Gender, Cultural, and Age Related Variations.

Differences in styles of thinking, problem-solving and communicating have gained a great deal of popularity in recent years when books such as those by linguist Deborah Tannen, You Just Don't Understand (1990) and Talking From 9 to 5 (1994), psychologist Mary Belenky and her colleagues, Women's Ways of Knowing (1986) and others hit the New York Times best seller lists. Understanding cultural, cognitive and communication style differences are important to consider in the preparation of our students as well as in the delivery of services to our clients (Battle, 1993; Sorensen, 1992).

Although sparse, there is some attention in the communicative sciences and disorders literature to the influence that gender, ethnicity, and age may have on expectations. These variables are important, in light of the demographics apparent in ASHA membership. Data indicate that more than 90% of ASHA members are Caucasian women and about 30 percent are in the 35-44 year age range and about 35 percent are in the 45-54 year age range (ASHA, 2001b).   Understanding differences and similarities can lead to more effective outcomes.

Langellier and Natalle (1987) described the ways in which gender is a profound and pervasive influence on our work and on our self-expressions. Providing facts gleaned from research on gender and interpersonal communication, and integrating facts about the profession of speech-language pathology and the world of academe, Langellier and Natalle offered a number of strategies for analyzing and dealing with differences in conversational styles. Seymour, Larkins, & Pickering (1992) addressed "Women's Ways of Supervising," noting how gender may impact self esteem, perceptions of roles, the ways we work and our preferences within our work

settings. Pickering (1992) stated, "A woman's way of being in the world, whether the domestic, public, or professional world, is likely to be different from that of a man's" (p.41).

DeVane (1992) offered multicultural strategies for quality improvement in the management/supervisory process, stressing the responsibility of supervisors to create a learning and work environment that uses the strengths and expertise of all participants. DeVane described underlying problems that interfere with successful management of diversity in academic and employment settings:

- Maintenance of the homogeneity theory/America as a "melting pot"
- Failure to differentiate between difference and deficit
- Cognitive and behavioral rigidity/Ethnocentrism

Understanding is gained by examining what we have in common, how we are alike, and by sharing our values and developing common goals. Empathy and concern for others, evidenced by behaviors such as active listening, asking questions, and honest and open communication are imperative. It is also necessary to recognize the relationship between language and culture, and understand that experiences, concepts, values, beliefs, and attitudes are reflected in how language is used.

Kayser (1993) cited four training issues that are important when supervising Hispanic SLP students: 1) culture, 2) language proficiency, 3) mentoring and 4) supervision and clinical management of minority clients. Culture is the knowledge that individuals must have to be functional members of a community and includes rules for interactions, appropriate behaviors, and regulations for interacting with people from different cultures (Saville-Troike, 1986 - cited in Kayser). Acculturation involves adhering to certain rules for interaction and adopting some values of a second culture while preserving the rules and regulations of one's native culture. Assimilation involves accepting various ideas and values from a second culture but rejecting differing values and expectations of one's native culture. Kayser (1993)

noted that "bilingual-bicultural graduate students come into graduate programs with differing levels of acculturation and assimilation" (p.18). The variability within and between ethnic groups and the impact that cognitive, behavioral, and affective differences may have on interactions with peers, supervisors, clients and their families, necessitates self analysis. The self-awareness that is achieved through self analysis provides the opportunity to recognize differences in styles and to identify those that enhance clinical effectiveness. Knowing that bilingual students are a heterogeneous group, Kayser recommends that the graduate program be designed to enable students to develop proficiency in assessment and clinical management in both languages. The issue of language proficiency is addressed in ASHA's (1989) position statement which includes an operational definition for bilingual SLPs and lists the competencies expected of bilingual clinicians.

Murray and Owen (1991) defined mentoring as, " a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies" (p. xiv). Mentoring is an unquestionable critical factor in the retention of culturally and linguistically different students. The paucity of persons of color in our professions makes cross-racial and cross-cultural matches inevitable. Further, it isn't fair to expect the one or few persons of color or ethnicity in an organization to assume the role of "minority in residence" or expert on all issues related to diversity (Brasseur, 1994).

Since the early 80's numerous articles have stressed not only the importance of mentoring, but also have suggested strategies. For example, Murray and Owen (1991) suggested that a mutually developed action plan that includes professional, educational, and personal goals be developed. For each goal the: a) activities, b) skills or knowledge to be achieved and c) timelines should be detailed. The frequency of regular meetings should be addressed during the planning process. Confidentiality also needs to be addressed. The plan is a contract of sorts, and as such should specify the length of the formal relationship. Murray and Owen call this a "no-fault termination" clause and

note that it is similar to a prenuptial agreement in that it provides for a civilized dissolution and a graceful ending. Supervisors who are unfamiliar with the body of literature on mentoring are advised to engage in some self-study to assist in our professions' efforts to recruit and retain diverse professionals.

In describing supervisor and supervisee style differences and preferences, Kayser explains some of the behaviors associated with a "field dependent" learning style which is fairly typical of Mexican-Americans, as is a polychronic style of treatment. Battle (1995) expands the discussion of variation in learning styles and states that a field independent/analytic learning style is more typical of European-American students while the field dependent/holistic learning style is often used by African-American, Asian-American/Pacific Islander and Hispanic students. Naturally, no single style exists across members of a particular ethnic group. Supervisors need to understand the distinctions and how to adjust their style to meet supervisee needs.

Inglebret (1996) described a model used at Washington State University for the recruitment and retention of Native American students. Recognizing learning style preferences and implementing those styles are essential to student success. Inglebret cited a body of literature that substantiates Native American students' preference for a cooperative versus competitive style. In applying this to supervision, supervisors will need to be familiar with group dynamics and the principles needed to form and facilitate effective functioning in learning groups.