

Supervising Perfectionism: An Asian Balancing Act

Sharlene Wong

Projects Co-ordinator/Trainer

ABACUS Counselling, Training & Supervision Ltd

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Introduction

- Who is Asian?
- Common supervision themes incorporating ideas for interventions:
 - Balancing the Needs of Self and Others
 - Avoiding Burnout
 - Humility
 - Relationships with Authority
 - Passivity
 - Shame/Self Esteem at Work
- Conclusion





Who is Asian?

- ❑ Statistics NZ: "Asian people are the New Zealanders who identify with or feel they belong to one or more Asian ethnicities. The largest ethnicity among Asian people is Chinese, followed by Indian, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, Sri Lankan, Cambodian and Thai."
- ❑ 9.2% % of population identified as Asian in 2006 census. Estimated to grow to 16% by 2026 (Maori 14.6% 2006, estimated 17% 2026; PI 6.9% 2006, estimated 10% 2026).

Who is Asian?



- ❑ Asian population in NZ is growing and diverse. A challenge to keep informed on trends/issues.
- ❑ Consider:
Gender, place of birth, recentness of migration, religion/spirituality, position/hierarchy in family (including birth order, impact of one child policy)), exposure to other cultures (other ethnic influences, youth, gay feminist, internet community etc), education, parenting, life experiences, socioeconomic factors

Common Supervision Themes: Balancing the Needs of Self and Others

- Self
- Client needs
- Workplace standards/paperwork
- Supporting work colleagues and friends
- Responsibilities to (extended) family
- Community, church, volunteer work, environment

Recession may contribute to the scarcity of resources (eg, may stay in a job they don't enjoy for the pay, may reluctantly work overtime, may have childcare issues, may support elderly parents/grandparents)



Balancing the Needs of Self and Others

- ❑ Asians more likely to focus on collective wellbeing rather than individual wellbeing (similar to Maori/Pacific Island).
- ❑ Exploration: What do I want? What do others expect of me? What are my values? How will I manage not pleasing all?
- ❑ Confusion and guilt re choices.



Balancing the Needs of Self and Others

- ❑ Sacrifices may have been made for a better life for those that follow and for the collective good.
- ❑ May be more individualistic/autonomous than generations before and face difficult consequences as a result of choices.



Parts Party, “Two” Chair Work, Where do these messages come from?

Women should be looking after home and family only

I want to finish my degree and have a successful career

Women and men are equals and should contribute equally to income, housework, childcare

I’m tired and want to rest and do nothing!

Balancing the Needs of Self and Others

“I want to be a good mother but if I take domestic leave again they will think I am unreliable. My husband says family should come first but he won't take leave.”

“It was great to get the promotion but I think my husband is only happy about the money. His work is not going well at the moment. He was highly skilled back home but here they don't recognise his qualifications.”

“They say to accept the roster change and then we can send more money home but I don't want to work nights.”



Balancing the Needs of Self and Others

“I helped buddy the new staff and now I am behind in my own work.”

“I am not happy at work but if I get a different job it won't pay as well. I want to give my son a good education.”

“My parents are disappointed I am not using my degree. I feel I have let them down by choosing a job that is my passion yet doesn't pay much.”

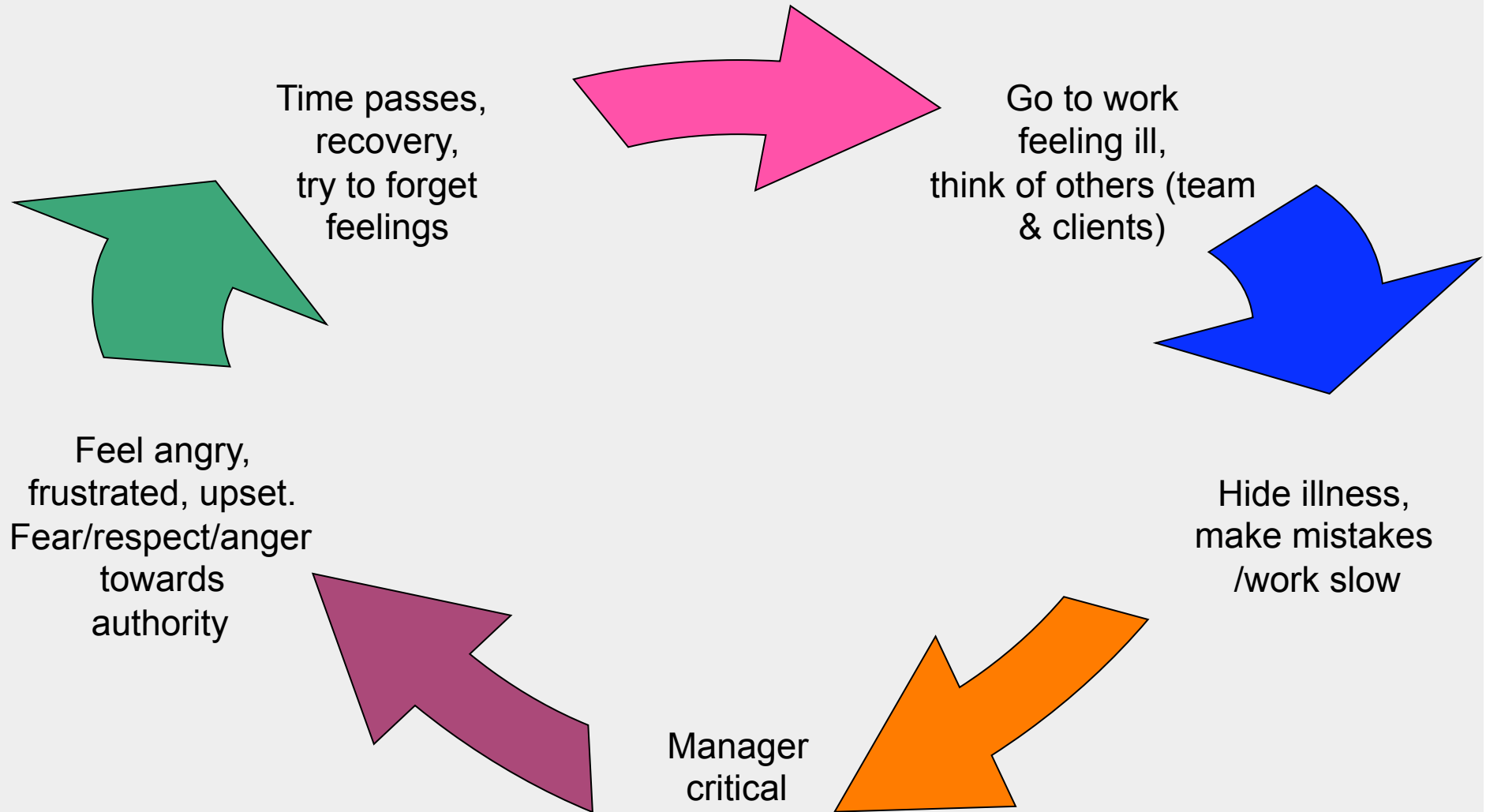


Balancing the Needs of Self and Others

“Our joint income cannot support us all. My parents say they will take our child back to China and care for her until she is five years old. They say they can care for her better than the childcare arrangement we have in NZ. I didn't think it would be so difficult to work fulltime and look after her. I am scared she won't remember me when she comes back.”



Supervisee: Sick Leave



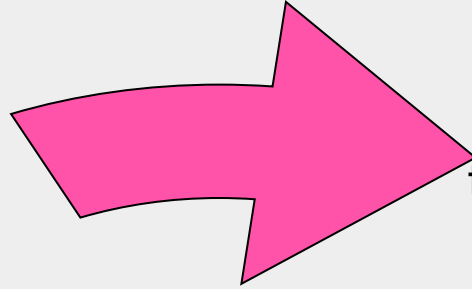
Common Supervision Themes: Avoiding Burnout

- Asians sometimes perceived as perfectionists. Likely to set high standards for themselves and others. High standards likely to have been modelled by elders. Pressure for children to succeed may be related to family sacrifices for migration process. Children may have early responsibilities to act as bridges to the new culture. Students may have been abandoned as parents look for work overseas, return to homeland.
- Failure to meet high standards may impact on self esteem.
- Self care may be sacrificed to meet the demands of others.
- Encourage reflection, positive self talk.

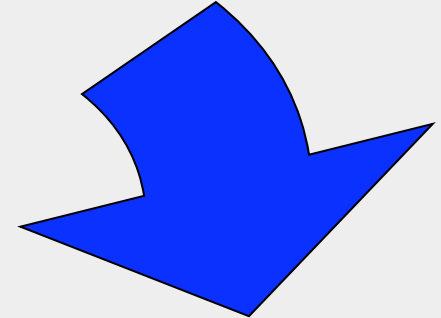




Time passes,
recovery

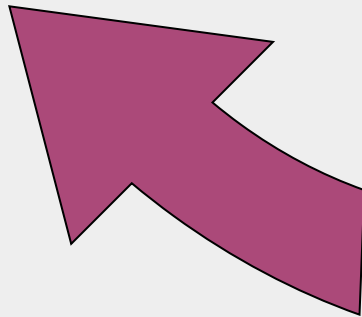


Feel ill, value self. Self
talk: cannot pour from an
empty vessel

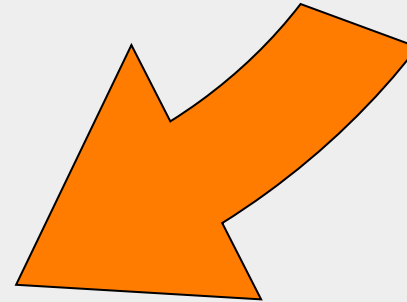


Call manager:
negotiate
sick leave or
alternative

Ignore or confront
critical remarks
re absence
(use supports)



Foster good
relationships
with work
colleagues



Common Supervision Themes: Avoiding Burnout

- ❑ If both supervisor and supervisee are Asian they may have similar experiences which can increase parallel processes and over-identification with client issues. Transference issues may also be complex. e.g., both may have experienced grief, adjustment issues, trauma history, stressors related to migration, both may easily feel shamed, or share experiences of racism; self esteem issues may be common arising from high standards.



Balancing Being Good Enough Using A Continuum

Can move up and down



Where do I sit? Where would I like to be? Where do others sit? What is acceptable for me? Realistic? Achievable? Where does this (work) culture sit?



0

50

100

Absolutely irresponsible

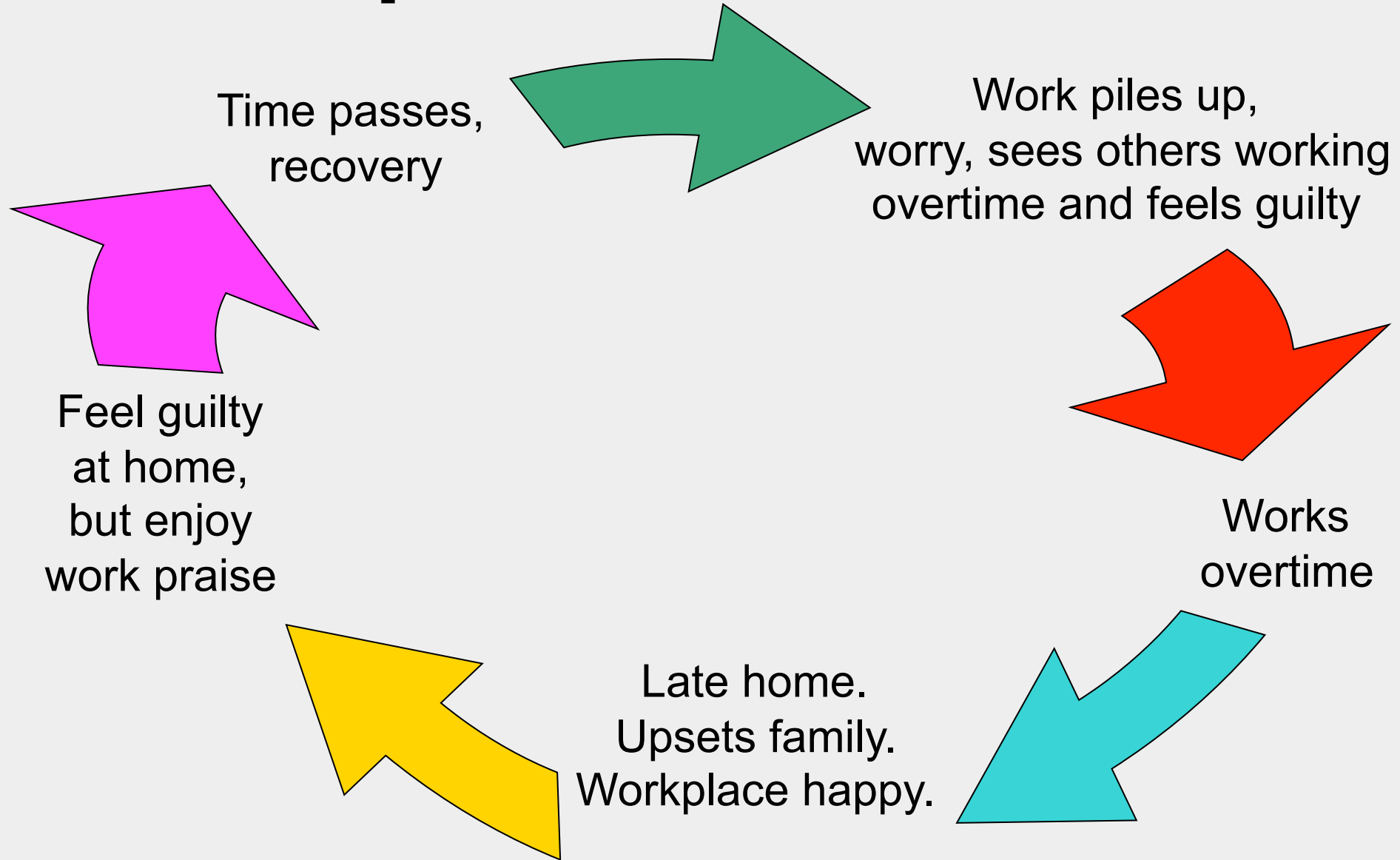
Late, frequent sick days, rude to clients and colleagues, failing to do job

Moderately responsible

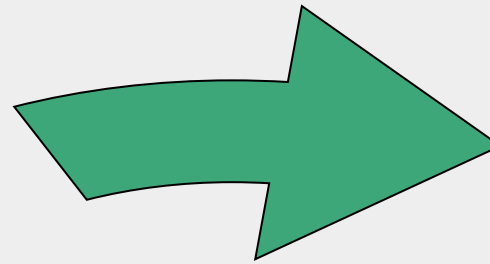
Absolutely responsible Unrealistic!

Overtime, never late, no sick days, always provide good service to clients, always in a good mood. paperwork always up to date, emails responses with hour, always help other staff

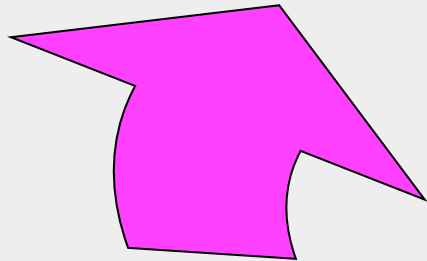
Supervisee: Overtime



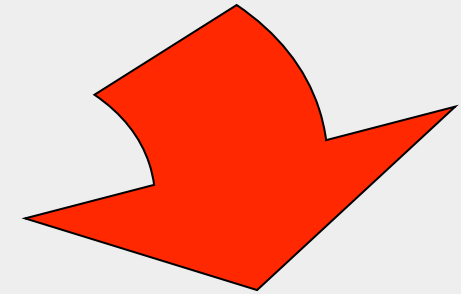
Time passes,
using supports and
stress management
techniques



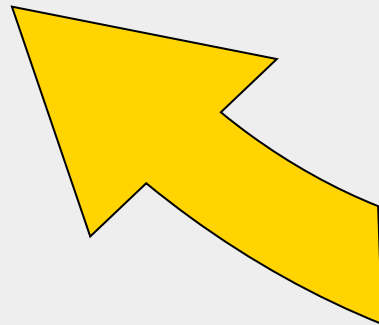
Work piles up, worry



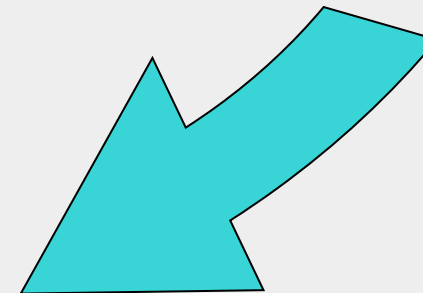
Family happy,
use strategies
to forget work



Remember
boundaries



Go home on
time



Common Supervision Themes: Humility

- Humility may hinder promotion, performance appraisals and job interviews.
- Concerns re being perceived as boastful.
- Fear of workplace jealousy or tall poppy syndrome.

“I shouldn't have to email my manager each week with 'my success stories'. They should notice I work hard. I spend a lot of my time doing the work of a colleague who has been sick lately.”



Pros and Cons (raise awareness, non-judgemental)

Good things about being humble

- Don't get a big head
- Others don't think you are a show-off
- Proud to be humble
- Not embarrassed about showing off

Not so good things about being humble

- Don't get recognition
- Don't get noticed
- Sometimes feel resentful if others are recognised for same work



Good things about highlighting good work

- Manager sees how hard I work
- Might get pay rise
- Might get promotion
- Manager might be more generous if I need time off later

Not so good things about highlighting good work

- Others might think I am a show off or a greaser
- Others might be jealous
- Manager might feel I am boasting

Common Supervision Themes: Relationship with Authority

- ❑ Possible resentment, frustration, anger, fear of confrontation, powerlessness, misunderstandings about well intended sacrifices.

“Can’t they see how hard I work.” (yet puts on brave, happy face.)

“I shouldn’t have to tell them I am at breaking point, a good employer would be able to see it.”

“I hid my injury... I couldn’t let the team down. My work was poor, now I am on my first warning!”

“ I didn’t feel it was my place to tell my managers how to do their job and that they were not being fair.”



Common Supervision Themes:

Passivity

- May not complain due to job insecurity. For example, English may be poor, may be an Asian specialist within a small field.
- May be employed beneath skill level due to language/cultural issues, qualifications may not be recognised in NZ
- May work hard but not complain out of loyalty to collective/colleagues. Don't want to "backstab" colleagues who are doing less.
- May not complain due to fear of authority.
- May not complain due to respect for authority.
- May not complain due to fear of losing face for not coping or being perceived as weak.



Common Supervision Themes: Passivity

- ❑ May not have the skills to confront or communication dissatisfaction and use passivity to assert power/frustrations.

“My manager said I couldn’t have leave during the school holidays but my co-worker could. I couldn’t be bothered arguing but decided I wasn’t gong to work as hard and wasn’t going to be as friendly as I was before.”

“If I didn’t agree with her decisions I just said yes, yes, but didn’t try very hard to complete the task. We had to look for research participants. I would ask the clients in a manner that said let the client know it wasn’t a good idea to give consent.”



Common Supervision Themes: Shame/Self Esteem at Work

- May be sensitive to criticism.
- "Be perfect" driver. May be own worst critic!
- Parents/elders may have used shame to control.
- Vulnerability to feeling shame and ashamed (of race, background, parents, loss of language, of being different... and ashamed of feeling ashamed and not proud!).
- Sensitivity, positive affirmation, non-judgemental attitudes, self awareness – all keys to healing/good self esteem, consciousness in decision making.



Shame/Self Esteem at Work

“It was hard starting a new job. I was the highest performer at my last position and now I feel like I am a failure every time I make a mistake.”

“I feel stupid. Someone who started working here at the same time as me understands the computer system while I am still confused.”

“When I took over the accounts of the previous worker some of the clients complained. They said they couldn't understand my accent. I felt ashamed and then I felt guilty for not being proud of my race.”



Conclusion

- Reflect and encourage self awareness.
- Encourage consciousness of the unconscious. Forgiving and understanding of parts the supervisee may be ashamed of having. Seek awareness of links to cultural messages.
- Highlight the impact of inadequate self care on self and others. Look for patterns.
- Explore conflicting cultural messages using techniques which do not degrade one culture and idealise another culture (non-judgemental).
- Emphasise “good enough” standards using scales rather than unobtainable standards. Affirm, highlight strengths.



Sharlene Wong
sharlene@acts.co.nz

