**Handling Disparate Information for Evaluating Trainees**

RashidVaji, Ph,D., a member of the school psychology faculty at a midsize university, serves as a faculty supervisor for students assigned to externships in schools. The department has formalized a supervision and evaluation system for the extern program. Students have weekly individual meetings with the faculty supervisor and biweekly meetings with the on-site supervisor. The on-site supervisor writes a mid-year (December) and end of academic year (May) evaluation of each student. The site evaluation are sent to Dr. Vaji, and he provides feedback based on the site and his own supervisory evaluation to each student. The final grade (fail, low pass, pass, high pass) is the responsibility of Dr. Vaji.

Dr. Vaji also teaches the Spring Semester graduate class on “Health Disparities in Mental Health.” One of the course requirements is for students to write weekly thought papers, in which they are required to take the perspective of therapy clients from different ethnic groups in reaction to specific session topics. Leo Watson, a second-year graduate student is one of Dr. Vaji’s externship supervises. He is also enrolled in the Health Disparities course. Leo’s thought papers often present ethnic-minority adolescents as prone to violence and unable to “grasp” the insights offered by school psychologists. In a classroom role-playing exercise, Leo “plays” an ethnic-minority student client as slumping in the chair not understanding the psychologist and giving angry retorts. In written comments on these thought papers and class feedback, Dr. Vaji encourages Leo to incorporate more of the readings on racial/ethnic discrimination and multicultural competence into his papers and to provide more complex perspectives on clients.

One day during his office hours, three students from the class come to Dr. Vaji’s office to complain about Leo’s behavior outside the classroom. They describe incidents in which Leo uses derogatory ethnic labels to describe his externship clients and brags about “putting one over” on his site supervisors by describing these clients in “glowing” terms just to satisfy his supervisors’ “stupid liberal do-good” attitudes. They also report an incident at a local bar at which Leo was seen harassing an African American waitress using racial slurs.

After the students have left his office, Dr. Vaji reviews his midyear evaluation and supervision notes on Leo and the midyear on-site supervisor’s report. In his own evaluation report Dr. Vaji had written, “Leo often articulates a strong sense of duty to help his ethnic minority students overcome past discrimination but needs additional growth and supervision in applying a multicultural perspective into his clinical work.” The on-site supervisor’s evaluation states that

Leo has a wonderful attitude towards his student clients…Unfortunately evaluation of his treatment skills is limited because Leo has had less cases to discuss than some of his peers since a larger than usual number of students have stopped coming to their sessions with him.

It is the middle of the Spring Semester, and Dr. Vaji still has approximately 6 weeks of supervision left with Leo. The students’ complaints about Leo, while more extreme, are consistent with what Dr. Vaji has observed in Leo’s class papers and role-playing exercises. However, these complaints are very different from his presentation during on-site supervision. If Leo has been intentionally deceiving both supervisors, then he may be more ineffective or harmful as a therapist to his current clients than either supervisor realized. In addition, purposeful attempts to deceive the supervisors might indicate a personality disorder or lack of integrity that if left unaddressed might be harmful to adolescent clients in the future.

**Ethical Dilemma**

Dr. Vaji would like to meet with Leo at minimum to discuss ways to retain adolescent clients and to improve his multicultural treatment skills. He does not know to what extent his conversation with Leo and final supervisory report should be influenced by the information provided by the graduate students.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why is this an ethical dilemma? Which APA Ethical Principles help frame the nature of the dilemma?
2. Who are the stakeholders and how will they be affected by how Dr. Vaji resolves his dilemma?
3. What additional information might Dr. Vaji collect to provide him with a more accurate picture of Leo’s multicultural attitudes and professional skills? What are reasons for and against contacting Leo’s site supervisor for more information? Should he request that Leo’s sessions with clients be electronically taped or observed?
4. Is Dr. Vaji in a potentially unethical multiple relationship as both Leo’s externship supervisor and his teacher in the Health Disparities class? Why or why not?
5. To what extent, if any, should Dr. Vaji consider Leo’s own ethnicity in his deliberations? Would the dilemma be addressed differently if Leo self-identified as non-Hispanic white, Hispanic, or non-Hispanic black?
6. Once the dilemma is resolved, should Dr. Vaji have a follow-up meeting with the students who complained?
7. How are APA Ethical Standards 1.08, 3.04, 3.05, 3.09, 7.04, 7.05, and 7.06 and the Hot Topics “Ethical Supervision of Trainees” (Chapter 10) and “Multicultural Ethical Competence” (Chapter 5) relevant to this case? Which other standards might apply?
8. What are Dr. Vaji’s ethical alternatives for resolving this dilemma? Which alternative best reflects the Ethics Code aspirational principles and enforceable standards, legal standards, and obligations to stakeholders? Can you identify the ethical theory (discussed in Chapter 3) guiding your decision?
9. What steps should Dr. Vaji take to implement his decision and monitor its effect?