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### UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

### A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE PERCEPTIONS OF COUNSELING FACULTY REGARDING THE USE OF HUMOR IN CLINICAL SUPERVISION

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Ryan Cheuk Ming Cheung

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education
Counselor Education and Supervision

This Dissertation by: Ryan Cheuk Ming Cheung

Entitled: A Narrative Inquiry into the Perceptions of Counseling Faculty Regarding the Use of Humor in Clinical Supervision

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in the Department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education in the Counselor Education and Supervision program.

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee
Jennifer A. Fulling-Smith, Ph.D., Research Advisor
Heather M. Pendleton-Helm, Ph.D., Committee Member
Angela H. Weingartner, Ph.D., Committee Member
Linda L. Black, Ed.D., Committee Member
William D. Woody, Ph.D., Faculty Representative
Date of Dissertation Defense _11/01/2023
Accepted by the Graduate School
Jeri-Anne Lyons, Ph.D.

Jeri-Anne Lyons, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Associate Vice President for Research

#### **ABSTRACT**

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Students in counselor preparation programs are required to be clinically supervised by faculty when working with clients. Considering how to help supervisees and positively affect supervision outcomes, one method could be the use of humor by counseling supervisors.

Research in the area of humor in counseling supervision is largely missing (Dantzler, 2017; Vereen et al., 2006). A key task in supervision is building a strong working alliance (Bordin, 1983) which includes the development of an affective bond. Humor is a social strategy used to form emotional bonds (Erozkan, 2009), and the bond component of the working alliance is influenced by different personal characteristics such as emotional intelligence, which is related to humor (Gignac et al., 2014).

The present study explored counseling faculty perceptions of using humor in clinical supervision. More information is needed to determine the utility of humor in the supervision setting because it is important to understand what the perspectives clinical supervisors have regarding the goals, intentions, and uses of humor to examine the perceived benefits or drawbacks of humor in clinical supervision, and if humor should be included in clinical supervision to enhance the experience.

The research questions included the following. What perspectives do counseling faculty have of using humor in clinical supervision? and What are the perceived impacts counseling

faculty perceive from the use of humor in supervision? This qualitative study was grounded in narrative inquiry as people use stories to explain and make sense of experiences. A semi-structured interview and extended member check were conducted to collect data from each participant.

Eight participants shared their individual perceptions of the use of humor in clinical supervision and the common main themes were: Describing, when people defined what humor was, described the types of humor used, or explained what humor is to them, Implementing, when people discussed incidents of humor that went well or not so well and what they learned in addition to precautions they take when using humor, Impact, when people described how they perceive their humor impacted supervisees, and Context, when people discussed how their humor has changed. Participants reported similar perceptions regarding the use of and impact of humor in clinical supervision. If humor is used intentionally and supervisors are attuned to their supervisees, it generally is perceived to have a positive impact. Many types of humor appear to be effective and taking a developmental and contextual approach is important.

The present study was the start of the conversation about what humor looks like in clinical supervision and allows readers to understand the potential benefits and drawbacks that exist for both supervisors and supervisees, from the perspective of the clinical supervisors interviewed. Future research ideas that emerged from the present study include learning if collective humor exists where there is no risk of offending anyone, seeing if humor has the long-term effect of supervisees staying in contact, and a longitudinal study with the same group of participants to explore how humor relates to the experience of burnout. One study that could be done includes learning about the type of humor used based on the level of rapport. Another study

could consider when supervisors got trained and how it has an impact on their perspectives of		
humor.		

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### Shout out to:

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Thanks,

Ryan

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#### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTION

I provide an overview of recently published literature about humor along with a description of clinical supervision and why it is important to study humor in this context. I deliver an explanation of the problem that was addressed and why the present study is needed. Following this, I state the purpose and significance of the present study. Lastly, there is a description of who I am and how my identities may have impacted my approach to and process of research. I suggest future studies and list the definitions of terms used for the present study.

### **Background of the Problems**

#### Humor

Humor is universally experienced around the world (J. M. Gibson, 2019), and the ability to laugh is a nearly universal human experience (M. L. Apte, 1985; Lefcourt, 2001) with a strong evolutionary history (Polimeni & Reiss, 2006) and genetic components that can be inherited (Schermer et al., 2017; Vernon et al., 2008). The term *humor* is used in everyday language and in academia. Humor is studied internationally (G. Chen & Martin, 2005; Jovanovic, 2011) by scholars in many disciplines such as education (Tsukawaki & Imura, 2022), the workplace (Rosenberg et al., 2021), business communication (Sidelinger et al., 2021), medicine (Shirvan & Khodabakhshi-Koolaee, 2021), and psychology (Plessen et al., 2020). Using the Humor Styles Questionnaire (R. A. Martin et al., 2003) in the field of psychology, Schermer et al. (2019) found

in a consistent pattern across 28 countries. Each country tended to have higher affiliative humor (positive humor that improves cohesiveness) style scores compared to the remaining three humor styles scales (self-enhancing: relatively benign uses of humor to enhance the self, aggressive: use of humor to enhance the self at the expense of others, and self-defeating: use of humor to enhance relationships at the expense of self) based on R. A. Martin et al.'s (2003) model. Heintz et al. (2018) found across 22 countries that benevolent humor (i.e., an accepting attitude toward the world and human weaknesses) was more strongly endorsed than corrective humor (i.e., criticizing and mocking wrongdoings, misconduct, and moral transgressions).

Recently, there have been several developments in the research on humor. Dissertations in the past 5 years have looked at humor in the classroom (Critchlow, 2023; Wayne, 2021) as well as counseling (Karinen, 2019; Kneisel, 2019), supervision (Dantzler, 2017), and leadership (Emmanuel, 2018; O'Neal, 2019). Regarding published articles in recent years, the focus has been on the work environment (Bartzik et al., 2021; Rosenberg et al., 2021; Sidelinger et al., 2021; I. Yang et al., 2020), counseling (Azmi, 2021; Brooks et al., 2020; Casares & Gladding, 2020; Talens, 2020), people who are medical patients (Stiwi & Rosendahl, 2022), teaching (Tsukawaki & Imura, 2022), and caregiving (Heinsch et al., 2022).

Differences in humor exist as a function of personality (Plessen et al., 2020), sex (Greengross et al., 2020; Salavera et al., 2020), and countries (Heintz et al., 2020). Further, humor during COVID-19 (Reizer et al., 2022), how it impacts relationship satisfaction (Purol & Chopik, 2022), can it be detected by computers (Fan et al., 2020), and its use during presentations (Shoda & Yamanaka, 2021) has been explored. Despite the differences that exist, more people are becoming interested in what humor is and how significant it is to peoples' lives.

Since the 20th century, humor started being examined within the field of psychology (R. A. Martin, 1998). People continually explore what humor is, how it works, and how it differs between people and cultures (J. M. Gibson, 2019). Humor is both a universal phenomenon generally present across all known cultures (Fry, 1994) and is a concept difficult to define and study. The word *humor* is an umbrella term that encompasses different constructs such as humor as a personality trait or stimulus (Ruch, 1998). Many definitions of humor exist, and no single definition is accepted by all researchers. Humor is associated with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, psychophysiological, and social aspects (R. A. Martin, 2000) and can refer to a stimulus (e.g., a joke), mental process (e.g., perception of incongruity), or response (e.g., laughter; R. A. Martin, 2001). There are numerous theories of humor (i.e., psychoanalytic, incongruity, and humor styles), and benefits and drawbacks exist in many fields. While there is ample research on humor, there is little known research within the field of counselor education and supervision.

### **Supervision**

Clinical supervision is an evaluative intervention with the aim of monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the clients and gatekeeping for the profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). While the term *clinical supervision* is used within the field of counselor education and supervision (CES), I used the term counseling supervision or supervision for the rest of the present study to make it clear to all readers that I am referring to clinical supervision in counseling and keeping the terminology consistent. Bernard and Goodyear (2019) have proposed that a key task in early supervision is building a strong working alliance. Bordin (1983) defined the supervisory working alliance to consist of three critical aspects: tasks, goals, and

bond. A supervisor and supervisee agree on the goals and tasks of supervision and develop a strong emotional bond.

One factor that predicts an effective supervisory alliance is the strength and growth of the relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Supervisors are responsible for maintaining the alliance between themselves and their supervisees throughout the course of the relationship (Nelson et al., 2001). In this supervisory relationship, a supervisee tends to become emotionally closer to their supervisor as part of what is typically discussed during this time are very personal topics, while being in an evaluative relationship.

Several pre-licensed counselors (i.e., supervisees) in Byrd's (2022) study noted that having contact with their supervisor about topics outside of the specific content of supervision was meaningful. The presence of humor was perceived as being a part of effective supervision and building rapport as it felt less like a "business all the time" relationship and instead one where supervisees could stop and have some fun for a while (p. 56). In Beinart's (2002) study exploring the factors which predict the quality of the relationship in counseling supervision, among the nine categories of the supervisory relationship and their defining features, one was *supportive*, which included a sense of humor. Characteristics of a healthy supervisory relationship include a sense of humor as appropriate, and a sense of humor (even in the face of crisis; Northwest Frontier Addiction Technology Transfer Center [NFATTC], 2005).

One avenue to work on building a strong working alliance in supervision is to develop an affective bond with supervisees (Bordin, 1983), and humor is a social strategy that can be used to form emotional bonds (Erozkan, 2009). Some ways supervisees have felt strongly bonded in the supervisory relationship is a supervisor's use of humor, clear communication, and warm nonverbals defined as "supervisors whose facial expressions and ways of communicating

nonverbally felt warm and welcoming to participants" (Heinrich, 2018, p. 116). Heinrich (2018) found through humor that supervisees felt more connected with shared humor, were more open, and used more humor themselves. The use of humor within the supervisory relationship helped give supervisees "permission" to be themselves (p. 115). The supervisor's use of humor was a connecting point, a source of strength in their bond to support more difficult conversations, and a "disarming" way to connect with their supervisee throughout the supervisory relationship (p. 114). Supervisors that maintain a sense of balance, humility, and humor are more equipped to manage challenges in the supervisory relationship (Beinart, 2014).

The effects of having a strong working alliance in supervision include supervisee satisfaction with supervision, willingness to disclose to their supervisors, and higher superviseerated supervision outcomes (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Given that counseling supervision is relational and that humor builds relationships, exploring how faculty supervisors understand humor in counseling supervision is an important first step in counselor education.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Counselor education is an academic discipline focused on training and preparing professional counselors (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016). When a student is in a counselor preparation program, they are required to be supervised when working with clients. Supervision in this educational context is an evaluative intervention provided by a faculty member, doctoral student, or site supervisor, with the aim of monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the clients and gatekeeping for the profession the supervisee seeks to enter (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019).

A current problem in research on humor in clinical supervision has been that there has been little known how faculty supervisors have experienced the success or failure of

incorporating humor into supervision. "One characteristic often discussed in theoretical works of supervision, but rarely mentioned in more empirical works, is sense of humor, or use of humor" (Hansel, 2006, p. 11). Faculty supervisors may be using humor in a harmful way or choosing not to use it despite the benefits. By not considering how humor is occurring and what it might be doing, supervisors are glossing over opportunities to deepen the supervision process or misunderstanding how humor works. Akin to the field of evaluation, how do we know if what we are doing is actually doing what we think it is doing? While using humor in any specific moment may not be an intentional thought of faculty (i.e., planning to insert a joke after they discuss something with their supervisee), their openness to it can be a factor toward how it shows up in supervision. Just as therapeutic humor is both intentional and unintentional (Franzini, 2001), supervision humor can be the same. Without a better understanding of humor use in supervision, we are left with a black box where humor occurs for some reason and with some effect.

### **Need for Study**

By examining how people who hold roles as counselor educators and supervisors perceive the use of humor in supervision, foundational insight of how faculty supervisors understand the methods, mechanisms, and potential effects of humor in supervision can be created. Future studies can now build toward understanding the actual effects and outcomes of using humor in supervision. When considering how to help supervisees and positively affect supervision outcomes, one method could be the use of humor by counseling supervisors. The present study helped fill in this gap and expand the existing literature in our understanding of the potential use of humor in the supervision process.

There is also a need to learn about how humor may affect the supervisory working alliance (Dantzler, 2017) because a study providing insight on how humor might affect the working alliance is both beneficial and informative in the CES field. It is important for counselor educators to stay current on what may help supervisees become more effective since "the personal development of professional counselors and supervisees is an important objective of counselor education programs and the counseling profession" (J. S. Myers et al., 2003, p. 264). Although the training of a counselor may be relatively brief in the academic context, the impact of counseling supervision is long lasting (S. Bennett et al., 2013). The present study is important because faculty are arguably the people who have the most important impact on counselors-intraining (CITs) in the beginning of their training and a lot of what licensed counselors learn is taught to them during their university training to become counselors (H. Abel et al., 2012).

"There is much to learn about humor and its effectiveness or ineffectiveness in clinical supervision" (Dantzler, 2017, p. 11). Prior to investigating outcomes of the use of humor in supervision, it is important to look at what supervisors are choosing to do, why, and what they think the results are of what they do. This provides a foundation to understand how supervisors think they are using humor first and provides a rich narrative for future studies to follow. This is important because the present study helped conceptualize what supervisors are trying to do or avoid with the use or disuse of humor. Therefore, a study exploring the perspectives and perceived impact of humor use in supervision was important to conduct.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study explored counseling faculty perceptions of using humor in clinical supervision. A key task in supervision is building a strong working alliance (Bordin, 1983) which includes the development of an affective bond. Humor is a social strategy used to form

emotional bonds (Erozkan, 2009) and the bond component of the working alliance is influenced by different personal characteristics such as emotional intelligence, which is related to humor (Gignac et al., 2014).

Humor is a clinical tool and an important ingredient in the "didactic experience of counselors-in-training" (Vereen et al., 2006, p. 10). Similar to Kneisel's (2019) development of a humour-based therapeutic programme, the present study contributes towards the development of a new tool to train doctoral students (current supervisors and future faculty supervisors) what humor in supervision can look like and how best to utilize it. Supervisors act as role models to supervisees and so can model to counselors how to use humor with clients (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014).

To date, previous literature in counseling has explored the use of humor in the context of the client-counselor relationship (Fry & Salameh, 1987; Goldin & Bordan, 1999; Kubie, 1970; Norcross & Lambert, 2018). Humor can strengthen the relationship between the client and counselor (Franzini, 2001), build trust (Ventis, 1987), improve communication (Dziegielewski et al., 2003), reduce client defensiveness (Lusterman, 1992), alleviate client anxiety (Gladding & Wallace, 2016), and facilitate perspective-taking (Sheesley et al., 2016). However, research in the area of counseling supervision is largely missing (Dantzler, 2017; Vereen et al., 2006).

With the empirical and anecdotal benefits of humor (to be discussed in detail in Chapter II), the present study explored faculty perceptions of humor use in the context of counseling supervision in order to build an understanding of the potential implementations and implications humor has. By exploring other ways of being or components of supervision that have yet to be examined, supervisors can continue to practice based on current knowledge of best practices in supervision (see more in the following significance of the study section). This qualitative study

was grounded in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as people use stories to explain and make sense of experiences. By interviewing each participant, a more contextual and deeper understanding of the use of humor in supervision was gained to answer the following questions.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in the present study were:

- Q1 What perspectives do counseling faculty have of using humor in clinical supervision?
- Q2 What are the perceived impacts counseling faculty have of the use of humor in supervision?

### Significance of the Study

By answering these questions, I believe supervisors are better informed and able to offer better supervision. In the *Standards for Counseling Supervisors* (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES], 1990) that outline personal traits of effective supervisors, standard 2.2.5 states "the counseling supervisor possesses a sense of humor" (p. 30). Although humor was not mentioned in the *Best Practices in Clinical Supervision* (ACES, 2011), the following best practices may be addressed by using humor in supervision and conducting the present study:

- 5.a.3. The supervisor continually seeks to enhance his/her self-awareness around supervisor traits/characteristics/factors that influence the supervisory relationship (e.g., cultural sensitivity, attachment style), based on current literature.
- 5.b.1. The supervisor gives deliberate attention to creating a safe environment that fosters mutual trust.

- 5.b.3. The supervisor deals with supervisee resistance in productive ways, using culturally appropriate strategies to guide, challenge, and encourage supervisees.
- 5.b.4. The supervisor seeks to lessen supervisee anxiety that is detrimental to supervision while recognizing that some anxiety is inevitable, normal, and positively related to supervisee growth.
- 5.b.5. The supervisor encourages the supervisee to work outside her/his comfort zone by taking clinically appropriate risks and expanding his/her counseling approaches.
- 5.b.8. The supervisor attends to strains, gaps, and/or ruptures to the working alliance and/or conflicts in the supervisor relationship in ways that create an opportunity for learning and growth for both the supervisor and supervisee. Importantly, the supervisor takes responsibility for his/her own contribution to the rupture or conflict.
- 5.c.2. The supervisor is aware of the power differential inherent in the supervisory relationship and is transparent about this with the supervisee. The supervisor works to minimize the power differential while at the same time maintaining appropriate authority.
- 7.b.4. The supervisor is engaged in ongoing continuing education in supervision and other professional development activities, including reading current literature on the conduct of supervision.
- 11.a.12. The supervisor incorporates elements of other supervisory styles if his/her preferred style of supervision does not enhance or challenge the supervisee's professional development and growth to the fullest.
- 11.d.6. The supervisor regularly reads research and other scholarly literature about supervision, and bases his/her supervision practice on current knowledge of best practices in supervision.

11.d.10. The supervisor has the courage to be imperfect and not expect perfection from self, the supervisee, and others.

11.d.13. The supervisor engages in critical self-reflection and self-care, and avoids professional stagnation and burnout. (pp. 7-15)

The present study showed what humor in supervision can look like. Given that humor is culturally bound (T. Jiang et al., 2019) and power dynamics exists in supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019), the present study informs whether an intervention thought to foster rapport can do so despite being so contextual. Can humor bridge a gap between supervisor and supervisee? The majority of research related to humor exists in the field of psychology (Dantzler, 2017) where it is seen as a positive wellness characteristic (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979) and an important element of counselor wellness (Gladding, 2007). It is important to look at humor in counseling supervision because humor can be used in a beneficial or hurtful way to communicate (Huo et al., 2012) and how it is understood and perceived by supervisors in counseling supervision remains unknown.

In the field of counseling there is a need to examine humor and how it may impact supervisees. It is important to understand what the humor used by faculty supervisors looks like and what is thought to come about from its use to examine the appropriateness or effectiveness of humor in counseling supervision, and if humor should be addressed in counseling supervision. The present study helps multiple populations of people as the research not only helps supervisors, but it can also impact supervisees and the clients they work with. This contributes to the larger field of counseling. The findings of future studies may be extrapolated to humor having an impact on different fields and corroborate the existing empirical benefits that exist across different professional settings (i.e., healthcare).

The aim of the present study was to explore humor in counseling supervision by understanding how faculty in counseling programs in the United States perceive humor in supervision. This includes what humor in supervision looks like (e.g., jokes, personal anecdotes, witty quips, irony), when it is used, and how faculty understand the effects of humor use (e.g., increased connection with supervisees or a moment of respite for supervisees). The purpose of exploring the nature and context of humor used by clinical supervisors was to foster better supervisors by first learning what faculty perceptions are. One way to define humor is "liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 30). This present study aimed to provide a better understanding of what humor looks like in supervision and to help build an understanding of other ways of being or other components of supervision that have not yet been articulated, but also to uncover potential benefits and drawbacks of using humor in supervision. Due to the qualitative nature of the present study, it is important to first understand who I am as a person and researcher.

### **Assumptions and Subjectivities**

I hold a long-term interest in the use of humor in personal and professional contexts. I have a degree in positive psychology and have humor as one of my top five-character strengths (i.e., aspects of one's personality). I have attended courses on improv for 6 weeks and humor (i.e., Steve Martin and Judd Apatow's MasterClass) in addition to completing training on the therapeutic uses of humor (i.e., a 2 1/2 day workshop). I have attended an academic conference on humor and published my master's thesis on humor used by the counselor. Further, I use humor in my own teaching, counseling, and supervision work. I believe supervisors use humor differently when in a one-on-one context compared to a one on group context (i.e., group

supervision) and that there are benefits and drawbacks to its use. For example, I am continuing to work on the appropriate timing and intentional use of humor as I can use humor when feeling uncomfortable and habitually laugh at seemingly inappropriate times while also being perceived as being funny when not trying to be. Despite being open to hearing various perspectives on humor, I assumed that given my aforementioned background in humor, I would be hearing more about how humor is perceived as beneficial in supervision. This may have led to me probing more into how humor is thought to help supervisees compared to how it has not helped or done nothing. I also have a higher level of interest in intentional uses of humor by supervisors and so wanted to be sure for the present study to also learn about how supervisors may facilitate humor occurring in supervision. By making intentional choices about what I am studying and who I am wanting to hear from, my study had parameters, meaning there are limits to what I will be able learn based on being specific about who I will be talking to.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

I recruited participants teaching in counseling specific programs because I wanted to generate research specific to supervision in my own field of counselor education and supervision. I did not want to limit participants to only CES programs as different schools may have different wording (i.e., counselor education, counseling) to describe the same type of program. Further, this opened up participants to share their own experiences of supervising graduate students. I only recruited English speaking participants because I was interviewing them and that is the language that I know.

A limitation to only recruiting English speaking participants was that I missed out on perceptions from people who may have had more diverse perspectives and experiences. Since all the participants will have doctoral degrees, the present study is missing perspectives of

supervisors with different educational backgrounds that could be of interest. It is likely that most of the supervision my participants have conducted was within academia and that they supervise graduate students differently in a learning focused academic environment as compared to out in the field. By only interviewing faculty, I missed the perceptions that general clinical supervisors have and may not have uncovered power dynamics related to how humor is perceived and received by supervisees. I did not uncover how supervisees perceive faculty humor use and so did not find out what the actual impact is, only the intentions and perspectives of supervisors. Additionally, I got only one side of a dyadic process (supervision), and social desirability may have occurred when I interviewed participants.

By being open to experiences with doctoral and master students, participants might have conflated experiences, meaning they may mix up which level of student they are referring to when talking about humor in supervision. Further, as my results came from the narratives of participants interviewed at a specific point in time, the details of events may be inaccurate as events they describe may have occurred years in the past. Finally, my role as the principal investigator and interviewer of this present study can be a limitation as my own biases may have entered and skewed interview follow up questions and data collected.

#### Conclusion

Humor is a global phenomenon (J. M. Gibson, 2019) studied in many disciplines, and generally present across all known cultures (Fry, 1994). There are many definitions of humor, making it difficult to define and study. And although there is much research on humor, little of this research exists within the field of counselor education and supervision. While there is research on laughter in group supervision (Hutchby & Dart, 2018) and supervisees' perceptions of doctoral supervisors' use of humor (Dantzler, 2017), there is currently no known literature

exploring perceptions counseling faculty have of the use of humor in supervision. We do not know much about how faculty supervisors have experienced the success or failure of incorporating humor into supervision and the goals, intentions, and uses of humor they have. Hence, the present study investigated the perspectives counseling faculty have of the use of humor in clinical supervision. Humor can foster relationships (Erozkan, 2009) and, therefore, may build the supervisory working alliance. And supervisors can model to supervisees how to use humor with their clients (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014). Therefore, the results of the present study have the potential to impact the effectiveness of supervision and inform counselor educators on how to train others.

The following sections include a review of the literature (Chapter II), the methodology of the proposed study (Chapter III), the results (Chapter IV), and a discussion of findings (Chapter V). In the literature review I first describe what humor is and differences that exist across cultures. Details about humor such as theories, general benefits and risks will follow. Finally, I discuss the effects of humor found across multiple disciplines leading up to why it is important to study humor in clinical supervision within the field of counseling. I describe in the methodology who and how faculty participants will be recruited and how narrative inquiry was implemented for the present study.

#### **Definitions and Terms**

Clinical Supervision [counseling supervision or supervision]. "Supervision is an intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior colleague or colleagues who typically (but not always) are members of that same profession" (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019, p. 9).

Counseling. "Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals" (K. M. Kaplan et al., 2014, p. 368).

*Note:* Counseling, therapy, and psychotherapy are used interchangeably, because distinctions among these terms are artificial and serve little function (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019).

Counseling Faculty. An instructor teaching in a counseling program.

- *Humor [playfulness]*. "Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 30).
- *Laughter*: An auditory and verbal response (Rogerson-Revell, 2011) to the speaker's intention to be humorous (Holmes & Marra, 2002a).
- Sense of Humor. "Sense of humor is a multi-faceted construct which is best viewed as a class of loosely related traits" (R. A. Martin et al., 2003, p. 49) such as a cognitive ability, aesthetic response, habitual behavior pattern, emotion-related temperament trait, attitude, coping strategy or defense mechanism, and so on.

Workplace. Any place where people work (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

#### CHAPTER II

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Before exploring humor use in supervision, it is important to first gain a better understanding of what humor is or can be. In the review of the literature, I start with describing how humor came to be, its existence across cultures, and the broad differences between and within cultures. A description of the different types of humor and humor theories in addition to the difficulty of defining what humor is follows. Next, I explain the general benefits, risks, and factors related to humor. Finally, I discuss the effects of humor in different disciplines, which leads into the relevance of humor in counselor education and rationale for the present study.

### **Humor Beginnings**

Humor might originate from our earliest mammalian ancestors about 60 million years ago (R. A. Martin, 2007/2010). For example, Köhler (1925) believed that the chimpanzee named Sultan laughed at him. Based on brain studies indicating that laughter originates in the same brain areas as other primates, human laughter was likely to have developed before language, which began about two million years ago (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). Infants begin to laugh at about 4 months old and even children born deaf and blind laugh without ever having perceived laughter in others (Black, 1984). Since the 20th century, humor started being examined within the field of psychology using Freudian theories (Freud, 1905/1980), followed by empirical research in the second half of the century. People continually explore what humor is, how it works, and how it differs between people and cultures (J. M. Gibson, 2019).

#### **Humor Differences in Culture**

Humor is a universal phenomenon present in all known cultures (Fry, 1994), but there are cultural differences in the way that individuals perceive humor and how it is expressed (T. Jiang et al., 2019). People have different relationships with humor (i.e., how they appreciate or use it) and this can be correlated to aspects such as culture, personality type, and emotional state (R. A Martin, 2007/2010). Of note is that theory drives the majority of cross-cultural comparisons and that a Western culture generates most of the humor theories (Flaskerud, 2017). As remarked by R. A. Martin and Ford (2018):

Humor is a universal human activity that most people experience many times over the course of a typical day and in all sorts of social contexts. At the same time, there are obviously important cultural influences on the way humor is used and the situations that are considered appropriate for laughter. (p. 30)

#### **International**

Humor styles (R. A. Martin et al., 2003) correlate with personality and mental health variables and so provide unique insight into individual differences. When comparing across countries, some country samples demonstrate differences in mean scores on the Humor Styles Questionnaire (R. A. Martin et al., 2003), indicating differences in the type of humor used. For example, the samples from Hungary, Indonesia, South Africa, and Serbia have high self-enhancing scores and Japan scored the lowest. This means that across countries, Japan appears to use humor that is positive and self-oriented (self-enhancing) the least. However, Schermer et al.'s (2019) findings suggest more similarities than differences between countries.

Hall (1976) introduced the concepts of high-context culture and low-context culture.

These refer to how important contextual cues are in interpreting a message. High context cultures

have a communication style based on body language, tone, and overall context; while low context cultures are more straightforward and explicit in communication. Lee (1994) stated humor is the most challenging form of intercultural communication because contextual cues are often part of the humor itself and so not stated. "Humour deeply rooted in culture, linguistic knowledge or 'insider' perspectives usually fails to cross over the cultural abyss" (p. 25).

Andrew (2010) showed international samples of comedy and humorous media to groups of university students and found nonverbal and context general examples like *Mr. Bean* or *Jackass* are more likely to be enjoyed with a wider range of audiences. "The types of humor which do not require specialized language, background knowledge or culture specific themes and artefacts are more successful over a diverse demographic" (Andrew, 2010, p. 31). In a study on punch lines in television comedies, Zhang (2019) concluded:

Punch lines in American comedy in low context culture largely depend on vocabulary and syntax, that is, speech itself. However, punch lines of Chinese comedy in high context culture need to be understood from many aspects such as environment, identity, status, relationship and so on. (p. 8)

Other studies comparing humor across countries include Proyer et al. (2009) who examined gelotophobia (i.e., the fear of being laughed at) across 73 countries and Heintz (2017) and Heintz et al. (2020) who investigated corrective and benevolent humor across 22 and 25 countries. A meta-analysis conducted by Schneider et al. (2018) compared the relationships between mental health and humor styles and considered geographic region (North America, Europe, and Asia) as a moderator of humor. Outcomes of this study include health-promoting humor styles being positively correlated with mental health, self-defeating humor (i.e., self-

deprecation) being negatively correlated with mental health, and aggressive humor (verbally harming someone) being unrelated to mental health.

#### East vs. West

Previous literature has shown that the East and West of the world differ in humor perception (G. Chen & Martin, 2007) and usage (F. Jiang et al., 2011). Jiang et al. (2019) conducted a study on cultural differences in humor perception, usage, and implications, and found differences impact psychological well-being. Many cultures demonstrate using humor as a coping mechanism (serving as a way to contend with unpleasant aspects of reality; Mishkinsky, 1977), while others (e.g., Singaporeans) show a weaker relationship of humor and coping (G. N. Martin & Sullivan, 2013).

#### West vs. West

G. N. Martin and Sullivan (2013) reported that British participants had more negative views of humorous people than American and Australia, and American participants used humor more in social situations than British participants. When comparing humor on television, the United Kingdom favors sarcasm, dry humor, and the use of puns, whereas the United States favors humor that brings people together and humor based on the juxtaposition of incompatible or contradictory elements (J. M. Gibson, 2019). Lundquist (2013) found that French people prefer wordplay and consider humor as unprofessional, whereas Danish people prefer irony and satire and frequently use humor in the workplace.

Humor exists across the globe and culture plays a significant role in the type of humor a person enjoys, the type of humor used, and what humor is used for. Despite recruiting a sample based in America for the present study, it is still important to consider people's experiences and

culture as these can shape their use of humor in supervision. Given that my sample is based in one country, it is important to explore how humor differs within a culture.

#### Within Cultures

When humor researchers have examined subcultures within a country or geographic region, Nevo (1984, 1985) found that Jewish people (compared to Arab people) preferred aggressive humor where Arabs were the target of jokes. Otherwise, both groups showed similar preferences for jokes. In both Mexico and Peru, it is not socially acceptable to challenge racial humor. Sue and Golash-Boza (2013) found how racial humor among minority Black residents of Mexico and Peru works to maintain a color-blind ideology (minimizing or negating the existence of racism) as people tend to "go along" with jokes, frame racial humor as benign, and use laughter to "soften" racism.

When investigating sarcasm in the United States, Marcello (2012) explained how it is difficult to classify sarcasm between being an effective communication technique, an immature style of humor, or both. People in the northern U.S. tend to be more direct and find the use of irony and sarcasm to be humorous whereas people in the southern U.S. tend to have an assumed politeness and see the use of sarcasm as a violation of this (Dress et al., 2008). Contextually these differences affect what is interpreted when sarcasm is used. Even after zooming into a country, differences in humor still exist indicating that culture is not a factor that accounts for all the variance in humor.

# **Humor Differences in Gender**

Another way to group and compare humans besides where they live is who they are.

Looking at between group differences on a variable that is less impacted by the external environment may offer more similarities as to how humor works and is understood.

In studies that dichotomize sex and gender, researchers (e.g., Greengross et al., 2020; Salavera et al., 2020) have found differences between biological sex (females and males) regarding humor production. Biological sex predicts the production, preference, value, and outcome for types of humor as described below (McCosker & Moran, 2012; Thomas et al., 2015).

#### **Production**

Across cultures, males have been found to produce humor more often (M. L. Apte, 1985) that is aggressive and self-defeating (Wu et al., 2016; Yip & Martin, 2006) and tend to tell jokes. Where women tend to employ humorous anecdotes (Crawford & Gressley, 1991). The four humor styles are:

Relatively benign uses of humor to enhance the self (Self-enhancing) and to enhance one's relationships with others (Affiliative), use of humor to enhance the self at the expense of others (Aggressive), and use of humor to enhance relationships at the expense of self (Self-defeating). (R. A. Martin et al., 2003, p. 48)

R. A. Martin et al. (2003) reported significant sex differences for each of the four humor style scales. Using t tests to compare across sex, men scored higher means than women for each humor style. Salavera et al. (2020) also found that males used the four humor styles more than females. Schermer et al. (2019) found that men and women did not differ significantly on the affiliative humor style scores, but men were found to score higher on the aggressive, the self-enhancing, and the self-defeating humor style scales. The social stereotypes that "women are not funny" is culturally pervasive in America (Hitchens, 2007; Shlesinger, 2017). Greengross et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis including 28 studies published between 1976 and 2018 found based on a random-effects model that men's humor output was rated as funnier than women's. To test for

possible sex bias, the author's dichotomously coded if the first author was a man (24) or a woman (12) and if it was a single-sex team (12 all male publications). Of the 12 studies conducted by men only, all samples contained women and men.

### **Preference**

Men show a stronger preference for disparagement humor (remarks intended to elicit amusement through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of someone else; Ferguson & Ford, 2008) when compared to women (Dyck & Holtzman, 2013), whereas women prefer affiliative humor, which enriches one's relationships with others (Lefcourt et al., 1990). Gilligan's (1982) theory of feminine morality explained that the differences between women and men center on a tendency for men to think that if they know themselves, they will also know women, and for women to think that if they know others, they will come to know themselves. This results in relationships being built where women do not voice their experiences.

When answering a humor question, it was found that men enjoy aggressive humor (answering yes to "Are you likely to enjoy a joke even if it makes fun of a racial or minority group?") jokes, and cartoons more than women (Crawford & Gressley, 1991, p. 223). Regarding the natural occurrence of laughter in everyday life, R. A. Martin and Kuiper (1999) found no overall difference in the frequency of laughter between women and men; however, women laughed significantly more at humor in spontaneous social situations.

### Value of Humor

Across cultures, with heteronormative assumptions, a sense of humor is more desirable for men to have as it is an attractive quality to women (Lippa, 2007; Sprecher & Regan, 2002; Todosijević et al., 2003; Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003). However, one study found no difference (McGee & Shevlin, 2009), and another found the opposite trend (Antonovici & Turliuc, 2017).

Weisfeld et al. (2011) found that the higher the frequency of humor produced by a wife, the higher the husband's marital satisfaction ratings. It is important to note that while the couples were located across China, Russia, Turkey, U.K., and U.S.A, they were most likely heterosexual couples compared to studies containing samples of married couples in the present since in 2011 heterosexual couples were the only ones with federal rights to marry.

E. Bressler et al. (2006), with heteronormative worldviews, specifically tested whether women prefer men who produce versus appreciate humor. This is similar to gaining an understanding if a woman prefers a partner who tells jokes to someone who appreciates the jokes that they make. What they found was women preferred men who produced humor while men preferred women who would appreciate their humor. These results show the importance of understanding how people define and experience humor.

#### **Outcomes of Humor**

Haydon et al. (2015) found between nurses and their patients that women use situation bound humor (i.e., humor in the context of specific events) to reassure others while men use stories and anecdotal humor (i.e., storytelling and jokes) to establish a sense of equalizing power between themselves and nurses in a regional hospital. Women use humor to foster solidarity and cope with topics outside of the present context whereas men use humor to cope with the immediate situation (Hay, 2000). Williams (2009) found that men use humor to communicate and tend to use humor to express concerns and fear about their health, to hide embarrassment, and to avoid emotional intimacy.

Although M. L. Apte (1985) found across cultures that males produce more of certain types of humor, from exploring dichotomized sex differences, there are mixed findings as to whether a person's sex impacts their humor. This solidifies there are humor differences all the

way down no matter how you group people. Therefore, it is important to understand each person's perspectives on humor. For these reasons, it is difficult to generalize humor differences or gain an understanding of what humor is.

## **Difficulty in Defining and Studying Humor**

The present study explored counseling faculty perceptions of using humor in clinical supervision. Humor is universally experienced and understood yet difficult to define. There is debate about what humor is (Ruch & McGhee, 2014) and "an all-encompassing, generally accepted definition of humor does not exist" (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, p. 49) because the phenomenon is so complex that no single definition would suffice (Moran, 2013). Humor is subjective, and individuals do not always agree on what they find funny. Further, what a person finds funny can "differ from individual to individual, from time to time, and may be affected by context, culture, and numerous other factors" (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019, p. 914).

One way humor is defined is that it is something that most people believe they know when they see (Godfrey, 2016). For the present study, Peterson and Seligman's (2004) definition of humor was used to explore humor in the context of supervision: "liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes" (p. 30). This definition is used because it views humor as a virtue that every human possesses in addition to being an active process. A subsequent issue of humor being difficult to define is that it is difficult to study.

Scientific theories define the conditions that are both necessary and sufficient for a given phenomenon to occur. Theories of humor do not have these conditions that facilitate the development of an encompassing definition and understanding of humor. This makes humor difficult to study. Individuals usually build on each other's previous statements in a complex

manner, creating a highly interactive interplay of clever exchanges that people view as humor.

Approximately 72% of humorous interactions were found in spontaneous conversations (R. A. Martin & Kuiper, 1992) which were, in turn, linked to the context of the conversation (Bertrand & Priego-Valverde, 2011).

Grieg (1923) listed 88 different psychological theories of humor, where most of them were only slightly different. "There are very few judges of humor, and they don't agree" (as cited in Esar, 1949, p. 38). This also carries over into the realm of computers and AI (artificial intelligence) where situations that are commonplace in humor language may be difficult to detect with simple sequential models (Fan et al., 2020). Due to its complex nature, there is no comprehensive and universally accepted definition of humor.

Despite the benefits, Crawford (2003) noted that perceptions of humor can differ along cultural, racial, and gender identities. What someone might view as humorous another person might find offensive (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Humor can get different reactions because where a joke is told makes it contextual (Gray & Ford, 2013). Is the social context a comedy club or workplace? Social norms, atmosphere, and group membership determine how individuals classify humor as appropriate or inappropriate and whether there is an appreciation of it (J. C. Meyer, 2000). Although social exchange norms may appear to be universal, individual reactions to such norms can differ substantially (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The effect of humor depends not only on the person using it but, on the perceiver, as well (Cooper, 2008; Wisse & Riezschel, 2014). Given how important context is when it comes to humor, the present study took this into account by utilizing a narrative inquiry approach.

The aim of the present study was to explore the perceptions of using humor in supervision. Doing so created an understanding of how faculty in counseling programs in the

United States understand the use of humor in supervision. This includes how humor in supervision is used (e.g., jokes or personal anecdotes), when it is used, and how faculty understand the effects of humor use (i.e., increased connection or a moment of respite). The goal of exploring the nature and context of humor used by clinical supervisors was to enhance the experience of supervision. The present study provided a better understanding of what humor looks like in supervision. It helped build an understanding of other ways of being or other components of supervision that have not yet been articulated, but also might uncover potential benefits and drawbacks of using humor in supervision. While there are many definitions of humor, it can be helpful to gain a better understanding of examples of it to help develop your own conceptualization and learn how other people understand what it is. This is also why I had participants define humor for themselves.

#### **Breakdowns of What Humor Is**

The word *humor* is an umbrella term that encompasses different constructs such as humor as a personality trait or humor as a stimulus (Ruch & Köhler, 2007). Humor is a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a notion such as "sense of humor" or ability to "see the funny side of things" (Moran, 2013). This makes it difficult to know what people are talking about when they use the word humor. People may be talking about the appreciation of humor, the ability to generate positive feelings in others, etc. Humor can be considered a process that acts as a pleasant mode of communication that elicits humorous reactions and expressions such as laughter (León-Pérez et al., 2021). Various definitions of humor exist reflecting different academic perspectives (Wijewardena et al., 2017). Authors and researchers have all defined humor differently to suit their research. This has created many variations of how humor is defined.

#### Forms of Humor

Humor can come in many forms (Pinderhughes & Zigler, 1985) such as jokes, comedy, wit, puns, cleverness, satire, parody, irony, sarcasm, incongruity, absurdity, ribaldry, pratfalls, repartee, whimsy, teasing, slapstick, limericks, and more. All these attempts at humor may create a humorous response or might not. Beyond the production of humor, responses to it include laughter, smile, mirth, amusement, merriment, cheerfulness, joy, liking, happiness, and more (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). These responses to humor are also responses to other positive experiences such as winning the lottery. Humor can be experienced passively by watching comedy movies (Gelkopf et al., 1993), or actively by telling jokes (Cai et al., 2014), or a mix of the two.

#### **Sense of Humor**

Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012) noted that researchers use the terms *humor* and *sense of humor* interchangeably. This is problematic because there is a difference between the two. Sense of humor can be seen as a personality predisposition. Most psychological researchers agree that a sense of humor can be described as a relatively stable personality trait and a multi-dimensional construct (Ruch, 1998) and are aligned in viewing *sense of humor* as "a personality trait that enables a person to recognize and use successful humor as a coping mechanism for social communication or interactions" (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012, p. 158). R. A. Martin et al. (2003) summarized the conceptualization of "sense of humor" as a cognitive ability, an aesthetic response, a habitual behavior pattern, a trait, an attitude, coping strategy or defense mechanism.

### Laughter

Laughter is a social stimulus (Provine, 1996) defined as a component of a universal language of basic emotions, which all people have in common and recognize (Sauter et al., 2010;

Savage et al., 2017). Instead of defining humor, some people use observations to define the construct (Cooper, 2008). For example, Rogerson-Revell (2011) used auditory and verbal cues, such as laughter, to identify humor episodes. Gupta et al. (2018) coded laughter events if they had at least three laugh notes (e.g., ha, ha, ha) and lasted at least three seconds. The problem with using laughter in research is that humor and laughter are similar but different. Laughter can be evoked by nervousness or embarrassment rather than humor (Ruch & Ekman, 2001). Not all instances of laughter are effects of humor and not all humor can elicit laughter (Shoda & Yamanaka, 2021).

### **Social Process**

Humor has an integrated relationship to social context (R. A. Martin et al., 1993) meaning the people with or around make a difference. For example, people laugh twice as much when watching a humorous video with a stranger than by themselves (Devereux & Ginsburg, 2001). Most researchers agree that humor is a social behavior which has a vital role in social relationships (Baldwin, 2007) requiring both a producer and receiver (Kuipers, 2008; D. T. Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Although two parties are necessary, it is possible to amuse oneself in the absence of others (Cooper, 2005).

# **Personality Trait (Construct)**

Humor can be seen as a personality trait and "a way of looking at the world" (Thorson & Powell, 1993, p. 13). It can also be seen as a habitual behavior pattern characterized by laughing frequently, telling jokes or amusing others often, or to laugh other others' jokes (R. A. Martin et al., 2003). Craik et al. (1996) had 456 people fill out questionnaires contributing to an overall sense of humor index and personality measures (i.e., Myers-Briggs Type Indicator [MBTI]). R.

A. Martin and Lefcourt (1984) had 497 people fill out surveys to develop the Situational Humor Response Questionnaire.

# Play

Often, play and humor overlap in the literature since theories and concepts are usually related to specific groups based upon ages and stages in life. When considering humor with young people, the terminology and theories turn towards the role of play and playfulness. Proyer (2017) investigated and developed a questionnaire to assess four basic components of playfulness in adults: other-directed, lighthearted, intellectual, and whimsical playfulness.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) used the term *playfulness* synonymously with humor. In summary, "humor is fundamentally a communicative activity" (Lynch, 2002, p. 423), but whether it is a stimulus, a cognitive process, an emotional or behavioral response, or all of these, remains somewhat of a debate among researchers (R. A. Martin, 2001).

### **Humor Theories**

Many definitions of humor exist, and no single definition is accepted by all researchers. Humor is associated with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, psychophysiological, and social aspects (R. A. Martin, 2000) and can refer to a stimulus (e.g., a joke), mental process (e.g., perception of incongruity), or response (e.g., laughter; R. A. Martin, 2001). Haig (1988) recognized over 100 theories of humor, and R. A. Martin and Ford (2018) recognized five central theories of humor: psychoanalytic, dominance and aggression / superiority/ disparagement, psycho-physiological (cathartic), incongruity, and reversal, which will be elaborated next in addition to others.

# **Psychoanalytic & Arousal Theory**

Psychoanalytic, arousal, and arousal-reduction theories view humor as pleasurable tension release or arousal, often aggressive or sexual in nature (Berlyne, 1969; Freud, 1905/1980; Wyer & Collins, 1992). Jokes or wit distract the superego from the fact that people "experience for a moment the illicit pleasure of releasing primitive sexual and aggressive impulses" (R. A. Martin & Ford, 2018, p. 39). Humor, a benign and sympathetic amusement with the ironic misfortunes of life (Freud, 1905/1980), offers a tension-release function of mirth and laughter in coping with stress. When a person anticipates something and the expected does not occur, their mental energy becomes superfluous and is released in laughter. Tension release occurs as a rebound reaction to an initial increase in arousal that accompanies much humor for example, during the buildup of a joke and during vigorous laughter (Koestler, 1949). The psychoanalytic theories suffer from a lack of generalizability, and empirical research has largely failed to support them (Attardo, 1994/2009).

## **Aggressive Humor & Banter**

Koestler (1964) believed aggression was fundamental to humor. Parts of Koestler's worldview come from psychoanalytic foundations (i.e., the use of humor to express thoughts that would otherwise not be dealt with). Aggression in humor may be pleasurable for its own sake, as it allows people to express feelings that they might not deal with otherwise. This expression of aggression may also lead to tension reduction, which is the source of pleasure (Burger, 1993). Banter is one style of aggressive humor which can be anything from direct sarcasm to telling funny stories and is often a mixture of confrontation and bantering repartee (Brooks et al., 2020).

# **Superiority Theory**

Superiority theory (Morreall, 1983) explains that laughter is an effect of a feeling of superiority due to the depreciation of other people (Gruner, 1978). Superiority and disparagement theories assert that humor arises from feelings of superiority at the expense of others. While these theories fail to explain humor in many contexts and are not generally accepted (R. A. Martin, 2007/2010), it is important to consider if the power dynamics inherent in supervision play a role into the perceptions of the use of humor in supervision.

# **Incongruity Theory**

Incongruity resolution theories are the most widely accepted (R. A. Martin, 2007/2010). "The idea that incongruity is the basis of humor has been proposed by many philosophers and theorists over the past 250 years" (p. 62). Humor is a surprising discovery of incongruity between two elements, the resolution of which is humorous (R. A. Martin, 2007/2010).

Researchers tend to agree that humor involves the communication of incongruous meanings in some amusing fashion (Cooper, 2008). Gervais and Wilson (2005) summarized humor as "non-serious social incongruity" (p. 399). This means humor evokes positive emotion or laughter by the unexpected juxtaposition of two disparate ideas (J. C. Meyer, 2000). Koestler (1964) referred to this as a bisociation of ideas and regarded it as a fundamental characteristic of humor. In supervision, this can be likened to confrontation when a supervisee is invited to examine behavior, presumably incongruous with their intentions, that harms themselves or others and to take responsibility for changing that behavior.

## **Reversal Theory**

M. J. Apter's (2001) reversal theory was about the daily fluctuations between the state of mind associated with play (i.e., paratelic) and the more serious, goal-directed state of mind (i.e.,

telic). Reversal theory suggests that the perception of incongruity requires a reinterpretation of initial information that elicits humor (Kneisel, 2019). However, M. J. Apter and Desselles (2012) asserted that reversal theory is not a theory of humor, "rather it is a general theory of motivation, personality, and emotion" (p. 418).

Learning about different theories of humor can provide you with the awareness that there are many perspectives as to how humor functions. This is why the current study seeks to gain the perspectives the faculty have about how humor works and what supervisors' intentions are. The following sections describe other ways in which humor has been researched in different fields such as psychology, neuroscience, and computer science.

## **Humor Styles**

One of the earliest investigations into humor style was conducted by Babad (1974). They developed a multi-method approach to the assessment of humor and created categories of humor usage that could be measured with the The Humor Style Survey. Humor has traditionally been divided into two fundamental categories, typically classified as either positive or negative (Gladding & Wallace, 2016; R. A. Martin, 2002). R. A. Martin et al. (2003) developed the Humor Styles Questionnaire and divided humor into two dimensions: maladaptive humor and adaptive humor. The two dimensions were further split into four categories: affiliative, self-enhancing, self- defeating, and aggressive. The four humor styles are:

Relatively benign uses of humor to enhance the self (Self-enhancing) and to enhance one's relationships with others (Affiliative), use of humor to enhance the self at the expense of others (Aggressive), and use of humor to enhance relationships at the expense of self (Self-defeating). (R. A. Martin et al., 2003, p. 48)

# **Positive Psychology**

In the field of positive psychology, humor is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Ruch et al., 2010). It is listed as one of the 24-character strengths (Ruch et al., 2010; Seligman et al., 2005), which are morally valued aspects of one's personality. Character strengths are individual differences that are positively valued across culture that impact how you think, feel, and behave (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined humor as "liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes" (p. 30). The definition of sense of humor shows similarities to the definition of humor as a character strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and their positive relationship was confirmed in an empirical study finding correlations between the two (Müller & Ruch, 2011).

#### **Neuroscience and Schemas**

Neuroscience research suggests there are neurological bases to humor processing based on a cognitive-affective function (Vrticka, Black, Neely, et al., 2013) and that humor engages a network of brain cortical and subcortical structures involved in detecting and resolving incongruity (Vrticka. Black, & Reiss, 2013). Kneisel (2019) explored the effects of humor during counseling and found that when counselors used a Humour-Based Therapeutic Programme, "consisting of four main components: 1) identification of core schemas; 2) psychoeducation; 3) the humour intervention; and 4) the mindfulness tool" (p. 56), there was an initial reduction of the strength and frequency of limiting schemas for clients. This can work in favor of supervisees who may have their own limiting beliefs. As humor can simultaneously highlight incongruity and promote relaxation, positive affect, and right hemisphere engagement, humor can be used to help schematic change in counseling (Kneisel, 2019), which include thoughts that have become

barriers in their lives (i.e., distrust of others, feeling incompetent, insufficient self-control, and unrelenting standards).

## **Computer Science Natural Language Processing**

Chatbot programs such as the Replika app (Luka, 2023) use neural network machine learning to create a personal AI that helps people express and witness themselves, because it is an AI app that becomes you. The app was first developed by using old text messages of a person who died that included their unique turns of phrase and sense of humor. This project helped the app creator grieve as they wondered if they could get a text back from their virtual friend (Canadian Broadcasting Company [CBC], 2021). Deep learning-based methods have been used to detect humor. For example, researchers have used neural networks to distinguish between humor or non-humor (Bertero & Fung, 2016; Chen & Soo, 2018). Fan et al. (2020) looked at humor detection using a recurrent network for humor recognition. Given the complex nature of the expressions, functions, and operations of humor, "broad definitions cannot be operationalized into functional measuring instruments that facilitate quantitative investigations of humor" (Rosenberg et al., 2021, p. 6).

After learning about how something as broad as humor has been defined, understood, and explored, next it will be useful to learn the outcomes of humor. Doing so will show the consequences of humor and why it will be helpful to understand and utilize in a setting such as clinical supervision.

#### **General Benefits of Humor**

The humor-health hypothesis describes the concept that humor has a positive direct or indirect impact on health (McCreaddie & Wiggins, 2008). There is extensive evidence for the positive effects of humor. For example, humor improves physical and psychological health

(Kuiper & Olinger, 1998; R. A. Martin & Lefcourt, 2004), reduces negative symptoms such as stress (M. H. Abel, 2002), helps people to cope (C. K. Cheung & Yue, 2012; R. A. Martin, 1989), and improves communication and relationships (Bell, 2007; Horn et al., 2019). Different researchers have described the main functions of humor differently. To some, humor is something impossible to teach (Goldin et al., 2006). Therefore, one is either someone who can use humor effectively or not. To others, humor is something that can be learned-for example taking a workshop where one is able to learn how to use humor effectively (Baisley & Grunberga, 2019). The following sections describe four overarching ways in which humor helps people: physical, psychological, social, and connection.

### **Physical Health**

Abundant evidence documents positive health benefits of humor. Studies consistently establish a link between the way people use humor and health outcomes (Schneider et al., 2018). Comedy and humor have health benefits similar to those received from aerobic exercise (R. A. Berk, 2001) and relieve chronic pain and increase happiness in adults with chronic pain (Tse et al., 2010). Cousins (1979) documented how humorous films and belly laughter contributed to their recovery from a medical condition that caused a lot of pain. Humor is shown to lower stress hormones (Savage et al., 2017) and blood pressure (M. Miller & Fry, 2009), decrease pain (P. N. Bennett et al., 2014) and inflammation (Bains et al., 2017) and strengthen the immune system (M. P. Bennett & Lengacher, 2009). Health benefits include changes in musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, endocrine, immunological, and neural systems. For example, vigorous laughter exercises relax muscles, improve respiration, and stimulate circulation (Fry, 1994; R. A. Martin, 2004). In supervision, humor use may be a form of self-care and allow both supervisors and supervisees to maintain their health in order to continue to work on their respective duties.

### **Cognitive and Psychological**

In addition to its physical effects, humor is associated with many psychological benefits. Humor provides psychological benefits in terms of cognitive and psychological functioning. People show improvements in cognitive abilities such as cognitive flexibility and creative problem solving when they are experiencing positive emotions. Studies suggested stronger associations with humor and psychological health indicators such as coping, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being (R. A. Martin, 2007/2010). Optimism and positive affect can reduce defensiveness and help people become "more open to seeing things as they really are: more accepting where things cannot be changed, but more active in changing them where they can be changed" (Isen, 2003, p. 182). This might help supervisees be more open to feedback and make changes to the work they are doing with clients.

## Reduce Negative Symptoms

A dispositional sense of humor has been shown to mitigate the effects of stress (Lefcourt et al., 1990; R. A. Martin & Dobbin, 1988). It is not that people experience less stressors; rather, they show less disturbance as a result of them (R. A. Martin & Lefcourt, 1983; Nevo et al., 1993; Nezu et al., 1988). Comedy and humor lead to a more positive self-image (McGhee, 2010), reduce stress and anxiety (M. P. Bennett & Lengacher, 2008), and counteract the effects of depressed moods (Danzer et al., 1990; Gelkopf & Kreitler, 1996) and symptoms of anxiety (Strick et al., 2009). Zhao et al. (2019) showed the positive effects of both a long term and short-term laughter intervention on depression treatment response were consistent with previous trials (Bailey et al., 2016; Ganz & Jacobs, 2014). Humor training is effective on perceived stress, depression, anxiety, and psychological well-being (Tagalidou et al., 2019). In supervision, if a

supervisee is less stressed and in a healthier emotional state, they are less likely to burn out and unintentionally harm clients.

#### **Produce Positive Outcomes**

In general, humor can elicit laughter and positive emotions and thus contributes to the release of tension in critical situations (Warren et al., 2018). Humor is reported to have a positive effect on persons' mental health (Schneider et al., 2018) and can create the positive outcome of happiness and mirth (Ulloth, 2002), the emotional reaction to humor. Mirth has been shown to increase willingness, persistence, and creativity in individuals presented with a problem to solve (Isen, 2003). Humor promotes creativity and divergent thinking (a way of thinking that leads to various solutions; Hauck & Thomas, 1972; Humke & Schaefer, 1996) and can increase hopefulness (Vilaythong et al., 2003).

Humor has also been one of the character strengths and virtues that promote psychological well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It has been reported to have a positive effect on a persons' well-being (Szabo et al., 2005) and studies such as those done by Mendiburo-Seguel and Heintz (2019) and Ruch and colleagues (2018) consistently found that:

Subjective well-being positively relates to some forms of humor (e.g., self-enhancing humor style, benevolent humor, sense of humor, coping humor), negatively with some forms (e.g., self-defeating humor style, cynicism), or not at all with others (e.g., aggressive humor style, corrective humor; Heintz et al., 2020, p. 2475)

Research has found that humor can function as a coping strategy in dealing with stress (R. A. Martin, 2003; McGhee, 2016) because increased well-being is associated with greater resilience (Li & Hasson, 2020). The positive emotions elicited by humor are "not compatible with stress" (Bartzik et al., 2021, p. 2), which helps with reframing situations and successful

coping (McGhee, 2010). Humor can be viewed as a tool, similar to exercise, that can be used in moderation to promote health (Baisley & Grunberga, 2019).

## Coping

Humor is often regarded as one of the highest forms of coping with life stress (Freud, 1905/1980; R. A. Martin, 1996; Vaillant, 1977). People who have the ability to perceive amusing aspects of problematic situations and stressful events are better at coping and maintaining subjective well-being (Wanzer et al., 2005). J. C. Meyer (2000) noted that stress and tension relief remains a major explanation for humor's function and motivation. M. Booth-Butterfield et al. (2007) found students that are more likely to express humorous communication also believed they could cope with stressful situations.

People with less humor experience mood swings and negative life events more than others (McGhee, 2010). R. A. Martin (2007/2010) explained, humor lets people shift their perspective to cope with stressful situations. For example, cancer patients use humor to make light of their illness and emotionally distance themselves from their mortality. "Humor is a way of refusing to be overcome by the people and situations, both large and small, that threaten our well-being" (p. 19). Similarly, Frankl (1963) stated:

Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds. (p. 43)

### Communication

Humor can function as an affinity-seeking behavior (S. Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Frymier & Thompson, 1992) or way to communicate when being too direct or serious can be confrontational, embarrassing, or risky (R. A. Martin, 2007/2010).

Through humour, humans can safely probe sensitive social issues such as sexuality, aggression and social status, and engage in playful competition and cognitive exploration through incongruity. (Kneisel, 2019, p. 19)

Humor is recognized as a two-way process (Tanay et al., 2013) that can give a sense or feeling of closeness between strangers (Fraley & Aron, 2004). Research suggests that people feel more emotional closeness with their friends when there is greater humor similarity between themselves (Curry & Dunbar, 2013). In some cases, humor may create a sense of belonging, a unique identity, and a private means of communication (Moran, 2013).

### **Bonding and Grouping**

Humor is seen as desirable in partners and important for relationship initiation and maintenance (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2010; Lundy et al., 1998; McGee & Shevlin, 2009). It is often used to reduce interpersonal tension, build bonds, and signal solidarity between people (Burns & Pearson, 2011; Gonzales & Mierop, 2004). Humor plays an important role in interpersonal relationships as it improves and increases positive interactions while also reducing psychological stress and conflicts with others (Cann & Etzel, 2008; Heintz, 2017; Leist & Müller, 2013). Mutual laughter can be a way of enhancing group identity, selecting and attracting partners, and bonding (Shiota et al., 2004). Humor is a pleasant and pro-social phenomenon (Tanay et al., 2013) that has a positive effect on persons' social lives (Hay, 2000) by acting as social glue that helps strengthen (Irving, 2019) and foster relationships (Samson, 2013). Such effects can be helpful in supervision because a factor that predicts an effective supervisory alliance is the strengthening of the relationship between a supervisor and supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019).

Humor can help a group identify who a person is within a social context (Emmanuel, 2018). The use of humor can help determine who is "in" and who is "out" when it comes to an established group. The informality inherent in humor makes it easy for groups to establish norms by highlighting and laughing at deviants (Lynch, 2002). R. A. Martin (2007/2010) explained humor is ambiguous, and can involve a "decommitment," where a person nullifies their message with a qualifying statement like "I was just joking." Many studies suggest benefits to using humor, yet there are also those that suggest a negative impact (D. Yang et al., 2015). With humor being largely a social phenomenon, if others do not judge humor similarly, negative consequences like failing at achieving social support or offending others may occur (Heintz, 2017).

Using humor without considering its potential impact can create harmful consequences such as keeping someone out of a group or pushing them outside of it. This harms relationships and is the opposite of building connection. After learning about the positive side of humor, it is equally necessary to learn about the negative side of it. Supervisors may avoid using humor because of the adverse outcomes it can lead to.

### **General Risks of Humor**

While humor might be seen by someone as always beneficial and a way to make everything better, it does have detrimental consequences when used inappropriately. For example, Edwards (2018) found it is possible for someone using humor to offend people, come across as culturally insensitive, or be an unwanted distraction. Fine and De Soucey (2005) found that jokes can come across as offensive even if they are unintentional. By failing to use humor properly or appropriately, it can offend and stop a conversation from starting or continuing. Humor can create barriers to learning and break down communication efforts (R. A. Berk, 2003).

The following sections describe four overarching ways in which humor has adverse outcomes on people, relationships, and the humor itself.

# **Harms People Verbally**

Maladaptive humor is a category of humor which includes self-defeating and aggressive humor (R. A. Martin et al., 1993). Most research suggests maladaptive humor reduces psychological well-being and is shown to be related to depression and burnout (Besser et al., 2011, Besser et al., 2012; Guenter et al., 2013). Superiority humor involves laughing at others' shortcomings. Examples include put-down humor and mocking (Romero & Pescosolido, 2008) which can be viewed as a joke with winners and losers (Roth & Vivona, 2010). Humor that harms people as a form of aggression against oneself or others include sexual abuse (Costa et al., 2015), derisive banter (Roark, 2013), inappropriate professional behavior (Gross et al., 2012), homophobic humor (Espelage & Swearer, 2008), and other biased-related humor.

# **Harms Relationships**

Humor that disparages others can create relational issues, which reinforce social boundaries (D. M. Martin, 2004). Humorous communication can be a way to mock nonconforming behaviors to reinforce status or power differences and inhibit unwanted actions (Lynch, 2002). For example, Lynch (2009) found kitchen staff of a hotel used abusive humor to instruct others and resist managements' attempts to minimize their artistic and skillful methods of food creation. Humor can serve as a function of inclusion and exclusion (O'Neal, 2019) and be a reminder that someone is not part of the 'in-crowd'. For example, one can joke about how someone dresses. When another person is the target of the joke, it is exclusion. When a person includes someone in the joke, it is inclusion. Using sarcasm creates the issue of someone

becoming the target of the joke and removed from the group while the others form a stronger bond. Conversely, humor can also lead to someone deciding to leave a group.

#### **Lowers the Value of Humor**

After a relationship is established and members of a dyad have formed impressions of each other (Cooper, 2005; Gkorezis et al., 2011), people's interest moves on to the task and "getting things done." Therefore, leader humor is viewed more as distraction at work and having a leader who is insensitive to employee needs (Avolio et al., 1999). Collinson (1988) found that managers who try to force jokes into their daily interactions cheapen the value of humor. If employees are constantly joking or exhibiting sarcasm, the value placed on earnestness and honesty can be lessened.

## **Distracting**

Humor may detract from outcomes instead of contributing to them positively. O'Neal (2019) found although a professor's humor helped with keeping attention, too much humor in a lecture tends to have a negative effect and lessened students' respect for the class. Pairing humor with serious topics may have negative consequences. For example, McGraw et al. (2015) found that pairing a serious issue (i.e., drunk driving and heart disease) with humor actually decreases the perceived importance of the issue. Humor may harm memory for the to-be-learned information as it can be distracting, irrelevant to the material, and not as good as the delivery of organized facts (J. M. Gibson, 2019; Harp & Mayer, 1997).

There are many potential risks and benefits to humor that have not been described above as doing so would be too extensive and not the purpose of the present study. What can be more helpful is to explore what humor looks like in fields similar to the context of the present study. As a result of the evaluative nature in an educational environment of a personal and at times

therapeutic relationship, the next sections describe humor in the workplace, education, healthcare, counseling, and clinical supervision.

## **Humor in the Workplace**

"A workplace with no humor is the riskiest environment of all" (Emmanuel, 2018, p. 41). Since Malone (1980) discussed the cases for and against humor in the workplace, more literature started to emerge in business management, leadership, and organizational psychology (Decker & Rotondo, 1999; Scheel & Gockel, 2017). Studies investigating humor show it having an impact on workplace outcomes. For example, employees are more engaged on days when they express adaptive humor (i.e., humor that increases bonding or helps one maintain a positive outlook on life; Guenter et al., 2013). Humor at school and in the workplace is positively associated with collegiality, satisfaction, and creativity and is negatively associated with burnout and emotional exhaustion (Burford, 1987; Mathew & Vijayalakshmi, 2017; Stogdill, 1972).

## **Productivity**

Collinson (2002) found that humor leads to productivity, change within an organization, and makes participants feel like they are a part of something worthwhile. Clouse and Spurgeon (1995) found that humor is not only an important aspect in leadership but correlates with a sociable atmosphere and improved efficiency. Ditlow (1993) found that the use of humor led to better outcomes in terms of memory and longevity, leading to easier retention of new material. They also found humor helps employees acclimate to a new or ambiguous role. Korobkin (1988) found that humor that results in laughter can lengthen attention spans and increase motivation for heightened productivity. People who take a break and watch a funny video are twice as productive when returning to work as those who took a break with no humor (Cheng & Wang, 2015).

# Creativity

Joking allows people to enjoy their jobs more and make routine tasks more interesting (Holmes & Marra, 2002b). The use of humor increases communication, stimulates creativity, and creates productive environments (O'Neal, 2019). Research shows that having fun at work increases employee satisfaction, performance, engagement with the company, and employee morale (Plester, 2009). When humor relieves stress, it creates opportunities for employees to continue thinking creatively. Therefore, employees who use humor tend to generate creative solutions to problems (Lang & Lee, 2010).

## **Coping with Stress**

Humor can be considered an effective coping resource to reduce stress associated with psychological well-being at work (León-Pérez et al., 2021). It offers the potential to cope with job stress and burnout (Wanzer et al., 2005) and helps with employee resilience and coping (Vetter & Gockel, 2016). In a meta-analysis of positive humor in the workplace Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012) reviewed 49 studies of positive humor use in the workplace and found that a positive sense of humor is associated with good physical and mental health, buffers workplace stress, and promotes effective workplace functioning. People who make humor a regular part of their lives can better cope with stress, stay in better moods, and enjoy greater health and relationships with others (R. A. Martin, 2003).

#### **Cohesiveness**

Laughing together allows people to feel closer and serves as "emotional glue" to help complete a work project (McGhee, 1999, p. 4). Humor encourages camaraderie, group cohesiveness, and teamwork because it allows group members to share common experiences. When two people share a laugh, a connection is made or strengthened, and they bond over

sharing the same sense of humor. The shared appreciation of humor is a signal that another person has similar interests and thus could be a valued partner for collaboration. A person will think because someone else is laughing at the same thing, they are a great person to become closer friends with. Leaders use this knowledge and encourage the use of humor because it builds relationships and helps to maintain collaboration and keep individuals engaged on a project or activity (O'Neal, 2019).

People can convert their concerns into a group issue with humor, which reinforces group solidarity (Pogrebin & Poole, 1988). Humor is useful for the development of positive relationships (Trichas et al., 2017), increases job satisfaction, and facilitates organizational cohesiveness (Holmes & Marra, 2006; Neves & Cunha, 2018) and team performance (Mao et al., 2017). Positive emotional contagion via humor appreciation benefits organizations as it enhances cooperativeness in groups (Barsade, 2002; Deal & Kennedy, 2000).

### **Lessen Status Differential**

Humor diminishes the hierarchy and status differentiation within an organization (Duncan, 1982) by fostering feelings of empowerment and eliminating interpersonal barriers within organizational hierarchies (J. W. Smith & Khojasteh, 2014). Cooper (2005) noted that increased use of humor positively correlated with how much subordinates liked their supervisor. This use of humor often decreased the perceived distance and reduced the level of formality between them. R. A. Berk (2003) noted that humor has the potential to break down communication barriers between students and professors, and Holmes (2000) found similar outcomes in the workplace as humor can be used in the workplace to challenge the powerful and mitigate or downplay the differences in authority. Romero and Cruthirds (2006) found that humor is useful for enhancing leadership in a hierarchical relationship by reducing feelings of

distance and making anyone on a team feel like they are able to speak to their superiors and be heard.

# **Improves Communication**

Humor is highly dependent on the situation at hand and the interpersonal relationships between the interlocutors (Sinkeviciute, 2019). Tracy et al. (2006) found that humor often helps communicate necessary processes to help employees make sense of their job duties and work environment. In a professional environment, Wallinger (1997) stated using humor conveys to others that the problem at hand is not something that should be taken too seriously. They continue that humor can help de-escalate serious situations or problems through laughter, which can make things seem less important. This can be risky if people start becoming unsure about how serious or important something is and can be beneficial if people are less stressed. Sarcasm seeks to convey disparaging messages in a socially acceptable manner (Calabrese, 2000), and humor may provide a way of challenging official guidelines without attacking the organization (Mulkay, 1988). A study found those in subordinate positions in a mental health hospital used humor to cope with feelings of aggression toward their superiors that could not be expressed openly, to satisfy their own immediate psychological needs (R. L. Coser, 1960). Humor as a coping mechanism in high stress environments such as police work and emergency scenes functions to reduce, cancel, or reverse the effect of stressful work situations (León-Pérez et al., 2021).

#### **Trust**

Neves and Karagonlar (2020) built on the trustworthiness framework (Mayer et al., 1995) to extend prior theorizations (Goswami et al., 2016; T. Y. Kim et al., 2016) and found how leader humor helps establish or destroy trust in the workplace. Too many groups actually use

humor inconsistently, which can also lead to uneven results (Avolio et al., 1999). Disclosures are less likely to be judged as true when they are accompanied by a humorous statement (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019). And when humor is used, consumers appear to be more lenient with regard to the service failure, which results in a more positive attitude towards the service provider (Kobel & Groeppel-Klein, 2021).

Where supervisory relationships exist in contexts such as workplaces, humor is something that improves relationships between people and allows people to get more work done. This is helpful in clinical supervision as time is limited during these meetings and the relationship between a supervisor and supervisee is paramount.

#### **Humor in Education**

A large body of research has demonstrated that humor is a valuable instructional tool in traditional classrooms (for a summary, see Banas et al., 2011) in addition to outside the physical classroom (Banas et al., 2019). Instructional humor can reduce stress, increase group cohesion, promote source liking, and make content more memorable when humorous examples are used to illustrate concepts (Banas et al., 2011). Instructional humor also can lead to higher teaching evaluations (Tamborini & Zillmann, 1981; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999) and increases in learning (Ziv, 1988). Humorous communication has been validated as a beneficial skill in the learning environments (M. Booth-Butterfield & Wanzer, 2016). Teacher humor plays a central role in teaching as it is related to a positive classroom environment, increased student motivation and student learning, and the level of student interest (Bieg & Dresel, 2018; Goodboy et al., 2015; Wanzer et al., 2010). Further, humor in education can improve attention control, promote understanding, manage disruptive behavior, create a positive attitude towards the subject matter, and reduce anxiety (Levey & Agius, 2019).

### **Environment & Culture**

V. M. Robinson (1983) argued that "What is learned with laughter is learned well" (p. 121). Dewey (1916) argued that the school should be more like a family than a factory. Namely by providing a time for relating, learning, and laughing. Humor improves the learning environment (R. A. Berk, 2000; Mitchell, 2005), and studies indicate that the learning environment is perceived as more enjoyable when teachers use humor (Stuart & Rosenfeld, 1994; Torok et al., 2004; Ziv, 1979). Humor builds culture in classrooms (Bolinger, 2001; Kuiper et al., 2004) and helps cultivate trusting relationships (Keen & Woods, 2016). Humor used by teachers in a classroom can help build good relationships with students and create a positive environment (Claus et al., 2012; Sidelinger, 2014; Tsukawaki et al., 2020). Banas et al. (2011) explained that the "clearest findings regarding humor and education pertain to instructional humor's ability to create an enjoyable learning environment" (p. 137).

### **Connection**

Research has shown that the use of humor in the classroom is likely to increase student satisfaction as it is related to positive perceptions of the instructor and learning environment (Halula, 2013). Students report greater liking for instructors who use humor in the classroom (S. A. Myers et al., 2014; Sidelinger et al., 2012; Wrench & Richmond, 2004). An instructor's use of humor may initiate positive bonding between the student and their instructor (Hackathorn et al., 2011). Instructor humor helps fulfill students' psychological relatedness needs (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2015; West & Martin, 2019). Critchlow (2023) investigated how counseling master's students experience an instructor's use of humor in the classroom. They also explored how this use of humor in the class influences the student-instructor relationship. The three main composite found were defining humor, humor and connection vs disconnection, and humor and learning.

# **Perception of Teacher**

Students describe their instructors as being more intellectually stimulating when they also perceive them as being funny (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011). When students perceive themselves as being similar to their instructor, they also view their instructor to be more credible (Glasock & Ruggiero, 2006; Wheeless et al., 2011) and immediate (Glasock & Ruggiero, 2006; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999). West and Martin (2019) suggested instructors should strive to be more humor homophilous (similar) with their students as the level of similarity was related to students' affect for their instructor, and their likelihood of enrolling in another class with their instructor. When students perceive having greater homophily with their instructor, they communicate more with that instructor (S. A. Myers & Huebner, 2011) and participate more in class (S. A. Myers et al., 2009).

# **Student Learning**

Research provides evidence that humor positively affects student learning (Gorham & Christophel, 1990; R. M. Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977) and can improve educational outcomes (Lei et al., 2010). Torok et al. (2004) found that students' learning experience will improve if the instructor uses humor in the classroom. Teachers typically use humor to build relationships and keep the attention of students by increasing engagement, interaction, and concentration (Edwards, 2018). Deiter (2000) found that despite the many reasons to use humor in the classroom, the most important is student learning. Teachers who use humor as a tool for student success allow their students to have an easier and more enjoyable time learning (Bieg et al., 2018).

Machlev and Karlin (2017) found that humor predicts student interest in course materials whether it is or is not relevant to the course. However, the more non-relevant humor was used

the less students reported interest in course materials. In addition to these findings, Machlev and Karlin (2016) found no relationship between different types of humor (relevant or not relevant to course material) and actual learning (students' final grade). Similarly, Wayne (2021) found that humor as an intervention in the form of funny images was not able to increase students' working memory (the ability to process relevant information and focus on a task) compared to relaxing images.

Faculty supervisors are educators and typically have degrees in education (i.e., counselor education and supervision). Their jobs are to teach other people how to be a counselor or educator. Using humor in education enhances the connection between people, improves student learning and engagement, and creates a more comfortable environment. These are all great aspects because counseling supervision is a confidential space where private topics are discussed and learning is necessary. When adding onto this the benefits of using humor such as building an affective bond with supervisees that contributes to supervisory working alliance, it appears beneficial for supervisors to consider integrating humor into their supervision.

#### **Humor in Healthcare**

Gonot-Schoupinsky et al. (2020) found in their meta analysis that humor had many benefits and applications in medical settings. In the clinical environment, humor is commonly used to relieve stress (Christie & Moore, 2005; Miracle, 2007; Scott, 2007) and as a coping strategy (Mallett & A'Hern, 1996; Peluchette & Karl, 2005; Wilkins, 2014). In a stressful job like nursing, humor can have a beneficial effect on perceived stress and overall work enjoyment (Bartzik et al., 2021). Humor can also help "clients accept, appreciate, and express something funny, laughable, or ridiculous in an effort to build a relationship, relieve tension, release anger, or deal with painful feelings. This can reduce stress and depression levels in individuals" (Azmi,

2021, p. 254). Humor creates moments of joy and positive emotions and helps reduce anxiety, depression, death anxiety, and adjustment to disorders and chronic pain (Shirvan & Khodabakhshi-Koolaee, 2021). Heinsch et al. (2022) studied caregivers and found that humor had five functions:

(1) an innate element of the self and relationship, (2) an expression of mutual connection and understanding, (3) a way of managing difficult or awkward moments, (4) a form of avoidance or a welcome distraction, and may be (5) helpful, or unhelpful, depending on where someone is in the brain cancer trajectory. (p. 4)

### **Positive Emotions**

Klein (1998) referenced hope in a cancer patient: "Humor is like the seasoning that makes hope tasty. Humor adds the extra element for the will to live that goes beyond hope and that actually is the thing that turns an experience from tolerable to desirable" (p. 14). One study suggests that laughter yoga (deep breathing, meditation and simulated laughter leading to genuine laughter) might enhance some dialysis patients' quality of life (P. N. Bennett et al., 2014). In adults aged 60 years and over, laughter and humor interventions appear to enhance well-being (Gonot-Schoupinsky & Garip, 2018). Laughter therapy helps treatment by improving and maintaining physical, social, and mental function, which in turn contribute to a satisfying life (Mora-Ripoll & Quintana Casado, 2010). Shirvan and Khodabakhshi-Koolaee (2021) explained that the humor training program they used acts as a positive psychological intervention, which reduces psychological distress and improves the quality of life through happiness. After eight sessions of humor training, the life satisfaction and happiness of women with epilepsy increased.

## **Reduce Symptoms**

Humor can help people drive negative emotions away and make them happy (Mora-Ripoll & Quintana Casado, 2010). When used with professional empathy, compassion, and knowledge, humor can be a low-risk way to positively influence patients' experiences (Osincup, 2020). In general, patients' anxiety can be reduced through the use of humor (Frankenfield, 1996; Greenberg, 2003). Falkenberg et al. (2011) showed that humor can help reduce depressive symptoms in patients with major depression. Humor decreases physical pain and negative emotions associated with diseases, and ultimately contributes to better self-care and greater resilience in patients (Flynn, 2020).

It has been shown that older adults who have a better sense of humor (operationalized by a sense of humor questionnaire) report less death anxiety and care more about life (Hosseinzadeh & Khodabakhshi-koolaee, 2017). Humor also has many therapeutic uses for cancer patients and gives them a chance to live again and be resilient (Joshua et al., 2005). Sim (2015) used humor skills to reduce behavioral problems and increase resilience in children with chronic diseases. They found that humor significantly reduces levels of cortisol, which helped children to cope with diseases. Humor can be an advanced defense mechanism that helps people with illnesses to cope with emotional conflicts or external stressors by focusing on humorous and entertaining activities (Tagalidou et al., 2019). The use of humor to help cope with current difficulties has been demonstrated with people facing the disability of arthritis (Skevington & White, 1998) and women facing breast cancer (Ryan, 1997). Humor can help patients express discontent in a socially accepted way. Anger and frustration can be dealt with by using humor and it becomes a healthy coping strategy (Buxman, 2008).

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Humor helps reduce psychological concerns, behavioral problems, cortisol, and helps people cope with emotional conflicts or external stressors. It can reduce negative symptoms that people do not want. This in turn can allow them to live happier lives while becoming resilient. Humor improves the lives of those who use it and those who it is used on or with.

## **Improves Communication**

Humor-based health promotion strategies may be a useful way to increase awareness and help-seeking behavior for public health, particularly issues associated with stigma (E. Miller et al., 2021). Humor as a form of communication is a helpful tool for patient-centered care (Scholl, 2007). For example, humor can be used to build and maintain a relationship (Bauer & Geront, 1999). The use of humor by nurses is seen by patients as a positive characteristic and important aspect of patient-nurse interactions (Tanay et al., 2013). Humor in the nursing context improves communication and also increases trust between nurse and patient (Greenberg, 2003; Sousa et al., 2019).

Hospital patients may initiate humor to alleviate stress or insecurity as well as to initiate communication with nurses (Adamle et al., 2008; P. MacDonald, 2008; Tanay et al., 2014).

Some patients use humor to convey their emotions or to maintain their dignity in difficult and embarrassing situations (Astedt-Kurki & Liukkonen, 1994; Astedt-Kurki et al., 2001; Old, 2012). Patients may also use humor to challenge the nurse and ask questions without undermining the authority of the nurse (Mallett, 1993). Patients with cancer may use humor to communicate the kinds of challenges they are managing, and not necessarily because they find the situation humorous (Beach & Prickett, 2017; Chapple & Ziebland, 2004; Haakana, 2001, 2002).

### **Improves Relationships**

During a hospital visit when a patient is surrounded by strangers in a strange environment, humor can positively influence the patients' experiences (McCreaddie & Payne, 2011). Patients feel supported when nurses use humor interventions (Greenberg, 2003) and humorous interactions between patient and nurse can support the therapeutic relationship (Chinery, 2007; Dean & Major, 2008; Moore, 2008). Humor interventions can enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy and promote interpersonal relationships among patients and nurses (Zhao et al., 2019). People use humor to resolve conflict and it seems to make difficult conversations easier (L. A. Coser, 1964; W. J. Smith et al., 2000).

Humor again improves the relationship between individuals while helping people feel better. Although supervision is not physical care, it is a form of mental care. A supervisee may have personal issues in their lives getting in the way of their counseling. And while clinical supervision is not counseling for the supervisee, it can be therapeutic and helpful to explore what might be preventing a supervisee from being present with the clients they are working with. Bernard's (1979) supervision model described how one role of supervision is *counselor*, in which the supervisor "aims to enhance supervisee reflectivity, especially about their internal affective reality rather than cognitions" (p. 47).

## **Humor in Counseling**

Clinicians and researchers from diverse theoretical perspectives have found the therapeutic potential and clinical utility of humor (Elliot, 2013; Falk & Hill, 1992; Gladding, 2016; Tilsen & Nyland, 2016). Research shows humor is a valuable tool in the counseling process (Ellis, 2000; Gladding, 1995; Mindess, 1976). Humor is a well-researched facet of holistic wellness (Shaughnessy & Wadsworth, 1992) and a well-documented part of counselor wellness (Roach & Young, 2007). Humor is also one of the most highly rated career sustaining behaviors among counselors (Lawson, 2007) reported to be a desirable characteristic in interpersonal relationships (B. Bressler & Balshine, 2006), leadership (Huo et al., 2012), and supervision (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979). Humor slows reflective processes (Bader, 1993), enables communication and harmony (Haig, 1986; Kissane et al., 2004), makes a therapist more approachable (Kennedy, 1991; F. Wright, 2000), creates transformative perspective shifts (Landoni, 2019), and provides a space in which clients' behavior can be safely challenged (Yonatan-Leus et al., 2018).

Norcross and Lambert (2018) identified therapeutic humor as a promising interpersonal construct for psychotherapy. R. A. Martin and Ford (2018) reported on the different approaches that have been taken to use humor in psychotherapy and broadly identified three areas: humor as therapy, specific therapeutic approaches, and humor as a communication skill. Comedy can transform pain and heartbreak into laughter and insight (Attardo, 2014; Cohn, 2016; Goltz, 2017). Humor is beneficial for counselors and clients given its ability to reduce stress, diminish anxiety, improve communication, and create moments of catharsis (M. P. Bennett & Lengacher, 2008; Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Gladding & Wallace, 2016). Humor promotes physical and

emotional well-being, strengthens therapeutic relationships, and prevents professional burnout (Casares & Gladding, 2020; Vereen et al., 2006).

All participant therapists of Hussong and Micucci's (2021) study reported using humor in counseling with various benefits mentioned. Participants stated that humor can enhance the quality of the therapeutic alliance, reduce client defensiveness, enhance a client's perspective, model adaptive behaviors, and encourage flexibility, improve coping, and foster resiliency. The benefits mentioned by these participants are similar to those discussed in the literature (N. Gibson & Tantam, 2017; Gordon, 2007; Sultanoff, 2013). A general idea of humor as a counselor skill is summarized by R. A. Martin (2007/2010):

Most types of therapy share several common goals. These include: (1) establishing positive rapport with the client; (2) gaining an accurate understanding of the client's thoughts, feelings, and behavior patterns; (3) helping clients to gain insight into their difficulties, recognize unrealistic aspects of their thinking, and develop alternative perspectives and new ways of thinking; (4) reducing levels of emotional distress and increasing feelings of well-being; and (5) modifying dysfunctional behavior patterns. A number of authors have suggested that, when used in a sensitive and empathic manner, humor might be useful to further each of these therapeutic goals (Gelkopf & Kreitler, 1996; Kuhlman, 1984; Pierce, 1994; Saper, 1987). (p. 342)

### **Diagnosing**

Levine (1963) noted that laughter and humor are signs of good mental health. Freud (1905/1980) also noted that as a healthy defense mechanism, humor can be a sign of inner strength, security, and mastery of our fears. A loss of humor may be listed as part of the symptomatology of traumatic stress and be part of a general reduction in emotionality that occurs

with other diagnoses such as major depression (Moran, 2013). Martens (2004) explained that in diagnosis:

A patient's relationship to [their humor] can reveal much about [their] general use of emotions. Also, the kinds of things a patient laughs at can be revealing. Humor reflects the nature of the self especially in its more troubling and problematic aspects; yet, they also reveal the healthy and intact part of the person. (p. 356)

In Krakauer's (2004) nonfiction book, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, about the court case of a man being convicted of two counts of first degree murder the psychiatrist Dr. Gardner stated that using the insanity defense does not work in this case because compared to other people with schizophrenia the psychiatrist has examined, the defendant was "a man who enjoys a good joke" and "shared humor with people around" him (p. 349). Dr. Gardner explained this is not characteristic of people with schizophrenia, most of whom most of the time are quite humorless.

Daren et al. (2020) studied people with schizophrenia who rated comprehension and funniness of funny, neutral and absurd stories and cartoons. What they found was that disorganization was associated with lower comprehension of funny stimuli and higher funniness of neutral and absurd stimuli. Similarly, Pirkalani and Talaee Rad (2013) noted that people with schizophrenia have shown by experience to have reduced sense of humor and do not understand jokes completely.

### **Defense Mechanism**

Historically, humor is viewed as one of the most mature defense mechanisms against stress (Ellis, 1977; Freud, 1905/1980; Rogers, 1961; Vaillant, 1977). For psychodynamic theory, laughter and humor are a means to express unconscious thoughts and feelings. They are defense

mechanisms to protect the self and foster mental health. One of Talens' (2000) participants described humor being deceiving:

Humour is experienced as a way in which hidden meanings and feelings can be masked and not present. They describe humour as having dual meaning in which something is presented that does not accurately represent the true feelings and thoughts of the person expressing the humour. Humour presents as a defence in the sense that it disguises and masks what the therapist describes as true feelings, either to the world or at times to oneself. The therapist is very aware of their role in a professional capacity and considers unmasking the true feelings as part of their work with the client. The defence is described as armour and the therapist speaks of disarming the client in a gentle way. (p. 90)

# **Client Coping**

Research views humor as a coping or therapeutic tool (Cann et al., 2011; Herzog & Strevey, 2008). Humor can lower rigid defenses, promote communication, and enhance options for coping (Gelkopf, 2009). S. Wright et al. (2014) found that their intervention (introducing a comedy show in a women's prison) improved coping and help-seeking behaviors but was not effective in reducing the stigma inmates attributed to mental health concerns. Anzieu-Premmereur (2009) used the development of a sense of humor in a young child with autism to show how humor was both a turning point in the therapy and a coping mechanism for anxiety due to trauma.

#### Relief

By shifting from difficult feelings such as hopelessness to mirth, humor can be felt as an emotion which offers relief from emotionally difficult moments or moments of stuckness. Using

humor with clients allows them to experience a positive emotion and metaphorical step out of their difficult situation for a moment.

The emotion can create a shift from intense and difficult feelings. It is experienced as a form of emotional flexibility, which indicates to the therapist something about their client's current emotional state and their ability to move from this state. (Talens, 2020, p. 88)

As Kline (1907) stated, it is the "uncertainties of life that give it zest" (p. 437), and the ambiguity within humor are uncertainties people enjoy. Humor is a type of game where real-world rules are suspended and emotional anesthesia is provided (J. M. Gibson, 2019).

### **Creates Distance**

Humor can be a way to create psychological distance and result in humorous distortions of negative thoughts. It is unclear whether humor is facilitated by psychological distance or if humor helps create psychological distance (McGraw & Warren, 2010; McGraw et al., 2012, 2013). By creating psychological distance, humor allows individuals to distance themselves from stressful situations, and to gain a degree of insight and objectivity (Manning, 2009) or can be a way to avoid problems. However, if humor is facilitated by psychological distance, then it can be viewed more as an outcome of wanting to avoid something such as feeling sad. Humor encourages communication particularly on sensitive matters (McGhee & Goldstein, 1977) and allows clients to process difficult topics and life's challenges from a distance (Salamone, 2002).

#### **Increases Positive Mood**

Humor can have direct beneficial impacts on emotion. A positive attitude and forced laughter can help stimulate the production of neurotransmitters (L. S. Berk et al., 2001; Vlachopoulos et al., 2009) and reduce muscle tension (Fry, 1992) and pain (Perez-Aranda et al.,

2018). Psychological humor can produce changes such as creating positive mood, optimistic thoughts, and reducing rumination (Gelkopf et al., 2006). Greene et al. (2017) showed that positive emotions triggered by simulated laughter can improve the self-efficacy of older people and make them get involved in activities more frequently.

## **Change in Perspective**

There are beneficial physiological changes that occur during laughter and the perspective-taking that humor encourages (Sheesley et al., 2016). Franzini (2001) described therapeutic humor as "both the intentional and unintentional use of humor techniques by therapists and other healthcare professionals" (p. 171) that includes different forms of humor all with the purpose of helping the client gain insight through pointing out the absurdities in life. They state this type of humor should lead to improvements in how the client views themselves and their situation. Counselors can use culturally sensitive humor with clients to help them come to terms with issues in their lives (Vereen et al., 2006) and reframe irrational beliefs (Ellis, 2000). By helping clients see the humor that is in their present situations, humor acts as a different way to allow clients to gain new perspectives, solve problems, and develop effective coping skills (Yonkovitz & Matthews, 1998).

### **Reduce Defensiveness and Disarm Clients**

Humor reduces defensiveness (Lusterman, 1992) and can facilitate therapy sessions by introducing flexibility and disarming rigid clients (Hoyt & Andreas, 2015). Buttny (2001) explains that humor is used to bypass resistance and deliver messages that clash with the clients' preferred narratives. This is beneficial for when a therapist has a contrasting interpretation and is trying to have a client take a different perspective. Panichelli (2013) described how humor allows therapists to remain connected to clients while simultaneously reframing their views of

the world. All participants in Hussong and Micucci's (2021) study reported that appropriate use of humor can reduce a client's defensiveness.

Exploring the meaning of clients' use of humor can stimulate insight into the ways in which they use humor defensively to avoid painful emotions. ... Humor takes some of the pressure off of [clients]. I think it allows them to feel safe looking at things that they otherwise wouldn't want to look at. (p. 83)

#### **Communication Skill**

It is important for therapists to reciprocate and participate in humor in order to facilitate communication (Haig, 1986). Humor is thought to have the "ability to produce verbal communication and contradictory non-verbal signals simultaneously" (Panichelli, 2013, p. 438). Talens (2020) reported that humor can function as a haven for feelings that neither the therapist nor client feel able to address. Panichelli (2013) wrote how jokes in psychotherapy can be used to talk about the problem without talking about the problem. By joking, safety in the conversation is increased by delivering a "message ... in a disguised way" (Nardone & Portelli, 2007, p. 88). Humor is thought of as a social lubricant (Martineau, 1972), facilitating conversations which may ordinarily feel too risky to engage in. It also can be a way to develop understanding and convey empathy (Middleton, 2007) and be effective for working with clients from diverse backgrounds, providing humorous entry points into painful and challenging discussions (Goldin et al., 2006).

### **Strengthens Alliance**

Displaying humor is a common way of demonstrating personal warmth (Blevins, 2011; Rogers, 1961; Wanzer et al., 2006). Humor can have beneficial therapeutic effects such as enhancing the therapeutic relationship (Borsos, 2006; LiButti, 2014; Salameh, 1983; Sultanoff,

2003, 2013). It is known to build rapport and create a shared positive experience with clients (Franzini, 2001) and build trust (Ventis, 1987). R. A. Martin and Ford (2018) identified humor as a therapist skill which might strengthen the therapeutic relationship or overall effectiveness of therapy (Saper, 1987; Teyber, 1988). By promoting a relaxed environment that facilitates open and honest exchanges, humor can strengthen the therapeutic alliance (Casares & Gladding, 2020; Kuhlman, 1984) and expose hidden thoughts and feelings a client may have (Mindess, 1976).

For counseling trainees in particular, taking a more lighthearted attitude can lower their own anxiety while allowing them to be more effective therapists (Ortiz, 2000). And effectively integrating humor into counseling can strengthen a client's trust in the therapeutic alliance by generating moments of catharsis, alleviating anxiety, lowering client defenses, diminishing resistance, and improving communication (Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Gladding & Wallace, 2016; Odell, 1996). Franzini (2001) found 98% of behavioral therapists self-reported using humor "to establish rapport and to illustrate the client's illogical thinking" (p. 173). Marci et al. (2004) found that changes in skin conductance, a measure shown to increase during moments of empathy, were greater during shared laughter. Hussong and Micucci (2021) found:

That humor had the potential to strengthen the therapeutic alliance by helping clients feel more comfortable and connected to their therapists. Some suggested that humor could facilitate rapport by offering clients an opportunity to engage with their therapist in playful ways. One participant pointed out that adolescents often need humor to engage in the treatment process. Another reported using humor in work with grieving clients by inviting them to recall and recount humorous memories of the deceased person. (p. 83)

K. J. Meyer (2007) explored the relationship between the use of humor within couples therapy and therapeutic alliance and found little to no relationship with the clients' perceptions of

therapeutic alliance at session one or three. R. C. M. Cheung (2019) also found no relationship with the working alliance and humor used by the counselor in individual counseling. If humor enhances the relationship between a therapist and client, then it could also enhance the relationship between a supervisor and supervisee. As humor characteristics vary as much as personal characteristics, Dantzler (2017) states the importance of examining the different characteristics of humor and how they are used in the working relationship between a supervisor and supervisee.

Valentine and Gabbard (2014) proposed an idea that humor creates moments of meeting where the therapeutic alliance deepens because of a moment of shared recognition. Gallese (2009) has linked this mechanism of shared intuitive understanding to mirror neurons. A new attachment relationship, provided by counseling, can change attachment-related implicit procedural memory (Amini et al., 1996).

These moments [of meeting] are spontaneous and lie outside the planned technical interventions of the therapist. They include such phenomena as seeing a tear in the therapist's eye, a shared belly laugh ... or a meaningful glance at the end of a session.

Through new experiences, these moments of meeting may contribute to the modification of old object relationships stored in procedural memory. (Amini et al., 19960, p. 3)

When clients have been asked about their therapy, they mention jokes the counselor shared or a humorous interchange that departed from the usual format of the counseling (Gabbard, 2010). Shared laughter can be a contributory factor to change in the client, and "while an intellectual understanding of a joke may be necessary to 'get it,' a major part of the therapeutic value probably lies in the relational connection that is beyond cognitive understanding" (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014, p. 3).

# **Modeling Adaptive Behaviors**

Through humor, counselors can model effective coping skills (Borsos, 2006). The way counselors use humor in sessions can model for clients how humor can be used positively. Hussong and Micucci (2021) found humor:

Models for the client that two people can have a serious conversation and still have levity and compassion in those moments ... [can] model a way to defuse potentially embarrassing situations ... [and] enable guarded or anxious adolescents to feel safer when discussing personal concerns or insecurities. Another [participant] disclosed that he sometimes jokes about his age with teenage clients as a way of modeling non-defensiveness and letting them know that he is aware of the generational differences. (p. 84)

Humor facilitates the important conversations held in counseling and can help clients "move through" feelings and process them instead of trying to "get around" them. Humor helps clients to feel known and understood by someone else, which is very validating. By using humor in counseling, clients are being taught how to harness the positive effects of humor for themselves.

# **Perception of Therapist**

When a client teases the therapist in a benevolent manner, it can make the therapist appear more human (Kennedy, 1991; F. Wright, 2000). When humor is perceived as funny by both client and counselor, there is an increased liking towards the therapist (Megdell, 1984). Although liking and satisfaction are different, satisfaction with supervision may be defined as "a supervisee's reaction to the supervisor's perceived personal qualities and performance" (VanderGast & Himkle, 2015, p. 93).

With humor having many benefits in counseling when utilized well, it might be something important for clinical supervisors to pay attention to when working with CITs. How counselors typically learn to counsel and develop is through training and supervision. Therefore, it is important to model and discuss humor in supervision. And in order to do a better job at this, the present study strives to explore how faculty perceive the use of humor in supervision.

Satisfied supervisees are more likely to learn from their supervisors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019), and current research has yet to investigate humor within the use of supervision models. Liddle et al. (1988) stated the best clinical supervisor "helps trainees use their natural sense of humor in therapy and also uses their own sense of humor in the supervisory relationship" (p. 392). If humor within a supervisory context continues to be studied then a supervisory humor construct may emerge (Dantzler, 2017).

## **Humor in Clinical Supervision**

Nelson et al. (2008) studied experienced and "wise" supervisors and found they used humor, humility, and self-disclosure. Worthington (1984) found that more experienced supervisors use more humor. This aligns with the findings that therapists lose their sense of humor during training but regain it after acquiring more experience (Neufeldt et al., 1997). When CITs begin professional training, they tend to suppress who they are in an attempt to become a professional and a gap starts to widen between how they function personally and professionally. "One's natural use of humor often follows this gradient. It usually becomes less present during training only to return at a later point" (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992, p. 508).

Counselor educators and supervisors utilize coping strategies, such as humor, to buffer against unaddressed stress and maintain their well-being (Wester et al., 2009; Witmer & Young, 1996). These behaviors are career sustaining (Briggs & Munley, 2008) as humor is an effective

buffer against perceived stress (Besser et al., 2012). Humor is a coping strategy supervisors can use to sustain their career (Briggs & Munley, 2008; Lawson & Myers, 2011).

Counselors and counselor educators have to be aware of how culture influences the use of humor in therapeutic settings (Maples et al., 2001).

Although the importance of using humor is well documented as a clinical tool for counselors, it is often a forgotten ingredient in the didactic experience of counselors-intraining. ... For counselor educators, there must be an impetus to include humor and its appropriate use in the curriculum for counselors-in-training. (Vereen et al., 2006, p. 10)

Hutchby and Dart (2018) examined the uses of laughter in group supervision for counselors. They found laughter can have three uses: laughter in re-assigning 'problems' to other parties, laughter in doing 'being-in-charge' of the supervision discourse, and laughter in the negotiation of ethically or relationally "tricky business." First, laughter was found to be a central factor in managing the relationship between counselors and the organization for which they work. Second, laughter was used to communicate expectations supervisors had of supervisees. Finally, laughter was used to bring the group together and defuse ethical or relational dilemmas supervisees had. The authors report that "a key function of laughter among psychotherapeutic counsellors is as a coping strategy which maintains group solidarity" (p. 174).

# **Perception of Supervisor**

Humor helps convey a sense of humanness and compassion, all of which help supervisors (Liddle, 1988). Humor is a personality trait that a supervisor can possess that supervisees find sexually attractive (Melincoff, 2001). The perception a counselor has of the relationship they have with their supervisor affects their counseling performance (Lanning, 1971) and client outcomes (Bibbo, 1975, as cited in Worthington & Roehlke, 1979). While supervisors who use

humor appear to be more competent (Cushway & Knibbs, 2004), Dantzler (2017) found no differences between secure and insecure attached CITs perceptions of humor used by doctoral-level clinical supervisors. It is important for supervisors to be aware of how they are perceived by their supervisees and how this impacts the supervisory relationship.

Worthington and Roehlke (1979) identified specific supervisor behaviors that are perceived as most "effective" by supervisees and found that using humor during supervisory sessions was related to supervisee satisfaction with supervision, the perceived supervisor competence, and the perception of a good working relationship between supervisees and supervisors. Regarding the supervisee, Hansel (2006) found that the supervisee's use of self-defeating humor was negatively related to satisfaction with supervision.

# **Functions of Humor in Supervision**

## **Bonding**

Humor is a social strategy used to form emotional bonds and improve interpersonal relationships (Erozkan, 2009). Researchers have examined the importance of the supervisory working alliance during supervision (Ladany et al., 1999) and broken it down into three components: goal, task, and bond (Tracey & Kokotovic, 1989). The bond component of supervision is influenced by different personal characteristics such as emotional intelligence, which is related to humor (Gignac et al., 2014).

# Modeling for Supervisee

Supervisors may use humor as a way to educate supervisees on how to utilize it in their sessions. "While some of the conceptual matters related to humor can be alluded to in a classroom setting, the idiosyncratic nature of how humor is used within a specific therapist-patient dyad requires hands-on supervision discussions" (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014, p. 6). A

supervisor's humorous style can be internalized (Gabbard, 2011) through the implicit relational learning that happens during supervision interactions. Valentine and Gabbard (2014) explained:

To facilitate this experiential learning, the supervisor must foster an atmosphere where a supervisee can talk candidly about failed attempts at using humor without fear of shaming or disapproval. Trainees, who may not receive much formal instruction in humor, may see humor as being outside therapeutic technique, and thus not within the scope of supervisory discussions. Further, if the supervisor is uncomfortable with humor as a therapeutic technique, [they] may implicitly model or explicitly state that humorous interventions are unacceptable. (p. 6)

Valentine and Gabbard (2014) noted that as a supervisor it is important to keep in mind that supervisees may not want to use humor with their clients in counseling. However, it is still important for supervisees to understand and be able to respond to client-initiated humor in counseling sessions.

From this literature review, it was clear to see the diversity of humor that exists, despite a majority of the literature being largely western definitions. Examining the theories of humor provided an understanding of how humor is thought to function and how this understanding has changed over time. By exploring the general benefits and drawbacks of humor, readers have learned the importance of knowing how to appropriately use humor and what effects it actually has. Finally, by examining humor in different fields, it was shown how humor specifically helps in contexts similar to those of the present study. In summary, I have explored what humor is, how it works, and what are the outcomes and in what contexts. All of this is necessary to craft better research questions so that I know what exists and how the present study adds to the literature base in the humor and counselor education fields.

#### **Relevance of Humor in Counselor Education**

In their dissertation, Dantzler (2017) noted how there is little or no research on humor in counselor education and supervision, because "the purposeful use of humor in the education and training of counselors has been meager," (Ness, 1989, p. 35) and that is there a need to learn about how humor may affect the supervisory working alliance because a study providing insight on this would be both beneficial and informative in the counselor education and supervision field. Byrd (2022) remarked that,

Further studies could pursue a more in-depth exploration of elements of effective supervision to include elements of the supervisory alliance such as the use of humor, warmth, and self-disclosure on the part of the supervisor. (p. 61)

A majority of research related to humor exists in the field of psychology where it is seen as a positive wellness characteristic (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979) and an important element of counselor wellness (Gladding, 2007). It is important to look at humor in supervision in the field of counselor education and supervision in order to learn what faculty supervisors are trying to do or avoid with the use or disuse of humor. Humor can be used in a beneficial or hurtful way to communicate (Huo et al., 2012) such as sexist (Thomae & Pina, 2015), disparagement (Ford, 2015), put-down humor (Gockel & Kerr, 2015), and other biased-related humor.

## **Current Study**

The present study aimed to explore what narratives faculty have regarding the use of humor in clinical supervision. It helped people understand what faculty perceptions were and how supervisors used humor during supervision and what the perceived impacts were. Doing so clarified the goals, intentions, and uses of humor.

## **Expected Findings**

I expected to find that supervisors use humor in supervision. I anticipated supervisors intentionally use humor to first develop a bond with supervisees and reduce supervisee anxiety by sharing personal anecdotes. Supervisors then utilize humor to reduce defensiveness and point things out to a supervisee by gently poking fun at a supervisee through immediacy. On an ongoing basis I believe humor is used to lighten the mood or create moments of connection. Doing so allows supervisees to be more receptive to feedback and model to them how to use humor in their own work if they want to.

With these positive assumptions, there is also the possibility that humor can be thought to have no effects or even negative effects. Kubie (1970) has described how humor can be harmful to the therapeutic alliance, and I imagine these can mirror being harmful to the supervisory alliance. For example, a supervisor using humor may convey not taking a supervisee seriously, be a defense against their own anxieties, reinforce an unhealthy style of humor, and make the topics being discussed seem taboo or not to be discussed seriously.

#### Rationale

Dantzler (2017) explained how the field of CES may benefit from examining humor and its use in various relationships (e.g., between a client and a counselor and between a supervisor and supervisee). There are very few studies which examine humor and counseling supervision. Hutchby and Dart (2018) conducted an exploratory analysis of the uses of laughter in group supervision for counselors. The present study explored humor in (individual) supervision, and the perceptions faculty have regarding the use of humor in counseling supervision. While humor builds rapport in different contexts (Chinery, 2007; Hackathorn et al., 2011; Sultanoff, 2013; Trichas et al., 2017) and supervisees state humor as being a part of effective counseling

supervision and building rapport (Byrd, 2022), how do faculty supervisors understand humor in supervision? For example, humor may be used in order to develop the supervisory relationship, which in turn acts as a protective factor for future ruptures in the relationship. Or using humor might be the cause of a rupture in the relationship.

As a result of not being informed about humor, supervisors may have misconceptions or misunderstanding and be unaware of ways they can incorporate humor that helps in supervision. Findings from this study might lead to changes in how counselors and counselor educators are trained. I am interested in how humor is or is not incorporated into supervision sessions and for what reasons. By learning how faculty view the function or process of humor in supervision, I can cross reference with the existing literature in other fields and then move towards future studies to determine if the perceptions faculty have contributed to effective supervision.

Given that humor is culturally bound (T. Jiang et al., 2019) and power dynamics exist in supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019), I want to know how humor is used and what faculty believe it does in the context of supervision. The present study adds to the literature by exploring humor between a supervisor and supervisee from the perspective of faculty supervisors. By carrying out the present study readers gain a better understanding of supervisors' perceptions of humor in supervision and be provided with a preliminary understanding of and strategies to turn toward or away from when working on how to continually become a more helpful supervisor for their supervisees.

It was expected that humor enhances the experience and outcomes of supervision, however, this research is important to conduct to begin to explore whether to use it more or diminish its use. Hence more information is needed to determine its utility in the supervision setting. In summary, there are four things the present study addressed: a gap in the literature;

clarification on the nature of humor (how it is used); clarification on the context of humor (when is it used); and the perceived utility of humor (why is it used).

#### CHAPTER III

#### **METHODOLOGY**

I introduce the philosophical assumptions and methods used in the present study. The term *humor* will be defined for the present study following the research questions I am asking. Following are descriptions of my participants and data collection methods and analysis. Finally, there are ethical considerations, my researcher stance, and how rigor and trustworthiness is addressed in the present study.

## **Philosophical Assumptions**

# **Epistemology**

To explain how we know about the world and come to know things, I used a constructionism lens (Papert & Harel, 1991). By viewing stories as co-constructed, this lens focused on the changing elements in the construction of narratives rather than seeing narratives as finished products (Esin et al., 2014). Our social world is constructed through social processes and interactions, and humor is an example of this. Typically, humor is a co-creation involving at least two people. This parallels dyadic supervision where I explored one side of the interaction between supervisors and supervisees for the present study.

People co-create new ways of understanding and new traditions of relating. For example, an inside joke may be created between a supervisor and supervisee and these social phenomena are created and sustained through social practices (Lockyer & Weaver, 2022). Similarly, research can be viewed as a co-production between research participants and researchers, that is the interaction between myself and participants. Co-creation of social phenomena is central to

constructionist research and there are potential connections between humor and social construction. Constructionist research acknowledges humor as a helpful tool for reconstruction in everyday life (Davis, 1993). Constructionist dialogues invite us to explore the ways in which traditions are harmful to our lives and consider new alternatives (Gergen, 2015). The present study explored counseling faculty perceptions of using humor in clinical supervision.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

To explain phenomena, I used symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1980). Within the framework, society is the product of shared symbols (i.e., language) and the meaning that individuals place on social interactions. Language is the medium of much humor and what one person sees as a function humor another may not. Further, a person's perception of humor can change based on interacting with someone else. For example, a supervisor may attempt to communicate feedback to a supervisee through humor, however, the supervisee perceives they are in trouble. Through talking about it afterward, the supervisee learns the supervisor was using a non-serious tone to understand their perspective and not to reprimand them. The meaning of an abstract idea like humor is modified through an interpretive process, making the supervisee change the meaning of the humor.

A micro-interactionist approach, focusing on the small scale or the interactions between individuals, allows humor studies to move away from the analysis of standardized forms of humor like joke ratings from questionnaires. Kuipers (2008) explained:

The symbolic interactionist approach to humor focuses on the role of humor in the construction of meanings and social relations in social interaction. Symbolic interactionist studies generally are detailed studies of specific social interactions, using ethnographic data or detailed transcripts of conversations. (p. 373)

Using this framework, it is understood that humor is constructed in the course of interactions which results in co-construction of whether or not something is defined as humor. Social relations and meanings are constructed and negotiated in the course of social interactions between people such as supervisors and supervisees.

#### Methods

Narrative inquiry has been described as a pragmatic methodology that has three aspects: experience, continuity, and social dimension (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). A framework that can be used for narrative inquiry is the pragmatic ontology of experience, which follows a Deweyan theory of inquiry. Dewey's (1976) view of the first aspect, experience, is that it is transactional in that relationships to objects are transformed. Therefore, narratives are a way to describe human experience as it changes over time (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Regarding continuity, experiences come from other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This idea means that experiences are continuous in that a stream of experience generates new relations that become a part of future experience and help develop a cumulative understanding of a human. There is no one objective reality to uncover. As for the social dimension, "stories are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person's inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 8).

# **Narrative Inquiry**

Prior to conducting more research on humor in supervision, it was important to first gain an understanding of what faculty perceive they or other supervisors are doing and what they believe is the impact of what they or other supervisors are doing as it relates to humor use in supervision. Thus, the goal for the present study was to conduct a study to investigate faculty

supervisors' perceptions of the use of humor in supervision. To understand the experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and context of clinical supervisors, I gained an understanding of the contextualized knowledge (a person's cultural understanding of humor and the history and cultural milieu that the person comes from) and human intention behind humor in supervision.

#### Stories

Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was the chosen methodology as it gives the participants an opportunity to tell their stories and to emphasize what is important for them to include in their narrative. Narrative research is used in studies on educational practice and experience because teachers, like all humans, are storytellers who lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry is the study of experience as a story. It is where researchers find ways to inquire into participants' experiences developed through the relational inquiry process. I am an active participant in the story being analyzed, and the relationship shapes the stories participants express (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The unit of focus is on collective stories and the aim is to produce general knowledge from a collection of stories (J. H. Kim, 2015). When people tell their stories, they are not isolated and independent of their context. It is important to recognize that people are always connected to their social, cultural and institutional setting (Wertsch, 1991). Narratives, therefore, capture both the individual and the context.

#### **Context**

Narrative research is the study of how human beings experience the world and the present study aims to examine and understand how human actions are related to the social context in which they occur (Moen, 2006). Narrative inquiry highlights and contextualizes how experiences shape beliefs and understandings of events and what faculty tell themselves in supervision.

Narrative inquiry concentrates more on the personal, including thoughts, feelings, and motivations. This methodology gives a more contextual and deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of the use of humor in supervision.

When people try to understand concepts like love or humor, the richness and nuances cannot be expressed in definitions or abstract propositions. They can only be demonstrated or evoked through storytelling (Carter, 1993). Narratives are, therefore, inevitably linked to language. As people experience life through participation in social events, they also learn to tell stories about them. In this way, they gradually learn what kind of meaning culture has imposed on the various events (Gudmundsdottir, 2001). Although research using narrative inquiry may have the ability to produce some kind of authentic view of reality, the belief in the potential attainment of an objective reality or truth is rejected (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). A qualitative approach for narrative inquiry means that researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.

### **Humor Definition**

There are many definitions and ways to understand humor and it is not known if any one definition exists that can capture a comprehensive definition. Defining humor is one of if not the hardest thing to do in the field. I did not intend to define what humor is for participants in the present study as I think this may constrain their perspectives of it. I wanted to allow participants to define what humor is for themselves. I chose to let people define what humor is for themselves as this is an essential part to my narrative inquiry. I did not want to limit my recruitment by indicating that my participants had to have a positive view of humor or to be using it in the supervision they provide. I also wanted to emphasis that therapeutic humor can be both the

intentional and unintentional use of humor techniques with the purpose of helping the clients (Franzini, 2001) and that humor has been shown to occur in it either through the 'natural' interactions of it participants or by design (Goldin et al., 2006). Relatedly, how a person acts or what they say may not be intentional to the degree of "I will state this joke when a supervisee brings up this topic;" however, faculty may be intentional in respect not to actively avoiding humor. The *intention* can be that faculty feel like humor is one of their tools that they will not avoid the use of. In the context of psychotherapy, R. A. Martin (2007/2010) explained:

In this view, then, humor is something that occurs spontaneously and naturally in the normal interactions between therapist and client, which may be used with varying degrees of skill and may be more or less beneficial to the client, rather than being a specific technique that is intentionally employed by the therapist. Humor in itself is not inherently therapeutic; to be effective, it must be used in a therapeutic manner. (p. 341)

With the importance of examining the different characteristics of humor and how they are used in the working relationship between a supervisor and supervisee (Dantzler, 2017), humor might be used during supervision as a way to positively affect supervision outcomes. One way to investigate the existence of this intention is to gain a detailed understanding of the broad attitudes and beliefs that counseling faculty have about using humor in supervision. This can add to the literature by determining if faculty supervisors' perceptions match the research on humor in other relationships or fields. For example, existing literature has found that a counselor's use of humor can help bypass client resistance (Buttny, 2001). Do faculty supervisors believe that a supervisor's use of humor can help bypass supervisee resistance? If so, how do supervisors carry this out? Future studies can then explore and triangulate if what supervisors say they do does have the intended impact. The present study is anchored in the perspectives and perceived impact

of humor use in supervision and is open to hearing every perspective from, "I love humor and use it all the time with my supervisees" to "Humor is terrible and I used it once with a supervisee and will never do so again." The goal was to learn about what supervisors are doing with humor, why, and what they think humor does. By interviewing faculty, a deeper understanding of the uses and perceptions of humor was gained to answer the following research questions.

# **Research Questions**

To understand faculty perceptions of the use of humor in supervision, the present study answered the questions:

- Q1 What perspectives do counseling faculty have of using humor in clinical supervision?
- Q2 What are the perceived impacts counseling faculty have of the use of humor in supervision?

# **Participants**

## **Sample Size**

I secured a sample of eight participants for the present study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended sampling until saturation was reached. Reaching a point of saturation means hearing the same responses to interview questions and no new insights are forthcoming (S. B. Merriam & Tisdale, 2000). Although "it is impossible to know ahead of time when saturation might occur" (S. B. Merriam & Tisdale, 2000, p. 101), commonly saturation is reached between 3 to 10 participants for narrative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From a methodological review conducted by Adhikari (2021), "the sample size for narrative research design is flexible, where there can be participation of one to twenty-five participants" (p. 71). Past narrative inquiry dissertations in counseling have sample sizes between three and six participants (G. L.

MacDonald, 2015; Moon, 2016; van der Hagen, 2018; Varnado-Johnson, 2018). The final number of participants was based on coding and whether saturation was met.

From sending out three emails to the CESNET-L list of 6,822 recipients, I received 12 Qualtrics responses. Two of them consisted of only a signature, and two participants did not respond to further email communication. My total sample was 8 people and recorded interviews lengths ranged from 32 minutes to 78 minutes.

## **Faculty**

The participants for the present study were faculty teaching in a counseling program. By including all types of graduate educators, I recruited broadly so that I could capture the diverse experiences of faculty supervisors. I wanted to focus on recruiting faculty supervisors and not general clinical supervisors as this was the scope of the present study and who I wanted to hear from. I assume that faculty would have more education and exposure and training in education as opposed to a general clinician supervisor with potentially only a master's degree.

# **Years of Experience**

While more experienced supervisors use more humor (Worthington, 1984), I was interested in the perspectives that all faculty members have. My results may have indicated a relationship between later career faculty and their perceptions on using humor. I would be interested in such differences that arose and so did not want to set this as an inclusion criterion to narrow my focus in such a way.

### **Demographic Data**

Demographic questions were asked to allow me to describe participants. Although a low sample size means my group of participants may not be representative, I was interested in looking for differences between participants. It is important to note that any trend in my sample

may be illusory because with a low sample size of eight people, outliers can have oversized impacts.

For spirituality, humor and religion are both relational and community-based, and a person's worldview may impact how they perceive humor. For example, when rating a mix of religious and non-religious jokes, Christians, the dominant religious group in America, were the least amused by the jokes and atheists were the least likely to be offended (Ott & Schweizer, 2018). For years of experience teaching, there is mixed evidence if experienced teachers are more proficient than beginners. While Gore et al. (2023) found no significant differences in pedagogy for primary school teachers, I was interested in whether faculty with more years of experience have more or less positive perspectives on humor use. Additionally, if I cross a threshold of participants and have not reached saturation then I would utilize these demographic data to diversify whom I interview next.

## **Inclusion Criteria**

The inclusion criteria for the present study were faculty that had thoughts or feelings about clinical supervisors using humor in supervision, be 18 years and older, currently teaching or supervising in a counseling program, and not members of vulnerable populations.

#### **Data Collection**

#### **Recursive Nature**

Narrative inquiry follows a recursive, reflexive process of moving from people telling their stories during the interview (i.e., field) to interview transcripts (i.e., field texts) to interim and final research texts (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). After transcribing interviews, researchers "isolate and highlight text of interest. The highlighted text is then paraphrased, and gradually the

paraphrased comments are collapsed to form themes and codes" (M. Polkinghorne & Taylor, 2019, p. 1). This is the recursive abstraction method to conduct a qualitative analysis.

## **Faculty Perceptions**

The present study was grounded in perceptions. I established a deep narrative dive into the perceptions supervisors have with the goals, intentions, and uses of humor in supervision. The faculty may use humor themselves and think it is helpful in supervision. However, I was not able to determine if this is true or not as I only considered their perceptions. Faculty may also have the perception that humor is not additive to supervision and so choose not to use it themselves. Or faculty may have perceptions as to why other supervisors do use humor even though they do not. If the faculty I interview did use humor, I am interested in hearing about what they do and how they think it works. However, my study was not solely focused on a participant's use of humor in the supervision they provided. The present study was not exploring outcomes of humor in supervision and was not comparing the opinions of those who did and did not use humor or those who would advocate or reject its use. What I am interested in is the perspectives and perceived impact regarding supervisors' choosing to use or not use humor in supervision. And the perspectives I want are those of counseling faculty.

#### **Procedures**

It took one to four minutes for participants to review and fill out the Qualtrics informed consent and demographics questionnaire. After a participant completes the Qualtrics survey found in the recruitment flyer, if saturation was not yet met, I emailed them to request an interview. After scheduling and completing the semi-structured interview (S. B. Merriam & Tisdale, 2000) to give participants the opportunity to describe details and tell their stories as opposed to a structured interview format, I proceeded to transcribe and code the transcript. As

soon as this was done and I met with my auditor to discuss the findings, I followed up with the participant by emailing them to schedule a meeting for an extended member check. In this email I attached a document (the codebook) of the themes extracted from their transcript with quotes attached. After integrating their feedback into the codebooks and looking for themes across participants, I again consulted my auditor to finalize my results.

# **Sampling Strategy**

A nonprobabilistic sampling strategy was used where I first decided what attributes of my sample are crucial to my study and then find people that meet those criteria (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). The most common form of nonprobabilistic sampling is called purposive (Chein, 1981) or purposeful (Patton, 2015) sampling. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (S. B. Merriam & Tisdell, 2000, p. 96). Purposive sampling is most often used in narrative inquiry studies and qualitative studies (Patton, 2015), and was used because it gives a better than average chance to get at the experience of participants. By aligning the purpose of the study with the people being studied, a deep dive with an interview can be carried out to ensure saturation is reached.

I also used the snowball sampling method (Creswell, 2012):

Snowball ... sampling is perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling. This strategy involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study. As you interview these early key participants, you ask each one to refer you to other participants. "By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases." (Patton, 2015, p. 298)

#### **Recruitment Process**

Recruitment was carried out through sending emails out to the CES listserv (CES-NET) in America (http://www.cesnet-l.net/). Prior to beginning the present study, participants received a recruitment flyer with an introduction to the research objective, basic inclusion criteria, an overview of the time commitment required (Appendix A), and a Qualtrics link containing the consent form (Appendix B) and demographics questionnaire (Appendix C). The Qualtrics survey ended with asking the participant to provide email contact information in order to schedule an interview as needed. Limits to this recruitment process include possibly only reaching those who have signed up to be a part of this email list.

### **Interviews**

The interview was structured enough to enable an exploration of the same elements amongst different people while also giving flexibility to allow what is important to rise to the surface. Generally, participants faced the same type of questions, however, not necessarily the exact same questions because participants may interpret the same wording of a question a different way and the specifics of follow up questions may change in response to what each participant shares. The interview (Appendix D) focused on the perceptions faculty have of their use of humor in supervision. Conversations lasted approximately 60 minutes, ranging from 33 to 78 minutes, and were recorded and later transcribed verbatim [excluding fillers and interjections such "mhm," "yeah," "right," and "okay" said by the interviewer while participants were responding to a question] by me and included in analysis. Each interview was conducted virtually using the university's Zoom video platform. Only an audio recording was kept of these meetings. In compliance with federal regulations, consent documents were retained for a period

of 3 years following the completion of the present study. For record retention, data will be kept on a password protected computer for a minimum of 3 years.

#### **Extended Member Check**

The extended member check (Appendix E) was a follow up to the interview with participants and focused on providing participants with emergent themes, inquiring about the accuracy of themes, and clarifying any gaps from these data that surfaced during the interview. Prior to this meeting, participants were emailed a summary of the themes of their narrative. A transcript of their interview was provided upon request. I met with participants virtually on the university's Zoom video platform and expected conversations to last no more than 60 minutes. These meetings were recorded but not transcribed because the member check interviews were not intended to be coded. Only an audio recording was kept of these meetings for the purposes of auditing. Before each meeting ended, I let participants know they could email me any additional written feedback they may have.

# **Data Analysis**

My primary purpose was to explore the perspectives of humor use in the context of counseling supervision to build an understanding of other ways of being or components of supervision that have yet to be examined. Given this purpose, I decided to ground the present study in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) due to its natural tendency for creativity, story-telling, and in-depth exploration of participants' narratives. People use stories to explain and make sense of experiences. Using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework, the participants' stories were explored by being attentive to situating transcripts of the interview within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, that is, positioning transcripts

of each interview with attention to the temporal, the personal, and social, and place (temporality, sociality, and spatiality).

Temporality looks at the repetition of stories and how the story told during the interview changes across time. I considered the past and present actions of faculty because those actions are likely to occur in the future. Past experiences influence how people experience their present situation. For example, when people look back at narratives they experienced years ago, the social changes become apparent and what seemed socially accepted then might no longer be so (Haydon & van der Riet, 2017).

Sociality looks at both the personal and the social aspects of the experience. I sought to understand the personal experiences and interactions participants have had with other people. The other people participants have interacted with may have different intentions, purposes, and points of view which may inform the analysis.

Spatiality looks at the physical space where the story takes place, which also includes the place where the story is spoken. I looked for locations in the narratives that give meaning to the narrative, such as the participants' physical location and how the activities occurring in that place affected their experiences.

Analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements. By using a paradigmatic type of analysis (analyzing paradigms by comparing and contrasting people's stories of experiences of humor in supervision and producing themes), concepts are inductively derived from the data (D. E. Polkinghorne, 1995). Therefore, I examined the written texts to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations. This approach usually requires a database of several stories (rather than a single story). The data were analyzed following D. E. Polkinghorne's (1995) methodology where generated themes from the storied data. Namely:

Qualitative researchers emphasize the construction or discovery of concepts that give categorical identity to the particulars and items in their collected data. Qualitative researchers examine the datum items for common themes and ideas. The coding schemes of qualitative analysis are designed to separate the data into groups of like items. The grouped items are inspected to identify the common attributes that define them as members of a category. (Strauss, 1987, as cited in D. E. Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 10)

After completing this I followed up with participants to discuss the findings with them (member checking). Finally, there was an examination of themes across the participants to gain understanding of the perceptions of humor in supervision. In summary, the following steps of analysis were carried out:

- 1. Upload video recording into transcription software,
- 2. Proofread transcript,
- 3. Read through transcript while coding and writing down initial thoughts in research journal,
  - 4. Reread transcript of interview,
- 5. Identify storied elements within narrative related to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (i.e., temporality, sociality, and place of the narrative),
  - 6. Develop emergent themes for the narrative,
  - 7. Search for connections across emergent themes within the individual transcript,
  - 8. Consult auditor to evaluate themes,
  - 9. Confirm themes from the interview with the participant,
  - 10. Add or remove any themes that come from the member check,

- 11. Look for patterns across all participant's account of the phenomena under study, and
  - 12. Consult auditor to evaluate themes.

#### Coder

The coder for the present study was myself. I was a doctoral student with a minor in applied statistics and research methods. I had conducted a narrative study before and published and presented qualitative research.

#### Auditor

The auditor was recruited from the CES program I am currently in and was an advanced doctoral student with qualitative research experience and knowledge about narrative inquiry. I gave them access to audio recordings, transcripts, codebooks, and research journals to use as needed in their role as auditor. First, I had them understand my study and assumptions by reading Chapter I and Chapter III of the present study in addition to my research journals. Next, I asked them to look over each codebook developed from the interviews. Finally, I asked them to look over finalized codebooks after I have conducted the extended member checks with participants. Throughout this process the auditor gave me feedback on my research process, and themes, and they also checked for biases.

# **Coding Process**

For each participant I identified narrative segments within their transcript and assigned a code in the form of a single word or a small phrase by highlighting the text using the "New Comment" function in Microsoft Word. For example:

Throwing humor on your people that are slow processors or do more work outside of the session than they do in the session, whether it's a group supervision or it's clients, you

need to know yourself. First of all, who are you in that mix? But also, what's your client like? Which is why timing I think is everything. (Crazy Town)

Was coded as *know yourself* and *timing humor*. And "Because sometimes it'll have also the effect of maybe shaking someone out of an uptightness that they don't need to have given the situation. So that's a that's a use as well. Put someone at ease a little bit." (Jack) was coded as *put supervisee at ease*. I created codes using the participants' own words as much as possible for continued emphasis of their narratives.

After doing this for each transcript, I copy and pasted each identified code onto a new Microsoft Word document and assigned a font color to each participant so that I could reference which individual code was attached to which participant to later obtain direct quotes as needed. I chose to not code from preexisting literature, but from the narratives themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to help maintain the narratives. Throughout this process I carried out reflexive journaling and consultation with my auditor.

### **Theme Creation**

With one Microsoft Word document created of all participant codes, as described above, I looked at each code for common ideas or concerns (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I reorganized the list of codes by combining similar codes to produce a more manageable number of codes (Creswell, 2005). For example, humor in technology problems, pointing out to supervisees, and share mistakes were categorized under a Types of Humor heading. I segmented the codes even more to generate subthemes. Using the previous codes, humor in technology problems and pointing out to supervisees was placed under Observational while shares mistakes was placed under Narrative. This process generated nine main themes and 39 subthemes. To make my results more accessible to readers I chose to "Zoom out" a level. I made the original main themes

become subthemes and then created new overarching main themes. For example, three of the original main themes, Definition of Humor, Types of Humor, and Humor as a Way of Being, became subthemes under the new main theme, Describing.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The present study was approved by the University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix F). Huber and Clandinin (2002) explained that narrative inquiry can shift the experiences of those with whom we engage. Therefore, it is important to consider one's own narrative, how a researcher interacts with participants, and how to write and share research findings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber & Clandinin, 2002). It is important to be open to multiple voices and learn how to make sense of stories (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Initial informed consent was obtained electronically through the University Qualtrics account. At the bottom of the informed consent webpage, participants were informed that their choice to continue onto the next page indicates they have provided their informed consent to participate in the study. Following this is a digital signature box for participants to sign. The participant was asked to provide email contact information in order to schedule the initial interview as needed. Informed consent was reviewed at two separate times; in written form just before participants are prompted to fill out the online demographic questions and verbally prior to the semi-structured interview.

For confidentiality, participant responses were only identifiable through a self-selected pseudonym when information is shared through reporting findings. Informed consent documents were the only documents with the name of participants. Informed consent documents did not have any information linking participants to their selected pseudonyms. Due to the electronic

nature of the consent forms, they were kept on a password protected server through the University Qualtrics account. Audio recordings and transcripts from each interview were kept on a password protected computer, and all identifiable names were redacted before storage. Only the researchers had access to and examined individual responses through written transcripts. All transcripts redacted any identifiable participant information and used only participant pseudonyms. Sensitive information such as interviews is categorized as a level 2 for the University of Northern Colorado's Institutional Review Board. Therefore, the data were kept on a password protected computer used in the handling of research data for a minimum of 3 years.

#### **Researcher Stance**

I hold a positive view towards humor and use it in most aspects of my personal life and work (e.g., teaching, counseling, supervision). I also use humor to cope with stressors and am continuing to work on the appropriate timing and intentional use of it in my work. Personally, I habitually laugh at seemingly inappropriate times and can be perceived as being funny when not trying to be. I believe that when humor is used intentionally and appropriately during supervision, it models to supervisees how humor works, allows connections to develop, and provides a way to communicate with supervisees.

### **Rigor and Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) created the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in order to explain trustworthiness. These criteria parallel the quantitative assessment of validity and reliability of research findings and ways to strive toward meeting the criteria are discussed by Nowell et al. (2017).

#### Credibility

Credibility describes the confidence in how true the findings are. Namely, how similarly are the participants' views and my representation of them. Techniques I carried out to establish credibility are prolonged engagement with the data, member checking, and researcher triangulation. I member checked (Birt et al., 2016) to corroborate evidence from the interview. My interview questions were broad enough to allow faculty to share their stories related to what I was interested in and focused enough that each question revealed what I needed to investigate. I listened repeatedly to each recorded interview and read transcript multiple times. I coded each transcript and had discussions with the auditor in order to check biases. I shared findings with participants to ascertain whether the findings reflected their experience (Creswell, 2009). Using negative case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), examining selected cases to highlight data that contradict the main findings to enhance credibility, I looked for negative evidence by actively looking for disconfirmation of what I think is the case. I constantly reconsidered the working hypothesis until there was no disconfirmation.

# **Transferability**

Transferability describes the generalizability of my findings so that other people can transfer my findings to their own contexts. The technique I carried out to establish this is having thick descriptions or detailed accounts of participants' experiences. I also asked a peer in my field, or an individual doing similar research to look at my results, and I asked counseling faculty supervisors to assess whether my interpretations make sense. These steps provided me with peer and audience validation (Loh, 2013).

# **Dependability**

Dependability describes whether the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented. The technique I carried out to establish this is having an external auditor who examined my research process.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability describes whether the findings I obtain and conclusions I make are supported by my data. The techniques I carried out were reflexivity and again utilizing the same external auditor who examined my methodology and other choices I made (i.e., recruitment criteria) and determined if they and others understood why those choices were made.

To record my stance and thinking during the study, I had a research journal (Ortlipp, 2008; Russell & Kelly, 2002). I am making no claim to be objective (Roulston, 2010) and so have subjectivity. "Subjectivity refers to an individual's feelings, opinions, or preferences" that comprise a person's identity (Siegesmund, 2008, p. 2). By acknowledging my subjectivities, I am striving to become aware of my biases, beliefs, emotions, and opinions that influence my interactions with the world (Pope, n.d.).

I bridled-direct subjectivities-through the method of journaling within one hour after each interview by writing about my own worldview, including preconceived notions, assumptions, or biases that could impact the research being conducted. Entries were shared with the auditor in order to help increase the internal validity of the present study (S. B. Merriam, 2002).

#### Research Journaling

This is the way I critically reflect on myself as a human instrument in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). I used journaling to engage data immediately after collection, and to express

personal assumptions, biases, values, hunches, insights, and broad ideas related to the narratives (Creswell, 2005).

### **Bridling**

This relates to the fact that researchers cannot separate themselves from their worldviews. By directing your subjectivities, bridling allows for trustworthiness to be incorporated.

Significance comes from the participants' narratives and not my own understanding of them (Ellett, 2011).

#### Conclusion

With a constructionism lens (Papert & Harel, 1991) and symbolic interactionism framework (Blumer, 1980), I used the narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to understand the stories of counseling faculty as a way to gain a contextual and deeper understanding of their perceptions of the use of humor in supervision. The aim of the present study was to explore the perceptions of using humor in supervision. Doing so created an understanding of how faculty in counseling programs in the United States understand the use of humor in supervision.

Participants were left to define what humor was for themselves and answered the questions: What perspectives do counseling faculty have of using humor in clinical supervision? and What are the perceived impacts counseling faculty have of the use of humor in supervision? The following sections will include the results (Chapter IV) and discussion (Chapter V) of the proposed study. I will share the themes and selected quotes for each participant and then discuss my findings.

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CHAPTER IV

**RESULTS** 

I first present the narratives of counseling faculty who identified having perceptions of

using humor in supervision. I then provide themes across participants (combined themes). The

data presented were not exhaustive of everything participants had said as it was an overview of

what was discussed. The data obtained from eight participants helped to answer my research

questions:

Q1 What perspectives do counseling faculty have of using humor in clinical

supervision?

Q2What are the perceived impacts counseling faculty have of the use of humor in

supervision?

**Participant Narratives** 

Crazy Town's Narrative: Dr. Crazy Town Has

Lost Her Mind

Crazy Town was a Puerto Rican cis female Lutheran, Wiccan with ADHD and dyslexia-

ability. She was 50 years old, had 21 years of teaching experience, and taught within a non

CACREP accredited college in the Northeast region of America. Crazy Town was an Associate

Professor and conducted group supervision in class settings and provided pro bono supervision

for underserved people working towards licensure. She also mentioned having her own three-

hour lecture on humor they presented to students in some of the classes they taught and having

read books and articles about humor.

Crazy Town stressed, "humor in therapy has been around for a very long time, and a lot of people don't use it. And if you don't teach people in supervision, they're definitely not going to use it properly." When they first started using humor, Crazy Town had "some underlying fear." She explained that as she got older, she felt safer about "using it at the right time and for the right reasons" because experience came with "becoming a little bit older in terms of this business." During the interview Crazy Town shared many personal anecdotes, stories, and jokes.

Crazy Town described humor being "about something that's odd, or absurd, or eccentric" that makes you laugh. She explained being "just that person" who uses humor because it is in their "makeup" and part of "being an authentic person." To Crazy Town, humor is a way to connect with students and let them know, "it's okay. Because we're all doing this work. And you got to find something to laugh about sometimes." In response to students not having done a required reading, she has said "Look, I think Dr. Crazy Town has uh lost her mind. And we're just not going to do the reading today because none of us knows what's happening." This makes students chuckle and allows students to "know that I'm as sometimes as forgetful and as disorganized as they are." It models to supervisees humor "is something you can use with your clients" as "sometimes trainees don't always understand how to use humor or what humor is." Humor helps supervisees relax when they "feel like they're the only one." It brings the supervision group closer together by showing supervisees "we've noticed you're trying to hide, and we're trying to take care of you by pointing it out."

Crazy Town used humor as "a layup ready to go to teach students." For example, "to show students you can make a mistake," the participant shared with her supervisees how she did not know how to address a client because she did not look at the paperwork, and so she would say phrases such as "Hey, kiddo, it's good to see ya.," "What's going on youngster?," or "How

are things, sir?" Humor is a protective factor for Crazy Town because she used it "to build resiliency to be protective of burnout." She explained having to find her own forms of mindfulness practices that differed from the typical "go outside" and "feel your feet on the earth."

Crazy Town seemed focused on the positive aspects of humor and noted not specific intentionality behind her use of it. She explained how you "need to know what your style of humor is" and that authenticity is very important. "If you're not that person [who uses humor], then don't try to be that person. You either are or you're not." In addition to knowing yourself, she stated how it is important to know your audience and what humor they find acceptable. A facet of humor she stressed was how "timing is everything." She reported how properly timed and used well, "humor can be just as good a therapeutic technique." She also emphasized that when it comes to humor in supervision, you have to be culturally aware. To adjust your humor after you find out who your supervisees are and "have a very steady relationship" with them.

You have to make sure that the humor is not about poking fun at somebody whose feelings you're going to hurt. ... Meanness does not have a place in humor. ... There's just some things that -it's not funny. It might be funny on the street, but it's not funny in supervision group. And it's not appropriate.

Over time, using a developmental approach, Crazy Town is more real with supervisees and makes comments such as "Dude that really was an inappropriate joke, but it was funny." She also found that the "majority of the people that I'm still in touch with that I've supervised over the years, they're able to laugh at themselves, um they're able to find some humor in this work." Crazy Town seemed to use a lot of sarcasm and humor. For her it seemed to be a way to use

immediacy with supervisees and help them feel seen and to put them at ease. She came across as a strong advocate of humor.

# L's Narrative: It's My Appalachian Coming Out

L was a White cisgender female Episcopalian with Autoimmune disorders, ADHD, and OCD. She was 34 years old, had 4 years of teaching experience, and taught within a CACREP accredited college in the Midwest region of America. She was an Assistant Professor and conducted group supervision in school settings and individual supervision for state licensure.

L described the counselor education field as becoming "a much more multicultural landscape" which has opened space for supervisors to use humor in their work. At first L seemed to not be sure how to define humor, and then shared how she viewed humor as "part of my personality" where she used lightheartedness in supervision. It is "any sort of speech language communication that is perceived to be lighthearted or not to be taken that seriously in its delivery, meaning, and context." In addition to using coarse language, the participant references herself often when using humor. For example, she make comments such as, "it's my Appalachian coming out" or "I live in the middle of nowhere in rural [state]. And so my internet connection is just sorry, I'm sorry guys. It's not great tonight."

As the interview progressed, L had more stories to share. For example, L explained how she tried to "tie humor in and really making humor a pedagogical approach in a way. Um into the classroom setting" to normalize, recognize, or share lived experiences. For example, the participant described using more humor during the COVID-19 pandemic since "the COVID experience helped ... to normalize that everybody's at home and like, everybody's got lives that exist at home, and that it like exists away from the computer screen."

L explained that in supervision you must be able to read the room so that everyone in "group supervision are going to be able to measure the same type of lightheartedness that you're trying to give off." She made sure to not "use humor in a way that would deprecate anyone else ... or try to make jokes about folks' lived experiences in terms of like traumatic experiences or anything like that, like you don't go there." L uses humor to "bring a little bit of reality and lightheartedness into university supervision." What appeared to emerge when L spoke was that humor allows her to be authentic and normalizes being an imperfect person who is a human and has a life outside of Zoom or the classroom. L seemed to be a lighthearted fun person who uses humor to deflect in their personal life and ruminates after if jokes do not land with her supervisees.

She puts students at ease when unintentional interruptions occurred over the Internet that showed "I have a child, I have a spouse, I live on a hobby farm in rural [state] and like, I have dogs that bark in the background, and they bark at the UPS man when he shows up." This humor normalizes and helps show "I have a life that exists outside of being a faculty member, and that I know other students have ... lives outside of being um students." Humor helps "build a level of rapport and congruency" which helps in "terms of allowing for as much of an egalitarian relationship as there can be in those scenarios" and "allows for supervisees to see that I also don't take myself too seriously." L used humor (i.e., coarse language) to "show genuineness and authenticity and that like, even though. ... I might be perceived in this hierarchical structure, as a supervisor, like I'm very much so a real person." L believed that by using humor, "the feedback on my course evaluations tends to be better then previous" because "that rapport is there" from "getting to know students over the 16 weeks" and being "more comfortable in teaching fieldwork" themselves.

# **Lilly's Narrative: The Benefits Are Truly Endless**

Lilly was a White cis woman slightly spiritual, agnostic. She was 35 years old, had 2 years of teaching experience, and taught within a non CACREP accredited college in the West region of America. Lily was faculty and used humor regularly with supervisees in master's level practicum and internship and, unlike other participants, mentioned her own past supervisors' humor in addition to her own use. She has also written a dissertation on the use of humor in the classroom.

Lilly knew a lot of the existing literature on humor and was interested in collaborating on humor research. She defined humor as "anything that elicits some sort of humor response ... whether it be internal or external, of an acknowledgement of it being funny" that "doesn't have to be outward laughter or a chuckle." She explained how the responsibility falls on the person who's giving the humor since it "can be funny to them, even though the receiver doesn't laugh. And vice versa, like, the receiver can think it's funny, even if the giver doesn't think it is. It's very subjective, I guess, is what I'm saying."

When thinking about an example of humor in supervision, Lilly described how their past supervisor shared a story in a "funny and engaging" way where her supervisor's inflection in voice indicated the "absurdity in it." Lilly "dip[s] a toe in in a very safe way" and sometimes shares "a really groan worthy pun" as it helps when a joke is observed by everyone and everyone in the supervision class is in on the joke. By leaning into bad or failed humor, supervisees can appreciate the attempt. Because there is a human component in our job as supervisors, people need to be professional yet "loosen up and show more of themselves to their supervisees." The participant naturally changed her humor style to match supervisees over time and tailored humor

to each supervisee as "authenticity looks different with different supervisees because we have different relationships."

Lilly used humor in supervision, "because I use humor everywhere else. ... I think my general way of being in all of my roles as a counselor educator is person centered." She explained,

The thing that I want most for all of my clients, my students, my supervisees, if they have a space where they can be fully themselves and not feel judged, and they can explore whatever they need to explore in a place that feels like, safe, like, to me, that's the, like, the best job I can be doing as a counselor educator is just letting people be themselves. And I think in order to facilitate that, we also have to show up authentically, of course, there are certain, you know, within professional bounds.

Lilly mentioned how the "the benefits are truly like endless" when it comes to humor. For a supervise it can lower defenses, alleviate tension, and help process difficult things -allowing things to be processed in a different way. Laughter from the supervisor was also a way to help supervisees realize what they, the supervisee, said was funny. "Humor can help concepts stick in our minds ... with my example with my supervisor, that metaphor of the Teflon, I remembered it impacted me. Um and I think that also has a lasting effect."

Humor "is incredibly relationship building" by increasing "trust and like working together" because "it's easier to trust somebody who presents as a human than not," and it can "even some of those power differentials" and "help supervisees feel a lot more comfortable." Lilly described her own experience of thinking she would not mesh with their past supervisor, and then after her supervisor's use of humor "felt a lot more connected with her than I previously had." It can also be "a really effective communication tool, when we're processing through

something that it can be helpful in processing something that can that's hard or difficult." The use of sarcasm "gives us an in that's soft and relationship building" that acts like a paraphrase and feeling reflection by saying something like "Oh, but you've got nothing going on, you've got plenty of time for this."

After a classroom learning experience where she realized humor in supervision can hurt people's feelings and be distancing, Lilly started to be more intentional with her use of humor. "While I utilize it in an authentic way, I also try to like, constantly have a filter of like appropriateness and make sure it's relationship building rather than distancing." It is important to, "be even more clear and obvious over Zoom, because you don't get the same like nonverbal experience, you're only seeing part of me." She described how it's very difficult to use humor at all when there is a little bit of a delay, or some sort of connectivity issue because "so many things can be missed, because like, it's just not -the flow isn't there, because it's really segmented."

#### Lilly described:

Even if you have what you feel like is a really solid relationship, that can still really hurt somebody's feelings. Um because at the end of the day, we are in a position of power and more than likely if we do hurt their feelings, the supervisee's not going to say anything.

And so we might never know that we've really crossed a line.

As a result of the inherent power differential in supervision, "you never fully know how like a supervisee feels about you." So it is important to be aware of responses and non verbals and to use humor that builds people up (not put people down) and to not use humor that hinges on identity while being aware of people's cultural background, as humor varies person to person.

# Daphne's Narrative: I Don't Withhold Myself From Having a Personality

Daphne was a Caucasian White female Christian. She was 40 years old, had 3 years of teaching experience, and taught within a CACREP accredited college in the South region of America. Daphne was an Adjunct Professor and conducted triadic supervision for practicum and internship students and supervised for licensure. She also mentioned their experience supervising doctoral students.

Daphne had a lot to say about humor and reported feeling "so much more comfortable on the internet mainly because [they] can wear pajama pants." She elaborated, "if we feel comfortable in what we're wearing, then we're naturally going to be more comfortable." Over time, Daphne started to show more of their personality in their work as they previously "felt like an actor. … I felt like I was putting on a muted version of myself." However, she added that she may start using less humor as time continues because,

Now that I'm a little bit older and I've been in the field a little bit longer I don't necessarily need to use humor as much because I think I have the, the innate credibility that comes with somebody who's been in the field for like over 10 years and who has more wrinkles on their face than I did when I was in my 20s.

Daphne preferred supervising online and has used humor developmentally based on the amount of clinical experience a supervisee has. She will use more humor and a relational approach with a supervisee just starting out with low confidence. She explained: "If my supervisee has so much confidence that they're not aware of the risks, because they're so confident in what they're doing, then I'm not gonna use humor quite as much." For a doctoral student with a lot of clinical experience she tended to use humor to "eliminate some expected"

frustration" as a student may already be a licensed counselor and have to be supervised due to program requirements.

Daphne defined humor as "anything that would make you laugh -tickles your funny bone." When asked about this funny bone, she stated it "might be like an internal kind of giggling ... like if you're sitting in a meeting, it might not be appropriate to actually laugh out loud, but um something that was said was kind of funny." She explained "I don't with withhold myself from having a personality" and that their humor is "intentional." By using a relational approach, students are comfortable sharing their reactions to humor. If a joke falls flat, "making fun of yourself actually adds the humor."

Humor can make it harder to maintain professional boundaries. The trickiness of humor is that it can both send the message of something not being appropriate to talk about or opening this place for a supervisee to start complaining. By using humor, supervisors may miss opportunities to dive deeper and come across as less intelligent or experienced if they are too relational. She added, "when humor is used uh in a way that it's uh discloses an opinion, that can be problematic."

Daphne explained that humor helps with connection and demonstrates: "Hey, I'm here for you. I care about you ... the relational aspect." She described humor as being a part of a relational approach and how it is an aspect of relational cultural theory and relational motivational interviewing. She has used humor at the start of supervision to have "the relational part to get into play ... [since] if you don't do that part, you might jump into quote, unquote, business mode. And you might miss important things that really do need attending to, with the supervisee."

Daphne used humor to avoid diving too deep into a supervisee's personal life as "it's really not our role to like dive super deep with our supervisees," as compared to in counseling. If the mood is tense or the conversation off topic, humor can help align conversation to "switch gears and get back to the productive part." By using humor, she can "jump start the serious talk" to "align the conversation into what we're going into next." She also has used humor coupled with confrontation to make it less direct, resulting in it being received better when done in a humorous way. Further, humor can align a conversation "if it isn't relevant to ... the supervision goal" as two supervisees may be talking about their work with adolescents while the other eight supervisees are not working with adolescents. "The aligning conversation might not necessarily be like there needs to be a change. It's just not the right time and place for whatever conversation's going."

Daphne could not really think of using any unintentional humor and uses humor as a way to "to encourage a professional identity that ... promotes competence and humility." She has confronted supervisees in a comical way by saying something such as, "so I'm almost getting the sense that you don't like your client." She explained supervisees can have too much confidence and so do not consider other approaches or if they are the best counselor for a client. She mentioned how creative approaches are very memorable and so maybe using a joke at start of class would be beneficial.

### Alice's Narrative: Cracking Jokes About My Life

Alice was an African American female who is spiritual. She was 64 years old, had 12 years of teaching experience, and taught within a non CACREP accredited college in the Midwest region of America. Alice was an Adjunct Instructor, supervised master's level students in practicum and interacts with doctoral level students for committee work.

Alice was very friendly and explained how her use of humor has not changed over time and is the same whether supervising in person or online. She described humor as being "a part of my family of origin" and "that might be how it's in supervision to calm my emotions, because of needing to discuss difficult topics or whatever. Maybe that's it?" Alice defined humor as "anything that makes you laugh ... it doesn't have to necessarily be external, it can be internal as well." The type of humor she used is "very matter of fact, some is deadpan humor. I may say something, I'm explaining something serious. And then all of a sudden I'll throw in a humorous line." She reported she "always start out, cracking jokes, about my life, you know, what's going on" and describing what their perceptions and emotions are in regards to clients. Namely:

I have these thoughts that go through my mind. And so when I'm talking with my students, I'm mentioning those thoughts that I'm having, so that they're aware that, "Yes, you have these thoughts, but that's okay. Just don't let them spill over into the session."

Alice appeared a bit closed off to exploring the reasons behind their actions as it related to humor in supervision. She did not have any cautions when using humor and reported being spontaneous when using it. She explained: "I don't ask myself [why], I just engage in the humor." She further explained: "I'm extremely spiritual. And so sometimes I feel that there is a guidance of knowing when people are in distress. And using humor to lighten that up. I feel like that's possibly the reason why it pops up." If she realized afterward that something they said was inappropriate she "always go back the next time I meet them and let them know" in addition to apologizing.

Alice used humor to relax students and help them feel at ease before or while working with clients by making comments such as "I didn't realize you had that much power that you can actually make somebody go out, stand in front of a bus, and get hit. Like, you can't do that." If

she sensed that "everybody's coming in, they're tired, they're overwhelmed or whatever. Then yeah, then I lighten the mood." She also used humor to build community. "You need to build trust. They're not gonna talk with each other about their cases. … And so I just figure using the humor builds that community. And, you know, apparently it's something that people gravitate towards."

Alice used humor to segue into teaching about the conceptualization process and how to work with clients. It helps "interns understand they can use humor in counseling" and helps "supervisees realize they [can] use the humor to alleviate their own tension and alleviate tension for each other" in the classroom.

#### Lily's Narrative: An Interesting Flavor to Life

Lily was a White, non-Hispanic gender fluid woman who was agnostic. They were 31 years old, had 2 years of teaching experience, and taught within a CACREP accredited college in the South region of America. Lily was a Professor and conducted supervision for practicum and internship in their program. They added that as a doctoral student they individually supervised master level students. Of interest was when Lily gave an example of their supervisees using humor during supervision instead of only focusing on their own use of humor.

Lily struggled a little to pick a pseudonym and was smiley throughout the interview.

Growing up, she learned to be mean to others through humor as a defense mechanism. When it comes to the beginning of a class or relationship: "I stick to things that are kind of like, safer, I guess. Um things that most people can relate to, or are like, not as personal, um kind of like focusing on a common enemy, so to speak." Over time they push the boundaries a bit more and their use of humor becomes more personalized and challenges supervisees. Lily uses self-deprecating humor a lot and defines humor as, "things that are funny, things that make me laugh

... like an ability to laugh at yourself, kind of poke fun, not taking things too seriously." They described how humor "adds an interesting flavor to life and kind of challenges us to think about things in a different way that's enjoyable."

When recalling an experience of humor in supervision, Lily described how one student who made a joke about themselves created an inside joke that was referenced throughout the semester. They utilize a lot of dark humor and explained, "we tried to poke fun at with, you know, the dark humor, trying to survive trying to get through it." They also share "funny anecdotes of things that I've messed up with, or things that are just funny to me" and displayed "physical comedy [which] is unintentional. ... I stumble over my words." They reported now bowing after they spill all their things onto the floor.

When it came to humor for Lily, "it really boils down to that's just who I am. And so it's me being authentic." It is "something I can't turn off a lot of times. It's my personality. And so if I'm being myself, there's humor involved." While humor "makes me more relatable," Lily explains how they "need to be mindful of, like, for my own personal needs" of wanting to be liked. Relatedly, they described needing to maintain some professional distance with supervisees as they are a young professor where students can relate to them and have similar types of humor. Lily did not want to describe the situation in detail and shared: "I've crossed lines with my supervisees before and kind of forgotten that I am in a position of power and authority ... and said things that were inappropriate. And it hasn't gone like horribly."

Lily explained how humor "makes things more fun" and "challenges us to think about things in a different way that's enjoyable." They try to "inject some energy" into supervision because there are times when the news going on is "draining and awful." Humor is "clinically bonding with my supervisees" and "shows me as a person" who is relatable. It "encourages

students to be authentic in themselves." They "level the power dynamic" as much as they can because they want to recreate the experiences they had with their own past supervisors where "I felt more comfortable knowing that this person in charge is similar to me." Lily hopes to show supervisees "you can be very serious and really good at your job and very serious and committed to quality client care, and still have your values and be yourself. Like you don't have to sacrifice one for the other."

They used humor to cope themselves, "that gets expressed in supervision," and to model to supervisees and let them have "another kind of coping strategy in their back pocket." Failed humor has created teachable moments and allowed the supervisor and supervisee to pause and look at what is happening and try to change it.

# Sharon's Narrative: How Appropriate Is It?

Sharon was a White, non-HispaniX cis woman Christian with ADHD. She was 35 years old, had 1 year of teaching experience, and taught within a CACREP accredited college in the South region of America. Sharon was an Assistant Professor and conducted university individual and group supervision for master's practicum and internship.

Sharon seemed to adjust herself in her chair often at the start of the interview. She mentioned having done her first-year teaching as a faculty member and seemed more tech savvy than other participants when it came to integrating technology and humor into their work. She also noted how she researched wellness, and already knew many benefits of humor and workplace satisfaction. Sharon reported feeling like there are "more tangible resources to access" when supervising online. "It can be easier to grab this resource or pull up this joke or even pull up a humorous video, um and use it in in a good supervisory way." At the start of a relationship, there is "more light, joking and me trying to contain my facial expressions ... it'll be more

concrete. I have a joke for you like setting that up or I have a meme for you." Over time, the humor "becomes more fluid and less structured, the more that we um navigate together as supervisee and supervisor."

Sharon defined humor as "any form of language, verbal or nonverbal, that may be used to provide a sense of levity or enjoyment or tension breaking." This includes "jokes with your supervisees," "laughing banter with them," "nonverbal facial expressions or showing memes that relate to counselor development," and when a "pet shows up on camera." She used humor "because it's a natural part of our human experience ... I don't think that you could or should fully separate your humanity from the role of being a supervisor."

One of the biggest questions Sharon always had was "how appropriate is it? ... And what type of humor am I going to use?" She thought about how her humor will land and how supervisees are receiving the humor. She was "very transparent" with supervisees and lets them know,

This is how I usually operate and run supervision, and empower them to know like, "If I were to use humor, or tell a joke or anything like that, and that is not, you do not feel comfortable with that, you can always let me know. And that is my responsibility to change that. And to adjust it or not use it because I am the one with more power in that dynamic. So um to fix things and adjust things." So that's generally how I approach it with them.

Sharon saw humor as "a very strong supervisory bonding experience." Light joking can break the ice and be used to connect people to their own culture and build rapport. Humor brings people together and "creates an environment that is welcoming and accepting and validating and pleasant to be in." She used humor to normalize discomfort around sensitive topics, tell funny

stories which create further educational discussion, and use humor to broach topics and normalize the process of becoming a counselor and enforce supervisees to be professional.

Jack's Narrative: Give Permission To Bring Themselves In

Jack was an Irish Scottish American male with hearing impaired, arthritis, and long COVID. He was 62 years old, had 28 years of teaching experience, and taught within a CACREP accredited college in the Midwest region of America. Jack was a Professor and conducted supervision at a University Counseling Center, group supervision as a faculty member, and practicum one on one and triadic supervision.

Jack was surprised by how quick we reached the last question of the interview. He was very aware when digressing and apologized to the interviewer. He also used a lot of humor during the interview and was not sure about unintentional uses of humor. Jack "learned through the doing" in that their humor "flowed more organically" as "I became less uptight, and as I became a better instructor." He reported saying what "was natural to me" however at times not having "read the room quite right. Or the developmental timing wasn't quite right." Humor has not worked for him in the past because "mostly it was generational failure," meaning the participant mentioned something that the supervisees did not know of such as "the professor from Gilligan's Island." He described not using humor as much online as he couldn't read the room. "I would just kind of throw some things out. Because I didn't know if I was on target or not. Sometimes they'd connect, sometimes they wouldn't."

Jack described humor as "the logical outcome of a creature like us becoming sentient ... implicating oneself in the species is, of course, the root of that humor." The types of humor he used include songs, magic tricks, a ventriloquist dummy, and making comments such as:
"Congratulations, you just managed to make 'Hello' sound creepy" when reviewing a recorded

session with a supervisee. He tried to use levity equally" in order to try to avoid supervisees thinking: "Oh, he always jokes with so and so, they must be the favorite." Jack reported always being intentional with humor and that you have to be yourself. He stated,

It's like anything else. You know, you practice at it. And you find degrees of freedom that aren't offensive, you know, and then you kind of work on those and I think it gets better if you just keep at it like anything else.

Jack described humor as "like seasoning ... an acquired taste, and it's 'start low, go slow' ... you know, don't bust out what you think is your kind of funniest joke. Read the room [laughs], you gotta read the room." He noted how it is important to start with lower risk humor first and to use humor based on how well you know a supervisee. His use of humor decreases tension and helps "put someone at ease a little bit." He "hope it makes their [supervisee's] training enjoyable" where "we can enjoy ourselves at some points." He reported that humor "promotes group cohesion, which for a species like us is critical. ... I think humor bastes [like basting a turkey with liquid to make it better] our relationships and I think it can bring out the best in us." By using humor, the participant stated he can "come off as informal" which makes him more approachable to supervisees.

Jack used humor to normalize new supervisee's worries. He explained:

If I'm looking at a supervisee, who's manifesting a fairly typical developmental hang up.

... I'll try to poke at it a little bit to see if they feel the absurdity in it. And if not, I'll kind of let it go and then I'll use a more direct approach.

The participant described using humor to help supervisees explore their own humor.

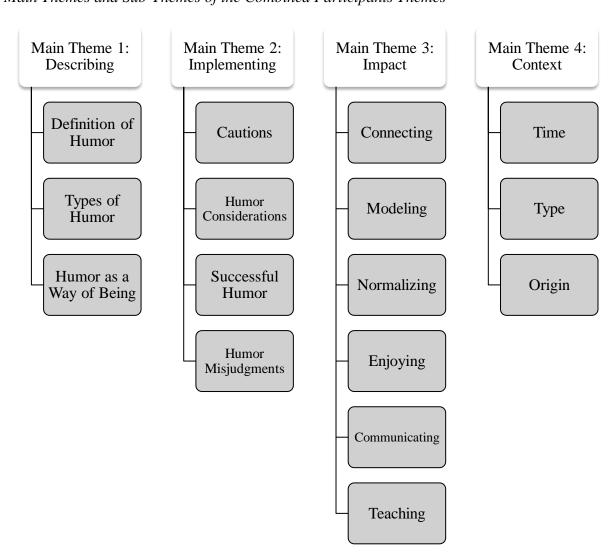
Because Jack as a supervisor focused on the "micro skills" and "the self as instrument," he

wanted supervisees to "explore your own humor too and decide [if you want to use it in counseling]. ... Hopefully gives them permission to bring that piece of themselves in."

# **Combined Participants Themes**

Participants shared their individual perceptions of the use of humor in supervision and multiple themes arose across participants as shown in Figure 1. The combined main themes were: Describing, Implementing, Impact, and Context.

**Figure 1**Main Themes and Sub-Themes of the Combined Participants Themes



# **Describing**

The first main theme across participants captured when participants defined what humor was, described the types of humor used, or explained what humor was to them. This theme had three subthemes: Definition of Humor, Types of Humor, and Humor as a Way of Being.

# Definition of Humor

Participants defined humor as "any form of language, verbal or nonverbal" (Sharon) that creates an internal or external response. Most participants referred to humor as "anything that makes you laugh" (Daphne). Several also mentioned *absurdity* when describing humor such as "the absurd that make you laugh" (Crazy Town) and "seeing the absurdity in life" (Alice).

The responsibility [does not] fall on the person who's like giving the humor. ...

Somebody could think something's funny themself. And it can be funny to them, even though the receiver doesn't laugh. And vice versa, like, the receiver can think it's funny, even if the giver doesn't think it is. It's very subjective, I guess, is what I'm saying.

(Lilly)

# Types of Humor

The types of humor participants mentioned were vast as "there's an abundance of things that can be considered humorous" (Lilly). Observational humor such as: "Well, it looks like everybody got beat up this week. Is anybody still alive in the room?" (Crazy Town) was used. Participants told stories or anecdotes like "I didn't look at the paperwork before the kid came. ... Again, I didn't know how to address that kid the whole entire time I saw him and I think that was for like a whole school year" (Crazy Town) or used metaphor by asking supervisees "What would our Broadway musical themes be?" (Sharon).

Since "the kindest form of humor was laughing at oneself" (Jack), participants poked fun at others and themselves, by saying: "It's my Appalachian coming out" (L) when supervisees misheard them. Humor came from "reacting as a human" (Lilly) or "trying not to [laugh]" (Sharon) and was usually described as "spontaneous. I never like calculate to use it" (Alice). Yet, humor "is intentional … but it's … like, spur of the moment … there's still an intentionality in the spontaneous conversation that happens" (Daphne).

Participants also used coarse language (L), stumbled over words (Lily), or accidentally said things that sounded sexual (Lilly). Sarcasm (Crazy Town) or sarcastic tones, facial expressions (Sharon), songs, magic tricks, and ventriloquist dummies (Jack) were utilized. Unintentional humor occurred when participants spilled all of their "things onto the floor" (Daphne), whereas intentional, in the sense of pre-planned humor, occurred through sharing memes related to counselor development (Sharon) and potentially even jokes (Crazy Town) or puns (Lilly).

### Humor as a Way of Being

Participants referred to humor as a self-expression that adds an "interesting flavor" (Lily) to life. It "takes some level of vulnerability, because it is showing a piece of our personality" (Lilly). Participants referred to authenticity when describing humor and why they use it. "The use of humor is a very relational approach. And I tend to take a relational approach in counseling and in supervision" (Daphne). Participants explained they are "just that person" (Crazy Town) and it is their "authenticity coming through" (Lily). As participants stated: "I do it because it comes naturally to me. And I think that a day without jokes is a whole day spent at funerals or something. I mean I can't imagine it. … It would be like not breathing" (Jack) and "I think my general way of being in all of my roles as a counselor educator is person centered. That's not like

my supervision theory. But it's just like my general way of being" (Lilly). A different participant explained, "people appreciate me being authentic" (Lily) and "if you're afraid to laugh at yourself, because you think you're gonna show your vulnerabilities, you probably should get the hell out of this business" (Crazy Town).

Participants also described humor as a personality trait. When referring to lightheartedness: "I think it is part of my personality. Um, to be that way to approach situations in that way or in that manner" (L). They also agreed that: "Yes, that's a, that's a really good description, like the playfulness" (Lilly). Participants did not withhold "from having a personality" (Daphne) and described "when it boils down to it, it's just something I can't turn off a lot of times. Um it's my personality" (Lily). Participants also explained how humor is a part of "part of my professional identity" (Lily) as they want to be relatable since, "when I grew up, I didn't want to be that kind of supervisor. I didn't want to be stiff and impersonal" (Crazy Town). In order to facilitate supervisees being fully themselves, "we also have to show up authentically" (Lilly).

# **Implementing**

The second main theme across participants captured when participants discussed incidents of humor that went well or not so well and what they learned in addition to precautions they take when using humor. This theme had four subthemes: Cautions, Humor Considerations, Successful Humor, and Humor Misjudgments.

#### **Cautions**

Participants discussed how "blurring those boundaries [is] always something to be mindful of" (Lily). Another participant stated:

I think as you get closer with somebody that can dip into kind of giving each other a hard time. And while that might work with my very close friends, I'm not in an evaluative role over my close friends. And so it's just like, it's very different with a supervisee. (Lilly)

Participants noted topics of humor not to use such as "jokes about folks' lived experiences in terms of like traumatic experiences" (L) and "nothing that hinges on identity" (Lilly). With an example or a metaphor you might not "realize you're triggering somebody" (Daphne). And being "sarcastic-mean" (Crazy Town) or using "humor in a way that would deprecate anyone" (L) is not encouraged as it can hurt feelings. It is important that nobody feels picked on and to not "use humor as a way to like put down somebody or pick on them or create like in and out groups like making fun of somebody else who's not in the room" (Lilly).

Participants believed that their supervisees think "she's not here to hurt anybody, you know? And if something offensive was said, then, you know, she will apologize" (Alice) and tell supervisees "I want you to feel comfortable telling me" (Daphne) if "you do not feel comfortable with that, you can always let me know. And that is my responsibility to change that. And to adjust it or not use it because I am the one with more power in that dynamic" (Sharon). One participant noted that,

Even if you have what you feel like is a really solid relationship, that [humor] can still really hurt somebody's feelings because at the end of the day, we are in a position of power and more than likely if we do hurt their feelings, the supervisee's not going to say anything. And so we might never know that we've really crossed a line. (Lilly)

Another caution participants had was their use of humor in their personal life potentially showing up in supervision. "And so I find that I just naturally use the humor, but it could be

yeah, that might be how it's in supervision to calm my emotions, because of needing to discuss difficult topics or whatever. Maybe that's it?" (Alice). A participant explained:

When I have that experience [of failed humor], I sit and I ruminate about it, forever. And I go, "Why did I make that uh why did I say that? Nobody thought that was humor." Like like um so um I start down that spiral. And so I try not to when I see those things happen, I try not to revert back to doing that. But I also use humor to deflect a lot in life in general. (L)

Participants noted: "There's still a little bit that I struggle with ... professionally, though, I've had an undertone of self-deprecation throughout my career" (Lily). Therefore, when using humor "everything always must be for the benefit of the client. That was me feeling uncomfortable" (Crazy Town). As such it is important to be "be mindful of when humor is used as an avoidance, as opposed to something more productive" (Lily). Participants remind themselves: "Okay, \*sigh\* we've had our fun. Let's get down to it, get back to business. ... I'm not their friend. I can be friendly" (Lily). Humor can keep everything surface level "if we don't set the stage to allow for the vulnerability" (Daphne).

Despite all these cautions, one participant said: "No" (Alice) when asked if they had any cautions when using humor. They elaborated: "Nope, never worry about it. Uh always works out. Well will one day I get in trouble? Probably" (Alice).

#### **Humor Considerations**

Participants mentioned humor being something that they use "regularly with all of my supervisees for the most part" (Lilly). Participants had experiences with humor "on the regular" (Crazy Town), but "the downside is if there's too much relational, too much humor ... I definitely don't come across as like a textbook expert" (Daphne) and supervisees think, "I can't

always go to my supervisor for like, the more serious stuff" (Daphne). Further, if used too much, "you can seem really, really desperate for building connection" (Lilly). As one participant described, "humor's like seasoning ... don't bust out what you think is your kind of funniest joke" (Jack) at the start of a new relationship.

Participants reported the importance of knowing yourself, "like you need to know what your style of humor is" (Crazy Town) and how you come across. They explained:

I just had to grow ... into being an adult who knows a little bit better, and also knows myself, like, that kind of stuff is funny to me. Um it's probably not funny to other people. ... That's the right way is to know yourself, right? Before you present that because it could come off as really shitty. And then it's not funny, right? Then I don't find that to be humorous at all. That is hurtful to people. (Crazy Town)

Participants were aware that "there are gonna be students that come into my space that don't really care for my teaching style, and don't really care ... for my personality" (L). They stated,

If you're not somebody who's funny, and I think this is hard for people to admit sometimes because I think it feels shameful. But if you're not somebody who like normally uses humor, in your day-to-day life, like it doesn't make sense for you to use it in supervision, because then you're forcing it and you're not being authentic. (Lilly)

In addition to yourself, participants described the importance of knowing your crowd.

They stated: "I would probably define humor the same way. Um though, I think the caveat to that in clinical supervision is you have to know you have to be able to read the room" (L). Participants thought that "you have to be in tune with your supervisees" (Crazy Town) and "attuned to the group's emotionality, too" (Lily). Furthermore,

Know what is culturally appropriate. There are some cultures that are just not going to be put at ease with humor. So ... like stop. Once you know that, don't keep trying it. And then there are some cultures that really require it a little bit more to feel more comfortable with you. (Crazy Town)

When using humor, the participants explained how it helped "to know the person a little bit" (Jack) and recognizing "their interests and their passions" (Sharon) while keeping in mind people's culture. There can be "generational failure" (Jack) if you reference things that supervisees are unaware of or do not know about and "you have to, like dip a toe in in a very safe way and kind of see what the response is" (Lilly). In particular with dark humor, it is important to "feel that out a little bit with my audience" (Lily).

One participant explained: "I'm extremely spiritual. And so sometimes I feel that there is a guidance of knowing when people are in distress. Uh and using the humor to lighten that up" (Alice). When using humor, some participants considered what they know about the supervisees and ask themselves questions such as: "What are their values? Is this is gonna ruffle feathers? Is this gonna be like, is this gonna drive a wedge between us? Um or is it gonna connect us?" (Lily).

# Successful Humor

Participants noted that humor was "useful in supervision when it's done well" (Crazy Town). By being intentional, participants questioned, "How appropriate is it? Like when I am with somebody, is now the appropriate time to use humor? And what type of humor, if it is, am I going to use?" (Sharon) Participants are "really, really careful and intentional ... I also try to like, constantly have a filter of like appropriateness and make sure it's relationship building

rather than distancing" (Lilly). They reported that "if we're gonna use humor, again, there has to be an intentionality of turning it off, as well" (Daphne).

Participants shared how "genuine humor is gonna be a little bit easier than kind of forced humor" (Daphne). And trying too hard is, "really gross to ... supervisees. Um and so it's really, really important that it comes from a place of authenticity" (Lilly). It is beneficial to invite "the whole group into um that conversation and allowing them in a really levity, joking, light manner" (Sharon) by using humor "in a way that's observed by everybody, and everybody else is in on the joke too. ... A humor that kind of builds people up, not puts people down" (Lilly). Participants explained that "timing ... is everything" (Crazy Town) so you "have to be a very quick witted person" (Crazy Town) and not necessarily "engage in the humor every time" (Alice) you meet with supervisees.

Participants mentioned that humor can still be productive even if it does not land. "If it totally utterly bombs. It's not a big deal. Most people forget it five minutes later" (Jack). And that, "you making fun of yourself actually adds the humor" (Daphne). One participant stated:

I think [leaning into humor] can actually be really endearing. ... If I am super obvious, and over the top about [the humor], it's not something that will like go over somebody's head or be missed. ... So even if it like doesn't go well, if you commit to it, and are like obvious that you are trying to not like trying too hard, but um just committing to it. I think that there can be an appreciation for the attempt, even if it's like groan worthy pun material. (Lilly)

And even if there is a "disaster in the session, you can probably repair it" (Crazy Town).

Participants have changed from previously being "super embarrassed" (Lily) if they spill

everything onto the floor to now drawing attention to it: "I'll do a bow [laughs] or I do my gymnastics" (Lily).

# **Humor Misjudgments**

When participants shared stories of when humor did not go well for them, they would typically know right away and "apologized right away" (Lily) or "went back in the next session" (Alice) and apologized. After having realized and apologized, "you process, like, you know, how it felt to hear" (Daphne). Participants described how these events "sucked. Um but it was a huge lesson" (Lilly) and "I will never forget that. And I will never stop regretting it" (Lily). They described that "how you address it moving forward is really important" (Lilly) and that it can be "a teachable moment" (Lily). They also described how "it's okay to fail a couple times. And then like you, you gotta do right. Like you gotta learn from what it is that you screwed up and why it is that you screwed it up" (Crazy Town). A participant stated:

If I am on it, right, like I recognize what is going on internally for me, and I'm able to like read my supervisee and read the room, and all that stuff. I generally, if I use humor and I don't get a smile, and a laugh, and a lighthearted response, I will come back and like sit for a moment before we move on. (Daphne)

Examples of humor not going well are bantering with students (Lilly, Lily), disclosing an opinion or the supervisee not thinking you are taking them seriously (Daphne), supervisees not understanding or receiving the humor (Sharon, L, Jack), a joke that offended (Alice), and saying something too soon (Crazy Town).

# **Impact**

The third main theme across participants captures when participants described how they perceive their humor impacted supervisees. This theme had seven subthemes: Connecting, Modeling, Normalizing, Enjoying, Communicating, Teaching, and Coping.

#### **Connecting**

Humor can be "this relationship building moment" (Lilly). It was viewed as something that "bastes our relationships and ... can bring out the best in us" (Jack). It impacts most "supervisory relationships in a positive way" (L) and "the benefits are truly like endless" (Lilly). Humor helps supervisees know: "Hey, I'm here for you. I care about you" (Daphne) and helps supervisees "feel more like they belong" (Crazy Town) because "it helps build a level of rapport and congruency" (L), "facilitates connection" (Lily), and can "be a very strong supervisory bonding experience" (Sharon). With humor, "the biggest thing is that connection, that even once the supervisory relationship is done, you usually maintain some sort of um feeling of closeness, I guess" (Lilly). Participants noted, "the thing I find is um I'm memorable, I guess you would say?" (Alice).

The participants reported humor making them "more relatable and less scary as a supervisor who's evaluating somebody" (Lily). Humor "does make it informal" (Jack) and "helps with relationship building, it makes us so much more approachable for supervisees" (Lilly). Using humor "can bring out, not necessarily egalitarian, like a feminist egalitarian relationship, but a relationship where the person doesn't feel afraid ... because of the authority figure thing" (Jack). Humor allows "for as much of an egalitarian relationship as there can be" in the hierarchy system of supervision (L) and is,

This good way of slowly and unconsciously and consciously building collegiality so that when they are no longer your supervisee, we still have a collegial working relationship with one another where I see you as my colleague. (Sharon)

Humor "evens the power differential" (Lilly) and helps "break down those barriers a little bit" (Lily). It "show[s] genuineness and authenticity" (L) and helps to show: "I'm just a person, like, I'm just a human being like you are" (Lilly). Humor also helps to,

Remind one another, both the supervisee and the supervisor that they're human before, they're like supervisors, or counselors, like they're human beings trying to make connection with one another. (Sharon)

In addition to showing: "I'm a person making mistakes" (Lily), humor allows supervisees to see, "I also don't take myself too seriously" (L). It "brings the group closer together" (Crazy Town) and helps "build that community" (Alice) as "it's easier to trust somebody who presents as a human than not" (Lilly). By using humor, "it creates an environment that is welcoming, and accepting, and validating, and pleasant to be in" (Sharon).

### Modeling

Humor can "create an ongoing evolving space of transparency and authenticity" (Sharon) for supervisees since utilizing humor as supervisors allows them to be "authentically ourselves, and very person centered" (Lilly). As a result, it gives "permission to my supervisees to also show up authentically" (Lilly) and "permission to bring that piece of themselves in" (Jack). As explained by a participant,

For those who, like you know, appreciate humor, they don't feel as uh intimidated to use it in a counseling session to help ground the client or, you know, help the client to see the absurdity of the situation or something of that nature. (Alice)

Students also "give back" the humor to the supervisor. For example:

Uh one of them doesn't call me uh doctor Crazy Town anymore. Now the kid calls me the goat, right? This is the goat. And I said, "Did you just call me an old goat?" And the kids like "No, doc, it's the Greatest Of All Time." And I was like, "Right on brother, I can get behind that." Like you see how they gave it back to me? That's what I like to see. Um and that shows that I did well in teaching them how to use humor. (Crazy Town)

By modeling humor, supervisor's teach supervisees "to try not to be afraid. You're probably gonna fail a couple of times ... and used well, humor can be just as good a therapeutic technique as any kind of CBT stuff" (Crazy Town). Humor helps supervisees,

Have another kind of coping strategy in their back pocket, or at least when they're in supervision with me. ... I hope it encourages students to be authentic in themselves. ...I hope, by showing a little bit of the, the humanity underlying my decisions, my professional journey, etc., my clinical work, um I show people that you can be very serious and really good at your job and very, very serious and committed to quality client care, and still have your values and your yourself. Uh like you don't have to sacrifice one for the other. Um so I hope that shows people that more than one thing can be true at once. You're a competent professional, and you're just a goofy person. And that's, that's okay. ... I want to facilitate personal growth, in addition to clinical growth, um because I think they go hand in hand. (Lily)

Humor also helps people increase the overall satisfaction with the role they have whether it be a counselor, supervisee, supervisor, etc. A participant explained: "I think we can get so caught in the weeds of that as supervisors that we turn our supervisees into automatons, to produce for us, instead of becoming someone they wanna be" (Sharon).

# Normalizing

Another aspect of humor is it helps to normalize other people's experiences. A participant reported:

I often reiterate to students like more than in more than one university supervision session, that um I have a life that exists outside of being a faculty member, and that I know other students have like that students have lives outside of being um students. And so I try to use a little bit of humor in normalizing that experience and letting them know like, "I know things come up, I know things happen." (L)

Humor helps supervisees "to really feel like adults. ... They're not just my little ducklings that are learning how to become counselors" (Crazy Town). By using a humorous reflection, "like it's kind of a paraphrase and feeling reflection in a way. Um just doing it in a different style ... [supervisees get] like a break from how they're just like, so frustrated in their head" (Lilly). A supervisor's humor can help "reassure [supervisees], they're doing okay" (Alice) or "normalize, we can experience discomfort ... around those [sensitive] topics" (Sharon) to diffuse embarrassment supervisees may experience.

# Enjoying

When using humor "in the beginning, when you're getting to know each other … humor can help break the ice … help supervisees feel a lot more comfortable" (Lilly). It helps to "ease a lot of anxiety for a lot of students" (L) and "put the supervisee at ease" (Crazy Town).

Participants will lighten the mood of the room with humor if they "sense everybody's coming in, they're tired, they're overwhelmed or whatever" (Alice). Participants described using humor "to get our endorphins flowing to center us" (Daphne) because "it makes it more enjoyable. I think it reduces the stress for the students" (Jack).

By using humor, supervisees are "not thinking about whatever we were dealing with before we walked into the room" (Daphne). Humor releases "all the good hormones and neurotransmitters in our brain. So it releases tension" (Sharon) and "it just makes things more fun. ... to lighten the mood, but not in like, not in a dismissive way" (Lily). One participant described telling students how their favorite DJ says "Party with a purpose." and that they say instead, "Yes, we're gonna have a party, but our purpose is to learn" (Alice).

### **Communicating**

Humor "sometimes can be a really effective communication tool" (Lily). It can be used to "open up a session" (Daphne) and "gives us an in that's uh soft, um and relationship building" (Lilly). A supervisor's facial expressions can generate dialogue when supervisees respond with "Yeah, but your face said everything!" (Sharon). A participant described how they "try to poke at it a little bit" (Jack) to see if their supervisees can feel the absurdity in it. And if it does not work they will "let it go and then … use a more direct approach" (Jack). Confrontation is "usually received a little bit better" (Daphne) when done in a humorous way and humor can be used to maintain professionalism when telling supervisees, "please don't mimic your clients who show up in their pajamas" (Sharon). Supervisees may use humor "to alleviate the stress of broaching difficult topics" (Sharon) with a supervisor and is a good gateway since it can,

Signal that something deeper is going on. And as a supervisor, it's my job to notice that and point it out like, "Okay, yes we can laugh, and that was hilarious. Good job. Let's talk about what's underneath. And let's dig into it a little more." (Lily)

Participants reported using humor to "align the conversation into what we're going into next" (Daphne) in that humor "can sometimes be useful in avoiding" (Daphne) or talking too much about a supervisee where it becomes counseling or them complaining for the session. Or

humor can be a confrontation "to encourage a professional identity that, you know, promotes competence and humility ... Humor can be this way to snap somebody into thinking a different way versus following the path they are going" (Daphne). Conversely, humor is a practical way to be relational and not "miss important things that really do need attending to, with the supervisee" (Daphne). A participant explained:

I want to get to the point. But I know that we can't just jump in. ... So the humor in the opening of the session is kind of doing that like, kind of the relational part to get into play. And sometimes that lasts a little bit longer than others. (Daphne)

Humor can help "help supervisees get unstuck and maybe like, get out of their head for a second in a way that helps them process something differently" (Lilly). Humor "helps us have perspective on ourselves" (Jack). Participants brought up funny memes and will "just have like a meme there. That's like talking to you -part of their development. ... Humor is something funny to talk about their process" (Sharon). Humor can help supervisees realize: "Oh, yeah, okay, what I just said was, I get it ... that was funny" (Lilly) and "challenges us to think about things in a different way. Um in a way that's enjoyable" (Lily). Supervisees may be "minimizing their own experience too ... and so again it's like pointing out the absurdity" (Lilly). It helps them change their perspective of clients and makes them think: "Oh, okay, well, maybe eventually, something will stick" (Lilly) to the client.

# **Teaching**

A participant spoke of their past supervisor stating, "the way she told it was like funny and engaging and it's the only thing I can remember. So it obviously really stuck with me" (Lilly). In addition to helping concepts stick, participants spoke of "making humor pedagogical approach in a way (L) and creating a "layup ready to go to teach students" (Crazy Town). Humor

"increase[s] synaptic responses in the brain for knowledge acquisition" (Sharon) and allows supervisees to "be aware that yes, you have these thoughts, but that's okay. Just don't let them spill over into the session" (Alice). Funny stories can create further educational discussion and be used to "accentuat[e] that person's strengths" (Sharon). After a supervisee makes fun of themself, it can become "a teaching moment" (Lily) and potentially become something funny to reference "throughout the rest of the semester" (Lily) as long as everyone is in on the joke.

Humor "increase[s] engagement" (Daphne) and leads to feedback on course evaluations being "better then [sic] previous" (L). Participants have their classes be "sought out" (Alice) and when supervisees have done reflective journaling, they comment that the supervisor's humor helped them "to feel comfortable ... them to feel at ease, easing their anxiety" (Alice). Humor helps supervisees enjoy difficult classes as: "The music and the jokes made it worth it. ... So maybe even a ritual ordeal like a comprehensive final. This humor takes a little of the sting out?" (Jack).

### Coping

Humor helps supervisees "get through tough times" (Crazy Town). It can be used "to deflect the situation at hand or like ease the situation at hand" (L) and "help deescalate" (Daphne). It helps supervisees "to relax" (Alice) because "maybe they're stressed out" (Daphne). Singing along to songs "usually helps them calm down a little bit" (Jack).

Humor "makes people healthier" (Crazy Town) as "laughter is a huge de stressor ... [it] increase[s] our wellness" (Sharon). Of note is that humor can also help supervisors cope since "we're gonna have to laugh about something to just let off some of that weight that we carry as um people" (Crazy Town). It was reported to be "a major coping mechanism" (Lily) for some participants.

Lastly, participants seemed to use humor just because. They described, "we're all doing this work. And you got to find something to laugh about sometimes" (Crazy Town) and how humor is "seeing the absurdity sometimes of what can occur" (Alice). They acknowledged that "we have to laugh at the human experience, because it's sometimes is just so ridiculous" (Lily) and how "you go through a few thousand years and you know, killing each other over flags … then you're like, you start to see the absurdity [laughs] in much of what human beings get so chuffed about with themselves" (Jack).

#### Context

The fourth main theme across participants captures when participants discussed how their humor has changed. This theme had three subthemes: Time, Type, and Origin.

#### Time

Macro. Participants mentioned a shift in the counselor education and supervision field allowing for more humor to exist in the field. For example, "we have also broadened what makes people authentic. ... Now you're also being taught to use yourself in the room" (Crazy Town) whereas in the past when they were trained, humor "was not acceptable. When I was in school transference and counter transference were bad things. ... Humor was seen as bad." (Crazy Town). Another participant added, our field,

Is transitioning from this ivory tower, hetero, cisgender, white male type of field, to a much more multicultural landscape, in some degrees, into a much more multicultural landscape. And I think that when counselor educators are using authenticity, that ... authenticity helps to lend itself to that. In creating that broader multicultural landscape for others [to use humor in their work]. (L)

Meso. Participants "have gotten more comfortable in teaching" (L) over time, and with more work experience felt safer about the idea that: "I'm using it at the right time. I'm using it for the right reasons" (Crazy Town). They explained: "I think the more that I've been in the field, the more I've been able to be intentional about my use of humor" (Lilly). Their use of humor "flowed more organically" (Jack) and was used differently depending on a supervisee's amount of clinical experience. One participant reported: "I use it much more strategically when we're about to begin because I just get a sense they are feeling anxious" (Alice) while another explained using more humor with doctoral students "because they're already at like, level three, or more, you know um, developmental level" (Daphne).

A participant used a metaphor to describe how their amount of humor use changes over time with supervisees:

So I think it's better to sprinkle at first, you know, and then I would say use like a parmesan cheese shaker, the next time. And then by the third semester, it's just like, turn on the hose kind of thing. (Crazy Town)

Over time, supervisors get to know supervisees and vice versa since there is more opportunity for relationship building, growth, and collaborative experiences in a cohort setting "rather than just like a 100 hour practicum for 16 weeks, and then you get a new cohort of 100 hour practicum students" (L). Therefore, in a cohort model,

The way humor is used and normalization of experiences can change and develop over time, even based on where a student might be in their fieldwork experience. Because a practicum student on week one looks very different when they're at week 15 of their, you know, second internship experience. (L)

Micro. As time goes on, most participants reported using more humor with supervisees as they "allow [their personality to show] more and more" (Daphne) and have more "comfortability with one another over those two years" (L) because there are more shared lived experiences, which then creates more opportunities for humor. However, a supervisor might only use more humor in the beginning of a relationship as they reported now having "the innate credibility that comes with somebody who's been in the field for like over 10 years and who has more wrinkles on their face" (Daphne).

Although one participant reported not changing how they use humor over time, the type of humor of other participants changed by slowly pushing the boundaries over the time of a relationship. As explained by participants, "so at the beginning. ... I stick to things that are kind of like, safer, I guess. ... And then as we get to know each other more, it becomes more personalized" (Lily). A participated stated, "I would say that you start off narrow, and you broaden, and you broaden" (Crazy Town).

When there is existing rapport with a supervisee, participants reported "there can be more sort of joking, sarcastic banter back and forth between us. ... I will usually cue off of them. So if they use a lot of sarcasm, I will respond in kind with that" (Sharon). Participants adapted their humor and noted: "I found ... that I was like able to find silly puns and in just like conversation with him. And so as our relationship grew over time, I found that like, that was more of our communication" (Lilly).

### **Type**

Humor was reported to be more difficult in group settings because you have to "extend the relationship to more supervisees ... to kind of figure out how to do both individualized humor, and um collective humor" (Lilly). A participant stated, "individually, I'm just taking in

the dynamics between the two of us or if it's triadic, the three of us. If I'm in a group, I have to monitor the entire group's dynamics" (Sharon).

In clinical supervision you have to be able to read the room ... whether the other 11 people that you have in your supervisor in group supervision um are going to be able to measure the same type of lightheartedness that you're trying to give off. ... Um whether or not it's gonna be perceived as humorous by everyone else that's in the room. (L)

Some participants were unsure if they used humor differently based on if they were supervising online or in person and one said there was no difference. Of those that reported a difference one stated,

If I'm online, there's sometimes it feels like there are more tangible resources to access um that, especially with the instantaneous nature of our technology now, it can be easier to grab this resource or pull up this joke or even pull up a humorous video, um and use it in a good supervisory way. (Sharon)

A participant noted how the COVID-19 pandemic helped to normalize "everybody's got lives that exist at home and ... away from the computer screen." Events could occur in a home environment that would not typically happen in a workplace environment. For example,

My daughter running in on a faculty meeting um isn't necessarily planned, but like, it can be used in a lighthearted way to normalize, that I'm home too, that I'm parenting too, that I've got dogs that bark in the background too. And like, it's fine. We roll with it. (L)

Another example of unplanned events relates to animals at home. Pets showing up on camera was mentioned by participants and were used to "break that tension" (Sharon) and be a way to relate to supervisees. For example,

You could use humor where you might say, "Oh, you know what? I know the same thing. My cat totally, like claws the furniture just like yours." Um and then you laugh about it like "Man -cats.," you know, kind of thing. People usually understand that kind of humor and that works really, really well in supervision. (Crazy Town)

As a result of there being "a difference in how things land on online" (Lily), participants' use of humor was more cautious: "Maybe more for myself um as a coping mechanism" (Lily) or lessened: "I did not use it as much. Because I couldn't read the room. And then I would just kind of throw some things out. Because I didn't know if I was on target or not" (Jack). Participants tried to make it clearer they were using humor online because "you don't get the same like nonverbal experience. … The worst is when there's like that tiny bit of delay. … In instances like that, it's very difficult to use humor at all, because … so many things can be missed" (Lilly).

Despite all of this, for one participant there was more comfort when online since "face to face I have the monkey suit on" (Daphne). So by being more comfortable, a supervisor can be more relational.

# Origin

Participants mentioned their personal uses of humor and where they think it may have originated. For example, they stated "my family and parents had great senses of humor. ... I just was kind of raised in it" (Jack) and "it's a part of my family of origin. Um and possibly, that is one of the reasons is to avoid emotions" (Alice). One participant noted, "I think it started with one of my mom's ... who just found humor in a lot of things" (Crazy Town) and another explained:

I do remember very early recognizing that I should be grateful when people try to use humor with me, to connect with me. Because it was a gift they were trying to give. They were trying to make me feel good. And so I think it became kinda just an important like factor in my life early on in connecting to people and ... taking life a little bit less serious ... And then wanting to give that gift to others. (Daphne)

# **Researcher Reflexivity**

For the member checks, two participants did not respond to email communications and so I only confirmed the themes I generated with six of my eight participants. As pointed out by the auditor, there seemed to be a parallel process going on where I as the interviewer at times felt pressure to laugh at the participants' examples and use of humor. This may occur with supervisees as a result of the power differential, they will not speak up regarding the humor their supervisors use and go along with it. The auditor reported being interested in humor within the interview, like the immediacy of it. During a follow up interview one participant asked if I had thought about this and stated:

I feel like we've met a couple of times and we've laughed a bunch and I wonder if that's something that you've thought about like, "Even just talking about humor can be humorous." So I don't know if that has affected you as the researcher in any way, or, even me as a participant I've been more cognizant of my strategies and even just talking to you I'm like "Oh, I made him laugh! YEAH." [laughs] (Lily)

Benign violation theory, "anything that is threatening to one's sense of how the world "ought to be" will be humorous, if the threatening situation also seems benign" (McGraw & Warren, 2010, p. 1142). was added to the discussion (Chapter V) in addition to speaking to the *absurdity* that participants mentioned when describing humor. A new combined participant subtheme, *Origin*, was created after discussion with the auditor. And the following follow up questions were added after speaking with the auditor:

- 1. Can you reflect on your use of humor, where do you suppose it originated?
- 2. If any, what strategies do you use to help ensure that what you are saying is landing as humor and not offensive?

### Conclusion

The individual themes for each participant were presented in addition to combined themes found across participants. Each participant had three to four main themes and four main themes were extracted across participants. All the themes describe the perspectives faculty had regarding the use of humor in supervision. These included what humor looked like, what to consider when using it, what its effects were, and how its use changed contextually.

#### CHAPTER V

#### **DISCUSSION**

I examine the combined themes I found through my data collection and analysis and incorporate relevant literature to corroborate my findings. The combined themes across participants were: Describing, Implementing, Impact, and Context. Following are implications for the present study in addition to recommendations for future research and limitations of this study.

### **Describing**

Participants did not appear to have much difficulty describing humor. They were able to answer the questions without hesitation and had a clear idea of how they defined humor. However, the amorphous nature of humor was revealed by participants having used words such as "anything" and "any" verbal or nonverbal communication to explain how they understood the concept. This reveals how it can be difficult to have a precise measurable definition for a universal phenomenon.

### **Definition of Humor**

As established by Weinberger and Gulas (1992), "an all-encompassing, generally accepted definition of humor does not exist" (p. 49). Participants tended to explain humor as something that made them laugh. While participants used the word *laugh*, they were not only referring to auditory external vocalizations such as laughter. When participants laughed in response to something, this could be internalized because "if you're sitting in a meeting, it might not be appropriate to actually laugh out loud" (Daphne). This aligned with R. A. Martin et al.'s

(2003) conceptualization of *sense of humor* as a cognitive ability or a response, among other things.

Humor is a social behavior that "promotes group cohesion, which for a species like us is critical" (Jack). Human laughter likely developed before language, which began about two million years ago (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). Humor requires both a producer and receiver (Kuipers, 2008; D. T. Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Although two parties are necessary, it is possible to amuse oneself in the absence of others (Cooper, 2005). This was echoed by one participant noting "the responsibility [does not] fall on the person who's like giving the humor. ... Somebody could think something's funny themself" (Lilly). Humor can be considered a process that acts as a pleasant mode of communication (León-Pérez et al., 2021). Or as put by a participant, "communication that is perceived to be lighthearted. Or not to be taken, I guess like, as necessarily that seriously" (L). Humor is subjective (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019) and "different for everybody" (Lily).

When speaking specifically about how humor is defined as it relates to clinical supervision participants explained, "I don't think it's different" (Lilly) because "humor regardless of setting is the same" (Lilly). L explained, "I would probably define humor the same way. Though, I think the caveat to that in clinical supervision is you have to ... be able to read the room." Because "you're in like a work group, like you're colleagues at work, I think it's a matter of timing, right? Humor is all about timing and knowing who your audience is." (Crazy Town) Daphne stated:

Yeah, I don't know. I mean I think -if it's hard to define to the general public, it's probably even harder to define in a narrowed uh fields like supervision. Um so I don't know that I would really kind of define it as any differently, to be honest, it's the

application that's different, or like the intention that might be a little bit different.

Actually it might be the same, I don't know, I hadn't really thought about it. I just know that uh the use of humor is a very relational approach. And I tend to take a relational approach in counseling and in supervision.

Similarly, Lily explained how humor in supervision "helps to make me feel a little more relatable and less scary as a supervisor who's evaluating somebody, if I can break down those barriers a little bit" and Sharon defined humor in clinical supervision as anything to "create laughter and positivity in the supervision space as primarily a means of connection and building rapport."

### **Types of Humor**

It was shown that humor can indeed come in many forms (Pinderhughes & Zigler, 1985) as participants described telling stories, poking fun (at the self and others), using sarcasm, showing memes, having a "loud face" (Sharon), and using facial expressions, physical comedy, singing songs, etc. Dr. Alok Kanojia noted how Zen Buddhists use humor on path to enlightenment and teach through funny stories—naming them as the original comedians (HealthyGamerGG, 2023). Participants typically spoke about instances of which humor occurred spontaneously in reaction to supervisees which aligns with the finding that about 72% of humorous interactions are found in spontaneous conversations (R. A. Martin & Kuiper, 1992), which are linked to the context of the conversation (Bertrand & Priego-Valverde, 2011).

### **Humor** as a Way of Being

When imagining not being able to use humor, "it would be like not breathing" (Jack). Participants often mentioned how humor was a part of who they were and so showed up in supervision as a byproduct of them being authentic. This parallels Peterson and Seligman's

(2004) definition of humor which viewed humor as a virtue that every human possessed to varying degrees. On the flip side of authenticity, managers who try to force jokes into their daily interactions cheapen the value of humor (Collinson, 1988). As stated by a participant, "that piece of like trying too hard, is, I think really gross to ... supervisees. Um and so it's really, really important that it comes from a place of authenticity" (Lilly).

To Hasan Minhaj, great comedy is the art of confession. It is telling the audience something they do not know about the speaker, and it generally involves some level of risk. In general, because someone cannot be forced to laugh, receiving laughter in response provides the validation of knowing, "Oh you see the world the same way I do" (Rosenblum & Chaudry, 2022) and there is a feeling of being seen through that. Participants described being embarrassed, ashamed or ruminating after humor did not go the way they expected, and this can be a result of humor being intimate, and so making a misstep feel more painful.

When a participant spoke of their past supervisor they explained, "I feel like I got to see her personality" (Lilly). As stated by Brown (2012), "we can't let ourselves be seen if we're terrified by what people might think" (p. 61). Like vulnerability, humor can lead to building trust in small moments. "Trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires work, attention, and full engagement" (Brown, 2012, p. 53). Humor did not seem to generate life changing paradigm shifts for the participants of the present study; however, it was a way for them to connect with supervisors and facilitate conversation.

Humor is a facet of holistic wellness (Shaughnessy & Wadsworth, 1992) and counselor wellness (Roach & Young, 2007) and as one participant noted, "the use of humor is a very relational approach. And I tend to take a relational approach in counseling and in supervision" (Daphne). One participant described humor as being "part of my personality. Um, to be that way

to approach situations in that way or in that manner" (L) which follows Ruch and Köhler's (2007) understanding of humor as an umbrella term that encompasses different constructs such as humor as a personality trait or humor as a stimulus. Humor is when a person has a positive cheerful attitude or a habitual behavior pattern characterized by laughing frequently, and a tendency to joke with or amuse others (R. A. Martin et al., 2003; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). Peterson and Seligman (2004) have used the term *playfulness* synonymously with *humor* and participants agreed that "Yes, that's a, that's a really good description, like the playfulness" (Lilly). Worthington and Roehlke (1979) saw humor as a desirable characteristic in supervision and participants described humor as being "a part of my professional identity" (Lily). Further ACES (1990) defined that an effective "counseling supervisor possesses a sense of humor" (p. 30).

# **Implementing**

Many factors determine how individuals classify humor as appropriate or inappropriate and whether there is an appreciation of it (J. C. Meyer, 2000). As a result, participants were able to recall instances of times when humor went badly and times it went well, and what they have learned.

### **Cautions**

Where a joke is told makes it contextual (Gray & Ford, 2013). The professional social context between a supervisor and supervisee is different from a friendship or partnership. Participants explained how humor can blur boundaries which seemed reasonable given that humor helps form emotional bonds and improve interpersonal relationships (Erozkan, 2009) and is a personality trait that supervisees find sexually attractive in supervisors (Melincoff, 2001).

Therefore, there is a risk of humor accidentally blurring a professional boundary required to be held by a supervisor.

Humor can be used in a hurtful way to communicate (Huo et al., 2012) even if it is accidental. If other people do not judge humor similarly, negative consequences such as offending others may occur (Heintz, 2017) since "you [might not] realize you're triggering somebody" (Daphne). Jokes can come across as offensive even if unintentional (Fine & De Soucey, 2005). While participants hope that supervisees will reach out when it comes to ruptures in the relationship because of humor, they might not, or they might write it in a teaching evaluation at the end of semester,

Because you're evaluating them, you're in charge of whether or not they like pass a class or get their license. That's a lot of power. And so they'll probably just like put up with a lot, and maybe even pretend. (Lilly)

The effect of humor depends on both the person using it and the perceiver (Cooper, 2008; Wisse & Riezschel, 2014). And while participants note a desire to "handle humor, respectfully and responsibly" (Sharon), it is important to consider who is making that determination and if it is presumably the person who holds the power in the room, namely the supervisor. Power is relevant because supervisors are gatekeepers and for counselors in training can determine whether they graduate and become counselors as careers.

Other aspects to be mindful of include using humor to cope as the supervisor. Humor is a career sustaining behavior among counselors (Lawson, 2007) that can be used to cope and reduce stress associated with psychological well-being at work (León-Pérez et al., 2021). So, it is important to be aware if the supervisor's use of humor is to help the supervisee and ultimately the client, or only to make themselves feel better.

When we're using humor ... everything always must be for the benefit of the client. That was me feeling uncomfortable about the ... student talking about the client's father. And I always have an issue with death and grief anyway." (Crazy Town)

Humor can be a way to hide meaning and mask feelings (Talens, 2000). As such, it is important to "be mindful of when humor is used as an avoidance, as opposed to something more productive" (Lily) for both the supervisor and supervisee. If a supervisor uses humor in supervision, it might give a supervisee implicit permission to use it as well. However, a supervisee may be using it to avoid talking about important topics and so it is important to be attuned as a supervisor.

#### **Humor Considerations**

Participants described using humor often and discussed how if there's too much humor, "I definitely don't come across as like a textbook expert" (Daphne). This correlates with how too much humor in a lecture tends to have a negative effect and lessens students' respect for a class (O'Neal, 2019). As the perceptions of humor can differ along cultural, racial, and gender identities (Crawford, 2003), it is important for the supervisor to know themselves and their supervisees.

Hussong and Micucci (2021) found counselors would joke to let clients know they are aware of the generational differences. And one participant noted: "It's like when I call the Internet the Google, they don't like that, either" (Jack) when discussing situations where humor did not work with supervisees. "You have to be in tune with your supervisees" (Crazy Town) and pay attention to how humor lands as you might make a joke and realize "one student didn't chuckle and the look on her face" (Alice). And "if you're not somebody who like normally uses humor, in your day-to-day life, like it doesn't make sense for you to use it in supervision" (Lilly).

It is important "for trainees to know who they are, as well" (Crazy Town). As a supervisor you must keep in mind that supervisees may not want to use humor with their clients in counseling (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014). If they are "gonna be a little more stiff as a therapist than what I would be ... I'm all right with that" (Crazy Town).

Considerations to keep in mind as a supervisor include how much humor is used and knowing when humor is beneficial for each supervisee by noticing how they react. Doing so will guide supervisors to tailor their supervision as needed. Counselor educators have to be aware of how culture influences the use of humor (Maples et al., 2001) and not force or pressure the of use humor by both the supervisee. As a result, supervisees will be comfortable being themselves.

### **Successful Humor**

Participants described the importance of being intentional regarding both when and when not to use humor. "I think one of the big questions that I always have is how appropriate is it?" (Sharon). This is important because what someone views as humorous another might view as offensive (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). As participants stated: "It's really, really important that it comes from a place of authenticity" (Lilly) as people who often exhibiting sarcasm and viewed as less earnest and honest (Collinson, 1988). Supervisors can seem "really desperate for building connection" (Lilly) or do not "come across as I am as intelligent or experienced or what have you" (Daphne) when using too much humor or forcing it.

Humor can identify who a person is within a social context (Emmanuel, 2018) and can create inclusion and exclusion (O'Neal, 2019). Participants were aware of this "harsh laughing at rather than laughing with or about" (Jack), and so would use humor,

In a way that's observed by everybody ... not to like use humor as a way to like put down somebody or pick on them or create like in and out groups like making fun of somebody else who's not in the room, sort of thing. (Lilly)

Participants explained that you "have to make sure that the humor is not about poking fun at somebody whose feelings you're going to hurt" (Crazy Town). This related to McGraw and Warren's (2010) benign violation theory where, if a threatening situation also seems benign, it will be humorous.

As many comedians have said: "Timing is everything." This is echoed by participants stating: "Humor is all about timing and knowing who your audience is" (Crazy Town).

Participants stated: "I hadn't read the room quite right. Or the developmental timing wasn't quite right" (Jack). Further, a golden tenet of Improv is "Yes, and ...," which means to accept whatever is going on and add onto it. Similarly, participants lean in and "just keep on rolling" (Lily) or "roll with it and not get super caught up in it" (Lilly) when humor is "groan worthy pun material" (Lilly) or is accidental. They explained, if the humor "doesn't go, it's just like, 'Oh okay, let's move on.' ... Most people forget it five minutes later" (Jack). And there is usually "appreciation for the attempt" (Lilly) when leaning into it. Participants "draw attention to it ... like, I own it" (Lily). It is important for counselor educators to "include humor and its appropriate use in the curriculum for counselors-in-training" (Vereen et al., 2006, p. 10).

### **Humor Misjudgments**

Many factors determine how individuals classify humor as appropriate or inappropriate and whether there is an appreciation of it (J. C. Meyer, 2000). As a result, participants were able to recall instances of times when humor went badly and times it went well, and what they have learned. Although participants have joked about how they should have been fired or reported, it

appears from their narratives that any ruptures created from their use of humor were able to be repaired after they apologized. As one participant noted, it "is a disaster in the session, like and you can probably repair it" (Crazy Town). Several examples of engaging in banter and crossing lines were mentioned and reinforced the types of humor that can and do harm people such as aggressive humor (R. A. Martin et al., 2003) or put-down humor and mocking (Romero & Pescosolido, 2008). Each participant learned from their errors in judgment and some gained life lessons.

### **Impact**

### **Connecting**

The impact most mentioned regarding the use of humor in supervision by participants was connection. This is widely reflected in the literature as humor is a process that can give a feeling of closeness between strangers (Fraley & Aron, 2004). Humor can create a sense of belonging (Moran, 2013). "It helps them feel more like they belong" (Crazy Town). Mutual laughter is a way of enhancing group identity and bonding (Shiota et al., 2004), and humor was "a very strong supervisory bonding experience" (Sharon). "I think humor bastes our relationships and ... can bring out the best in us" (Jack).

Humor diminishes the hierarchy (Duncan, 1982) and eliminates interpersonal barriers within organizational hierarchies (J. W. Smith & Khojasteh, 2014) which allows "for as much of an egalitarian relationship as there can be" (L). Humor can be used in the workplace to mitigate or downplay the differences in authority (Holmes, 2000) and helps "break down those barriers a little bit" (Lily). It helps develop "a relationship where the person doesn't feel afraid of me because of the authority figure thing" (Jack). Humor is a social strategy used to form emotional bonds and improve interpersonal relationships (Erozkan, 2009) and a good reminder that

supervisors and supervisees are "human beings trying to make connection with one another" (Sharon).

Laughter has been used to bring supervision groups together (Hutchby & Dart, 2018) and the bond component of the supervisory working alliance (Ladany et al., 1999) is influenced by characteristics such as humor (Gignac et al., 2014). This means that a possible outcome of a supervisor's use of humor is that it closes the gap between potential strangers where one has authority over the other in an academic or workplace setting. Closing this gap builds the relationship and helps supervisees feel connected, which in turn can enhance supervision experiences and allow supervisees to become better counselors.

### Modeling

Humor can model adaptive behaviors (Hussong & Micucci, 2021) and give "permission to my supervisees to also show up authentically" (Lilly). Counselors can model effective coping skills with humor (Borsos, 2006) and supervisor humor helps supervisees "have another kind of coping strategy in their back pocket" (Lily). The way counselors use humor in sessions can model for clients how humor can be used positively (Hussong & Micucci 2021). Similarly, supervisees "don't feel as uh intimidated to use it [humor] in a counseling session to ... help the client" (Alice) when seeing the supervisor use it. Supervisors may use humor to educate supervisees on how to utilize it in their sessions (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014). A supervisor's humorous style can be internalized (Gabbard, 2011) through the implicit relational learning that happens during supervision interactions. As a participant noted: "You gotta be yourself. All the other identities are taken. So be yourself and bring your humor in" (Jack).

Showing supervisees how to use humor "requires hands-on supervision discussions" (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014, p. 6) and can be done by the implicit relational learning that

happens during supervision interactions (Gabbard, 2011). Supervisors can implicitly model that humorous interventions are unacceptable (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014). Therefore, being aware of accidental negative role modeling is beneficial for supervisors.

# Normalizing

The use of humor helps employees acclimate to a new or ambiguous role (Ditlow, 1993). A participant mentioned, "I think it helps trainees, in supervision group, to really feel like adults" (Crazy Town). Humor can help "reassure them, they're doing okay" (Alice) and normalize that supervisors have "a life that exists outside of being a faculty member, and that I know other students have like that students have lives outside of being um students" (L). Valentine and Gabbard (2014) proposed that humor creates moments of meeting where the therapeutic alliance deepens because of a moment of shared recognition. By using a reflection, "like it's kind of a paraphrase and feeling reflection in a way. Um just doing it in a different style" (Lilly). These moments of meeting are spontaneous and lie outside the planned technical interventions of the therapist (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014) or supervisor. A major part of the therapeutic value of humor probably lies in the relational connection that is beyond cognitive understanding (Valentine & Gabbard, 2014). As one participant described:

The small glimpses of humanity that I saw in my authority figures when I was going through school uh were so meaningful to me that I was like, "Oh, okay. I can relate I'm, I feel more comfortable knowing that this person in charge is similar to me." (Lily)

### **Enjoying**

Humor can create positive emotions (Warren et al., 2018) and have a positive effect on persons' mental health (Schneider et al., 2018). Participants reported that humor "helps to ease a lot of anxiety for a lot of students" (L) and "put[s] the supervisee at ease" (Crazy Town) and

"lighten[s] the mood" (Alice) where "we can enjoy ourselves at some points" (Jack). Supervisors using humor during supervision has been related to supervisee satisfaction with supervision (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979) while supervisee's use of self-defeating humor has been negatively related to satisfaction with supervision. Teachers who use humor allow their students to have an easier and more enjoyable time learning (Bieg et al., 2018). As simply put by a participant: "It just makes things more fun" (Lily).

### **Communicating**

The positive emotions elicited by humor help with reframing situations (McGhee, 2010) by helping "supervisees get unstuck and maybe like, get out of their head for a second in a way that helps them process something differently" (Lilly). Positive affect can help people become "more open to seeing things as they really are" (Isen, 2003, p. 182) and "challenges us to think about things in a different way. Um in a way that's enjoyable" (Lily). Confrontation is "usually received a little bit better" (Daphne) when done in a humorous way as it is a way to communicate when being too direct or serious can be confrontational, embarrassing, or risky (R. A. Martin, 2007/2010). Laughter has been used to communicate expectations supervisors had of supervisees (Hutchby & Dart, 2018).

Humorous communication can be a way to mock nonconforming behaviors and inhibit unwanted actions (Lynch, 2002) such as telling supervisees: "Please don't mimic your clients who show up in their pajamas" (Sharon). Humor creates transformative perspective shifts (Landoni, 2019), and provides a space in which clients' behavior can be safely challenged (Yonatan-Leus et al., 2018). Rowan Atkinson described humor as the ability to use physicality to broadcast an attitude. People use humor to present a sort of truth to others of which the audience may identify with (Nerdwriter1, 2018). As participants explained, as a supervisor it is their job to

notice and point it out. For example: "Okay, yes we can laugh, and that was hilarious. Good job.

Let's talk about what's underneath. And let's dig into it a little more" (Lily).

# **Teaching**

Humor "increase[s] synaptic responses in the brain for knowledge acquisition" (Sharon), "increase[s] engagement" (Daphne) and plays a central role in teaching as it is related to a positive classroom environment, increased student motivation and student learning, and the level of student interest (Bieg & Dresel, 2018; Goodboy et al., 2015; Wanzer et al., 2010).

Instructional humor can lead to higher teaching evaluations (Tamborini & Zillmann, 1981; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999), which was mirrored by participants receiving feedback on my course evaluations that was "tend[ing] to be better then [sic] previous" (L). Research shows the use of humor is likely to increase student satisfaction as it is related to positive perceptions of the instructor and learning environment (Halula, 2013). This was demonstrated by participants stating: "My understanding is my class is sought out" (Alice).

# **Coping**

Studies consistently establish a link between the way people use humor and health outcomes (Schneider et al., 2018). Participants explained: "I think it makes people healthier" (Crazy Town) and "put[s] someone at ease a little bit" (Jack). Humor "helps your [supervisees] to relax" (Alice) because "maybe they're stressed out" (Daphne). It reduces stress and anxiety (M. P. Bennett & Lengacher, 2008) and "laughter is a huge de stressor ... [it] increase[s] our wellness" (Sharon) and can also help supervisors cope since "we're gonna have to laugh about something to just let off some of that weight that we carry as um people" (Crazy Town).

Humor is an effective buffer against perceived stress (Besser et al., 2012) and can function as a coping strategy in dealing with stress (R. A. Martin, 2003; McGhee, 2016).

Supervisors use coping strategies, such as humor, to buffer against unaddressed stress and maintain their well-being (Wester et al., 2009; Witmer & Young, 1996). Humor is a coping strategy supervisors can use to sustain their career (Briggs & Munley, 2008; Lawson & Myers, 2011). Using humor also conveys to others that the problem at hand is not something that should be taken too seriously (Wallinger, 1997). As reported by a participant: "We have to laugh at the human experience, because it's sometimes is just so ridiculous" (Lily).

#### Context

Participants described changes in their humor based on both the larger context of our field and the microcosm of the supervisor supervisee relationship.

### **Time**

For the participants who stated their humor has changed, they usually perceived self-reported changes to be the result of being more experienced, and having a stronger relationship with supervisees over time, and choosing to take a developmental approach when working with supervisees. As stated in the *Best practices in clinical supervision* (ACES, 2011),

The supervisor modifies [their] style of and approach to supervision (both within a session and across sessions) based on [their] assessment of client welfare, supervisee characteristics, supervisee's immediate needs, supervisee's developmental level, supervisee's supervision goals, environmental demands, as well as the supervision context. (p. 5)

Participants also mentioned using more of the humor that supervisees use. "So if they use a lot of sarcasm, I will respond in kind with that" (Sharon). West and Martin (2019) suggested that instructors should strive to have humor similar to supervisees as this is positively related to

students' communication with the instructor (S. A. Myers & Huebner, 2011) and participation in class (S.A. Myers et al., 2009). It is also important to be mindful that:

I have similar types of humor as a lot of my supervisees. And that's like, \*sigh\* "Okay, but yes, I am evaluating you, I am teaching you and critiquing you, and there's some professional distance that needs to be maintained there. (Lily)

Over time it is helpful for supervisors to adjust their humor use as they, their supervisees, and the relationship between them changes. Using a developmental approach, changing what humor is used based off how much training experience supervisees have, is a beneficial. While having or using similar humor to supervisees can foster connection, supervisors need to maintain professional boundaries.

# **Type**

Participants described using safer humor not only at the start of a relationship, but if the supervision was in a format that included more than one person (i.e., triadic or group). They would try to use a "collective humor that's palatable by everybody" (Lilly) because individuals do not always agree on what they find funny (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). When supervising online the types of humor used were sometimes different. Participants stated: "If I'm online, there's sometimes it feels like there are more tangible resources to access" (Sharon) and "I did not use it [humor] as much [online]. Because I couldn't, I didn't, I couldn't read the room. ... But Carl (a ventriloquist dummy) got everyone's attention" (Jack).

Parts of participants' lives would show up online such as pets and "helped to normalize that everybody's at home" (L). Further it was important to add more emphasis when humor was being used online. A participant noted:

I think I have to be even more clear and obvious over Zoom, because you're, you don't get the same like nonverbal experience ... in instances, instances like that, it's very difficult to use humor at all, because like it can, so many things can be missed, because like, it's just not -the flow isn't there, because it's really segmented. (Lilly)

### **Origin**

Humor has genetic components that can be inherited (Schermer et al., 2017; Vernon et al., 2008) as this was supported in part by participants that mentioned "my family and parents had great senses of humor. ... I just was kind of raised in it" (Jack). Infants begin to laugh at about 4 months old (Black, 1984) and participants described humor being "a part of the my family of origin" (Alice) and relevant to their use of humor growing up. Several participants mentioned having funny uncles when asked about in the member check where they thought their humor originated from. A participant described: "I'm kind of a people pleaser, I like getting positive feedback from people, I love to make people laugh" (Lily) which "I need to be mindful of, like, for my own personal needs" (Lily).

### **Demographics**

As the sample contained one male participant who was also the only non-spiritual or religious individual, I was unable to determine if other faculty with the same identities felt similarly. His perceptions of humor seemed largely similar to other participants, however, he appeared to take on a more biological approach to understanding and explaining humor from using phrases such as "the logical outcome of a creature like us becoming sentient," "evolutionary trait," and "utilitarian purpose." A supportive anecdote is that he was also the oldest participant with the most teaching experience as a faculty member.

A different participant mentioned during a member check being interested in age differences. They explained that each participant may have been trained differently depending on what years they were in graduate school. The participants believed that fields such as psychology have broadened their understanding of what makes people come across as authentic and so psychologists in training are now taught to bring and use themselves in the room. Older participants may have been trained differently and been taught by their own supervisors that humor is not something good to use. They reported how this could mirror how the training of supervisors has changed over time and what is viewed as appropriate (i.e., why questions and self-disclosure). They elaborated that how a doctoral student is trained to be a helper and educator may impact their perspective of humor and noted their own past clinical psychology training encompassed serious supervisors as compared to counselor education training in the present.

Younger participants seemed more cautious regarding their use of humor and reported wanting to connect with and be liked by supervisees while older participants seemed to speak more about the teaching impact and not being as worried about the use of their humor. More experienced supervisors use more humor (Worthington, 1984), and therapists, who may also be supervisors, lose their sense of humor during training but regain it after acquiring more experience (Neufeldt et al., 1997). Therefore, a younger faculty member may have less experience and so be more cautious and use less humor. Once again, given the low sample size, this claim may be illusory. Additionally, it seemed like the only participant who supervised doctoral students had a more intentional and nuanced understanding of their own use of humor.

# **Implications**

One unique finding from the data that was not anticipated was the theme *Humor as a Way of Being*. It was important for supervisors to be able to bring aspects of who they are into supervision which also creates secondary gains for supervisees. When supervisors use humor in supervision, it allows counselors to be trained in a way where they can be fully who they are when working with clients. The present study disrupts the stereotypical image of a counselor sitting quietly and asking a few questions. When counselors are themselves and working with clients, this creates a relationship that maximizes the growth that can occur for clients. Every counselor has their own personality and supervisors can help bring this out by allowing supervisees to try new ways of being without being judged and model different types of humor for supervisees to find their own style of humor. As noted by participants, "if we're teaching people about it, we need to teach them also how to identify their own style of humor" (Crazy Town), and "humor feels good for most people. So you [the supervisee] should explore your own humor too" (Jack). Hence supervisors can encourage supervisees to decide if humor is something they want to use while keeping in mind whether the supervisee uses humor in the personal life.

Supervisors do not need to integrate humor. What is more important is being authentic and respecting everyone's differences. Participants described the importance of having a sense of self and knowing that supervisors can still be authentic while interacting with people differently. Authenticity looks different because supervisors have different relationships with supervisees. And do not force humor if it is not something a supervisor would genuinely use. Supervisors can help supervisees determine the type of counselor they are while keeping in mind that not every supervisee enjoys or wants to use humor and that is okay. As explained by a participant: "Not all

of them do of course, it's depending on the type of counselor that they want to be and their counselor efficacy" (Alice).

The data have revealed the intentionality of supervisors' use of humor and integrating it if it is a part of who they are and know how to use it appropriately. It can be helpful for supervisors to know the many uses of humor. The present study can provide the knowledge, awareness, and intention behind humor beyond simply getting a laugh. For example, humor can help center supervisees before going into the work of supervision and help supervisees get out of their head and become unstuck. While a joke can be used to ensure students dress appropriately, being seen "as like, 'Oh laid back, you know, easygoing'... can be a little bit jarring" (Daphne) for supervisees when a supervisory directive is given due to ethical guidelines. Humor can be used to "to encourage a professional identity that ... promotes competence and humility" (Daphne) by saying something such as "I'm almost getting the sense that you don't like your client" (Daphne) which acts as a confrontation in a comical manner. Humor can be a protective factor, as compared to self care, for faculty supervisors that helps develop a sense of resiliency and be a type of mindful practice where a supervisor can laugh at themself or something that has happened.

#### Limitations

Social desirability (Holden & Passey, 2009), when people typically present themselves in a generally favorable fashion, is something to consider. While I did ask participants for a story of humor going badly, participants may only have shared what they can remember or are comfortable with. For example, one participant stated, "I've crossed lines with my supervisees before ... and said something that I don't want to repeat here" (Lily). This makes it difficult to

develop a clearer understanding of the perceived impact given that information is missing or even altered.

To my knowledge, no participant referred other participants to take part my study. However, using the snowball sampling method produces limitations because groupthink (Janis, 1972), a psychological drive for consensus, can make it so that participants may have wanted to be in alignment with each other in what they shared. All forms of humor were not expected to be discussed by participants because of how many types of humor that exist.

As a participant noted, "if you're not somebody who's funny, and I think this is hard for people to admit sometimes because I think it feels shameful" (Lilly), there could have been an implicit pressure on participants. For example, when asked for a story of humor going well, participants may have picked the single best time which leads into questioning how often an experience like that occurs in supervision versus it being a peak experience that occurs once a semester. When I as an interviewer stated, "I won't rate how funny it [your story] is. So you don't have to worry," a participant replied, "How did you know that's what I was thinking of? Like, is this actually gonna seem funny [laughs] as I retell the story?" (Lily)

Relatedly, participants often recalled recent events when asked for an experience in supervision. A participant explained: "I have them ... on the regular and sometimes it'll just be, oh, an example would be, so in last Tuesday's supervision" (Crazy Town). During the member check another participant stated, "It's so hard when I don't have a recent example" (Daphne). Therefore, while the narratives may have been more trustworthy, as memories from years ago could be altered unintentionally, there is both the recency bias and I may have not been able to fully capture participants' perspectives since it was an example from 1 or 2 weeks ago.

A cognitive bias where people judge an experience largely based on how they felt at its peak and at its end, known as the peak-end rule (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993), may have occurred since participants may misjudge the perceived impact of the use of humor in supervision and even maybe selectively attended and missed noticing reactions to their use of humor and its perceived impact.

Several participants also seemed to be put on the spot when asked about a time they intentionally or unintentionally used humor in supervision. While this speaks to the spontaneity of humor, it also muddies what the perceived impact of the use of humor is, given that it is important for supervisors to model intentionality.

Of interest, a few participants thought I asked: "What questions do you have when using humor?" instead of "What cautions do you have when using humor?" This can simply mean I have to work on my interviewing skills and enunciation in addition to interviewing in person to avoid mishearing participants or not being able to connect fully with them as they were in the middle of something else or did not have their camera on. And the mishearing can speak to a positive view people generally have toward humor. While the present study was zoomed out to generally capture what perspectives counseling faculty have of using humor in clinical supervision, most spoke of themselves and their own use of humor. As a result, my data and results are more constrained and limited. As a participant stated, "but that's an interesting thing to consider as well. And you will have people out there who think it's really inappropriate to use humor" (Daphne).

#### **Future Research**

The present study has laid the groundwork and built an understanding of what perceptions faculty have regarding the use of humor in clinical supervision. After having started

off as broad as possible, studies with narrowed samples will be beneficial. That way it is clearer how participants are contextually choosing to use humor based on their audience. This is important to do because participants at times would collapse talking about students in content courses, students in group supervision, master's students in individual supervision, doctoral students, or people working towards licensure. Further as faculty, they may already have pre-existing relationships with students. As one participant reported:

I've fostered relationships with students who I'm supervising because I'm supervising a practicum 1 and so I spend like 5 hours with them once a week. And so I'm in the classroom with them a lot and then when I provide them supervision, there's already a relationship there And so I'm able to use humor in a very nuanced authentic sort of way because we know each other well enough that they know that I'm joking. (Lilly)

One participant mentioned that when supervising doctoral students: "I probably have the most personality that I would anywhere else, because like I said, they are there for formality and they're already doing the work" (Daphne). Therefore, it would be interesting to view in what ways humor is used differently when someone being supervised is already licensed. While some participants conducted supervision for people outside of academia working towards licensure, it will be interesting to examine supervisors working outside of academia to see if their perspectives differ from those of us in the ivory tower and comparing across studies.

Studying supervisors who choose not to use humor in supervision would also be very interesting to me to see if the costs do outweigh the benefits. Supervisor who choose to not use humor may do so because they were not taught how to. One participant mentioned having "a whole entire lecture that I give my supervisees about humor" (Crazy Town) and other noted,

Part of the reason why I liked your topic was because I don't think ... we don't really talk about this, we don't really talk about the intentional use of humor, or we don't really talk about a relational approach to that extent. But I think it needs to find its way into academia, because it is so important. And you know, you hear it, you know, the use of humor in Adlerian psychology. Um but I don't know that there's really a translation for it into supervision. (Daphne)

They also stated, "if you end up writing this up as an article, I would assume that that's kind of the promotion you have is, people should be a little bit more intentional about their use of humor" (Daphne). They continue to describe not having "thought about using humor in like a pre planned way ... maybe to start off with something -a joke, an intentional joke, and then go into a clinical way. Uh I think that that would be creative" (Daphne). Another interesting direction is to dive deeper into what one participant described as "a collective humor that's palatable by everybody" (Lilly) despite them not being sure if it even exists. Participants often spoke of humor in a group supervision context so this can be important to look into more.

While Byrd (2022) had already conducted a study on graduated pre-licensed supervisees' experiences in clinical supervision, humor was not a focal point of the study and so future studies can investigate how supervisees perceive counseling faculty use of humor in supervision. This can lead to uncovering what the actual effects of humor are and how it actually differs in person as compared to online in our increasingly digital world. Another potential study I am interested in would be if humor does have the long-term effect of supervisees staying in contact as several participants mentioned. For example, one participant noted: "This isn't a study or anything, but I know that, we get a lot of grads who just come back to say hi" (Jack). This can be done by using scales to measure quality of supervision and uses of humor and if a relationship exists. It can be

interesting to further explore the directionality, if any, between rapport and humor. While most participants discussed the need to have a connection with supervisees prior to using humor, one explained that you do not need to get to know the supervisee first and that "you have to, like dip a toe in in a very safe way" (Lilly). Therefore, furthering an understanding of the type of humor used based on the level of rapport built would be an interesting future direction.

Considering when supervisors got trained and how (i.e., as clinical psychologist) can also be interesting to see if it has an impact on their perspectives of humor. A participant wondered about "what kinds of media are different age groups consuming and how does that influence humor" (Lily) as a lot of their existential dread and absurdity has influenced their work from having lived through so many unprecedented global events that have been horrible. Further, one participant noted:

So I guess I'm reflecting on this thinking that perhaps I feel more comfortable now being more open with my supervisees because we are closer in age and there's a lot more like similar pop culture references, similar developmentally and so they might get me in a way that a younger crowd might not. (Lilly)

While I did ask for each participants' years of teaching experience, it could have also been helpful to ask for the number of years they have been a supervisor for since new faculty may have been working in the field prior to obtaining their doctorate and starting a career in academia. Lastly, carrying out a longitudinal study with the same group of participants can be done to explore how humor relates to the experience of burnout and if it presumably reduces it.

#### Conclusion

The present study explored counseling faculty perceptions of using humor in clinical supervision. Doing so created an understanding of how faculty in counseling programs in the

United States understand the use of humor in supervision. In conclusion, participants generally had similar perceptions regarding the use of and impact of humor in clinical supervision. Humor will help supervisors if it aligns with who they are and they are intentional and attuned to their supervisees. There are many types of humor that can be effective and taking a developmental approach helps while keeping in mind the context of your supervision. The present study sheds light on what humor looks like in supervision and has begun to open the conversation and allow readers to understand the benefits that exist for both supervisors and supervisees. Although the participants of the present study viewed the use of humor in supervision favorably, future research can sample and explore supervisors who choose to not use humor in supervision in addition to supervisors working outside of academia.

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## APPENDIX A RECRUITMENT FLYER

[CESNET-L Request Schedule]
1st Request – 07/14/23
2nd Request - 07/24/23
Final Request - 08/02/23
cesnet-l@listserv.kent.edu

Email Subject 1: Dissertation Study - Faculty Perceptions of Humor in Supervision Email Subject 2: Dissertation Study - Faculty Perceptions of Humor in Supervision (2nd Request) Email Subject 3: Dissertation Study - Faculty Perceptions of Humor in Supervision (Final

Request)

Hello,

My name is Ryan Cheuk Ming Cheung and I am seeking research participants for a narrative inquiry exploring the perceptions counseling faculty have regarding the use of humor in clinical supervision. This dissertation is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer Fulling-Smith (jfullingsmith@agnesscott.edu). Please note the following inclusion criteria in order to be considered for participation in this study:

- 1. You are faculty (adjunct or any rank) teaching in a counseling program (any specialty)
- 2. You have perceptions (good, bad, or ugly) about clinical supervisors using humor
- 3. You are 18 and older and not a member of a vulnerable population.

Participants will be asked to sign an informed consent and complete a demographic questionnaire which should take approximately 10 minutes. Participants will then be asked to participate in one 60-minute interview and one member-check (no longer than 60-minutes) through an online video communication platform (Zoom).

If you are interested in participating, please click the link below to complete the informed consent and demographic questionnaire. Results will provide insight on what the perspectives faculty have regarding the goals, intentions, and uses of humor during supervision. Any individual who agrees to participate may withdraw their consent at any time without penalty. Approval for this study has been granted by the University of Northern Colorado, #2304048888.

Click this link to participate: https://unco.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\_0JS9kG8ke3uf6aG

If you have any questions regarding the research study, please contact the principal researcher, Ryan Cheung – ryan\_cheung@msn.com or (909) 480-6842.

Thank you for your consideration!

Ryan Cheung Doctoral Candidate University of Northern Colorado

### APPENDIX B

## CONSENT FORM



### CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN

### RESEARCH UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

**Project Title:** A Narrative Inquiry into the Perceptions of Counseling Faculty Regarding

the Use of Humor in Clinical Supervision

**Researcher:** Ryan Cheung; xxxx\_xxxxx@xxx.xxx

**Phone Number:** xxx-xxx-xxxx

**Research Advisor:** Dr. Jennifer Fulling-Smith; jfullingsmith@agnesscott.edu

**Phone Number:** xxx-xxx-xxxx

The primary purpose of this narrative study is to explore counseling faculty perceptions of using humor in clinical supervision. As a participant in this research, you will be asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire and to participate in one interview and member check meeting that will take place through an online video communication platform (Zoom). The demographics questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and will ask basic questions, such as your age, race/ethnicity, gender, etc. The demographics questionnaire will follow this consent form.

Participation includes one 60-minute interview and one member check meeting. The interview will ask questions about your perceptions of using humor in supervision. The member check will focus on providing you with emergent themes, inquiring about the accuracy of themes, and clarifying any gaps from the data that surfaced during the interview. For the purposes of confidentiality, your responses will only be identifiable through a self-selected pseudonym when information is shared through reporting findings. Informed consent documents will be the only documents with your name. In an effort to protect your identity, informed consent documents will not have any information linking you to your selected pseudonyms. All informed consent documents will be obtained through Qualtrics and reviewed verbally before the initial interview. Due to the electronic nature of the consents, they will be kept on a password protected server through the University Qualtrics account. Audio recordings and transcripts from the interview will be kept on a password protected computer and all identifiable names will be redacted before storage. Only the researchers will have access to and examine individual responses through written transcripts. All transcripts will redact any identifiable participant information, only use participant pseudonyms, and these data will be kept on a password protected computer for a minimum of 3 years.

Risks as a participant in this research study are minimal. The foreseeable risks would not be considered greater than those that might occur during supervision or conversation with a colleague. The benefits of participation include greater insights into the experiences faculty members have of their use of humor in supervision. Other benefits may include participants gaining a greater understanding of their worldviews, such as beliefs, attitudes, and values toward humor and how it impacts their lives. Additionally, you may benefit from sharing an experience that is personally meaningful by relating your experience to another.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, University of Northern Colorado at irb@unco.edu or 970-351-1910.

- o I wish to participate and DO consent.
- o I DO NOT consent at this time.

Please provide your signature if you agree with the consent form.

[digital signature box]

# APPENDIX C DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please leave anything blank that you do not feel comfortable answering.

- 1. What is your name?
- 2. What are your racial and ethnic identities?
- 3. What are your gender identities?
- 4. What are your abilities and disabilities?
- 5. What are your religious/spiritual identities?
- 6. What is your age? (Please enter numerals e.g., 18, 42)
- 7. How many years have you been a counseling faculty member? (Please enter numerals e.g., 1, 5)
- 8. Do you supervise in a CACREP accredited counseling program?
- 9. What state do you currently live in?
- 10. Is there anything else you want to share?
- 11. Please enter your preferred email address. (So we may contact you as necessary).

## APPENDIX D INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- Q1 What perspectives do counseling faculty have of using humor in clinical supervision?
- Q2 What are the perceived impacts counseling faculty have of the use of humor in supervision?

Before we begin, I'd like to go over the consent form.

Please tell me a pseudonym you would like to use.

- 1. How do you define humor?
- 2. How do you define humor in clinical supervision?
- 3. Tell me about an experience you had with humor in clinical supervision.
  - a. Note: Can be supervisee-initiated humor, their own past supervisor's humor, or spontaneous [unintentional] humor by either member of dyad.
  - b. Probe for methods (how used) and process (how works) of humor.
- 4. What benefits do you see from using humor?
  - a. Tell me a story of it going well.
- 5. What cautions do you have when using humor?
  - a. Tell me a story of it going badly.
- 6. How do you see humor impacting the supervisory relationship?
- 7. Do you use or have you used humor in your supervision?
  - a. Tell me about a time you intentionally used humor in supervision.
    - i. How did you decide when to use humor in that situation?
  - b. Tell me about a time you unintentionally used humor in supervision.
  - c. Why do you use humor in supervision?
    - i. What do you hope your humor does (perceived impact)?
  - d. What do you perceive to happen after your use of humor (short or long term)?

- e. Have you changed how you use humor over time?
- f. Has your humor use changed developmentally over time with the same supervisees?
- g. Have you supervised over the Internet or Phone?
  - i. Was there a change in the use humor in these situations?
- 8. What else would you like to share about the use of humor in clinical supervision? If you know anyone who might be interested in this study, please let me know.

## APPENDIX E

### EXTENDED MEMBER CHECK PROTOCOL

#### EXTENDED MEMBER CHECK PROTOCOL

Before we begin, I'd like to review what you have shared so far (Provide an overview of themes and a description of each theme.)

- 1. What questions do you have about the findings I shared from your interview?
- 2. What fits your experience?
- 3. What's missing or what would you add?
- 4. What needs to be clarified from your perspective?
- 5. How are you feeling as we review/discuss this? What are you thinking about?
- 6. Looking back at our emergent findings again, what are you noticing? Tell me about that.
- 7. What would you like to add to this? What best represents your experience?
- 8. What have we not talked about yet that you'd like to share?

If you have any additional written feedback you would like to share, please feel free to email it to me.

## APPENDIX F INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



**Institutional Review Board** 

Date: 06/28/2023

Principal Investigator: Ryan Cheung

Committee Action: IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol

Action Date: 06/28/2023

Protocol Number: 2304048888

Protocol Title: A Narrative Inquiry into the Perceptions of Counseling Faculty Regarding the

Use of Humor in Clinical Supervision

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(702) for research involving

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:



#### **Institutional Review Board**

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this
  protocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. \*You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Interim IRB Administrator, Chris Saxton, at 970-702-5427 or via e-mail at <a href="mailto:chris.saxton@unco.edu">chris.saxton@unco.edu</a>. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - <a href="http://hths.gov/ohrp/">http://hths.gov/ohrp/</a> and <a href="http://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/">https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/</a>.

Sincerely, Michael Aldridge Interim IRB Administrator

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784