conclusion

- Humor can:
 - Transform the learning environment
 - Make it more engaging, supportive, and effective
 - Enhance supervisory relationship and promote resilience





Questions?

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