

RUTH LIJTMAER

What We Are Not Addressing in Psychoanalytic Education: Teaching Versus Neglecting Cultural Awareness in Training. Resistances and its Consequences

The cultural landscape of the ethnic population of this country is changing constantly. Despite of this, there are still resistances in including cultural awareness courses or in supervision, to create more cultural sensitive future psychoanalysts. The student's and the teacher's inability to tolerate anxiety, fear, and narcissistic vulnerability, which accompany the discussion of clinical material related to race and ethnicity, can prevent the exploration of these topics in the overall learning process. These exclusions indicate that there is still fear of the "other" different from us. This cultural countertransference resistance can deeply affect teaching and supervision.

Resistances can have many faces and affect both faculty and students. Personal attitudes, stereotypes and experiences of the teacher/supervisor with different ethnic groups impede their ability to effectively present the information in a nonbiased manner. Students experience resistance because their current beliefs may not coincide with the information presented. If they are minorities, they report that their feelings and experiences are misunderstood, or that they do not feel comfortable to express their feelings in response to a patient's material.

It is concluded that many faculty and students suffer from what Jackson (1999) calls character resistances, transference resistances and content resistances. These resistances are based on difficulties in confronting the individual's own stereotypes and prejudices. It is critical that supervisors and teachers attain a reasonable level of cultural awareness, initiate the discussion of race and culture in treatment, and are open to discuss cultural transference and countertransference, in order to model these competencies to the future analysts.

Ruth M. Lijtmaer, PhD, is a supervisor and training analyst at The Center for Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy of New Jersey, and in private practice in NJ. She has presented papers, both nationally and internationally. She also published papers on transference, countertransference and cultural issues.