Trust Development in the Supervisory Working Alliance

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the development of trust in the supervisory relationship between doctoral-level student supervisors and masters-level students. Using phenomenological research methodology to analyze data obtained from 10 interviews with masters-level practicum students, six themes emerged: (1) Focus, (2) Investment, (3) Safety, (4) Honesty, (5) Expertise, and (6) Evaluation.

Keywords

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The ability to create a strong working alliance is critical to successful outcomes in counselor supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Bordin, 1983; Efstation, Patton & Kardash, 1990; Ekstein & Wallerstein, 1972; Holloway, 1987; Ladany, Ellis, & Friedlander, 1999; Mueller & Kell, 1972). Efstation, Patton, & Kardash (1990) defined the working alliance in supervision as "that set of actions interactively used by supervisors and trainees to facilitate the learning of the trainee" (p. 323). Supervisors are able to positively influence supervisees' training through this working alliance, guiding them toward more effective counseling behaviors. The ability of a supervisor to create a working alliance with the supervisee is built upon the foundation of an emotional bond characterized by mutual trust (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Ladany, Ellis & Friedlander, 1999).

Supervisory Working Alliance

A strong supervisory working alliance sets the stage for the interventions and activities of supervision (Chen & Bernstein, 2000). Such an alliance provides a positive relational context for supervision, which corresponds to higher supervisee ratings of their supervision experience (Efstation, Patton & Kardash, 1990). A sound supervisory relationship also establishes an atmosphere of comfort where the supervisees feel open to self-disclose (Efstation, et al., 1990; Pistole, 1993; Webb & Wheeler, 1998), an important supervisee behavior that leads to growth and development in the supervisee (Holloway, 1987). Patton and Kivlighan (1997) found that in addition to providing a positive context for supervision, a strong working alliance directly relates to improved supervisee performance of counseling skills and is predictive of the supervisee's therapeutic working alliance with their clients.

While previous research confirms the effects of the supervisory working alliance, less investigation has focused on exploring the cause, origin, or components of a strong supervisory

alliance. Bordin (1983) theorized that the supervisory working alliance consists of factors similar to the therapeutic working alliance between a counselor and client. These factors (well researched in the therapeutic working alliance, though not the supervisory working alliance) include: agreement to the goals of supervision, understanding of the tasks and roles within supervision, and creating an emotional bond between supervisor and supervisee. While many aspects of the process may be similar between the two types of alliance (Bordin, 1983, Worthington & Stern, 1985), significant contextual influences exist in the supervisory relationship that impact the supervisory working alliance (Ladany, Ellis & Friedlander, 1999; Patton and Kivlighan, 1997), for which Bordin did not account in her model.

Ladany, Ellis and Friedlander (1999) sought to confirm Bordin's theoretical model through empirical research, finding that instead of consisting of the three factors proposed by Bordin's (1983) model, the supervisory working relationship is more appropriately conceptualized as two separate factors—agreements and emotional bond. The development of emotional bond is the focus of the current study. Though Ladany et al. (1990) identified emotional bond as a factor contributing to the supervisory working alliance, no investigation to date has explored the nature of the experience and perspectives of the participants contributing to the development of this emotional bond in the supervision relationship.

Emotional Bond and Trust

The mutual caring, trust, and respect held between supervisee and supervisor can be thought of as an emotional bond (White & Queener, 2003). Researchers have stressed the importance of trust development in supervision through a strong emotional bond (Chen & Bernstein, 2000; Ekstein & Wallerstein, 1972; Kell & Mueller, 1966) and have recommended that supervisors strive to achieve an emotional bond with supervisees (Ladany et al.,1999).

However, many unique challenges may impact trust development in the supervisory relationship that are non-existent in other relationships, including the counseling relationship. Most supervisors are adept at forming a strong emotional bond with their clients, but the process with supervisees is different (Ladany, Ellis & Friedlander, 1999; Patton and Kivlighan, 1997; Worthington & Stern, 1985). For example, in many university settings, the supervisee enters a relationship with a supervisor through requirement, not by choice (Webb & Wheeler, 1998). The supervisee often has little or no control over which supervisor he or she is assigned to work with. Therefore, any inherent trustworthiness in the social role or "expertness" of the supervisor is not assumed (Strong, 1968; Worthington & Stern, 1985). In addition, fewer expectations for emotional self-disclosure exist in the supervisory relationship, a context that contributes to a shared emotional bond in the therapeutic relationship (White & Queener, 2003). Finally, the supervisory relationship is evaluative by its very nature (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Chen & Bernstein, 2000) and supervisors serve as "gatekeepers" of the profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009, Holloway, 1995). Supervisees are caught in a role conflict characterized by sharing thoughts and concerns (Ladany & Friedlander, 1995; Olk & Friedlander, 1992; Webb & Wheeler, 1998), while at the same time recognizing that they are being evaluated by their supervisor (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Ramos-Sanchez, Esnil, Goodwin, Riggs, Touster, Wright, Ratanasiripong, & Rodolfa, 2002).

Further complicating the development of trust in the supervisory working alliance, many universities with Ph.D. programs in counselor education utilize doctoral students to supervise masters-level students. Issues of boundaries and dual relationships arise wherein the doctoral student is simultaneously supervisor, teacher, evaluator, colleague, and classmate, making the issue of role ambiguity and role conflict even more salient (Ladany & Friedlander, 1995; Olk &

Friedlander, 1992; Scarborough, Bernard & Morse, 2006). Multiple research studies have concluded that no difference exists in the tasks or focus of supervision (Goodyear & Robyak, 1982; Worthington, 1984), the quality of the supervision relationship, or ratings of supervisor competence (Worthington & Stern, 1985) between supervision conducted by a more experienced faculty supervisor and supervision by a less-experienced doctoral-level student supervisor. Yet perceptions still exist that experience level of supervisors can create inequalities in supervisors' "expertness" (Worthington & Stern, 1985).

Given these challenges particular to the supervisory working alliance, White and Queener (2003) sought to discover the degree to which attachment style of the supervisee and social support influence the emotional bond in the supervisory working alliance. A review of research exploring factors contributing to the therapeutic counseling alliance revealed two factors: the client's ability to form adult attachments and his or her level of social support. Interestingly, in applying these factors to the supervisory working alliance, their research did not support the hypothesis that supervisee attachment style and social support are the main factors contributing to supervisee and supervisor perceptions of the supervisory working alliance. Their research did, however, indicate that attachment style and social support are two of many important factors contributing to the alliance and the supervisee's ability to trust his or her supervisor.

While previous research has confirmed that trust between supervisor and supervisee is a key element in effective supervision, little is known about the particular way trust develops in this unique relationship. The purpose of this research study was to illuminate the individual experiences of students in counselor education practicum related to the development of trust with their supervisor. While all interpersonal experiences are unique, this study sought to discover common themes that exist among individual students' experiences.

Method

Research Design

Qualitative research methodology is particularly fitting for exploring the nuances of individual experiences within a particular context. Phenomenological methodology, as a specific means of conducting qualitative research, captures the lived experience of a group of people that contributes to the development of a particular phenomenon (such as trust in the supervisory relationship, as was explored in this study). In phenomenological data analysis, researchers developed a textural description of the experiences of the participants, a structural description of their experiences, and then combined both descriptions to illuminate the essence of the participants' lived experience (Creswell, 2007). The research questions explored in this study include:

Research Questions

1. How does trust develop between doctoral-level supervisors and masters-level supervisees in counselor education as described by masters-level first year practicum students?

2. What are essential components of a trusting relationship as described by master's-level first year practicum supervisees working with doctoral-level supervisors?

Participants

A purposive sampling of 10 individuals from a masters-level counseling program in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States was invited to participate in this study. All ten participants were enrolled in graduate training including both coursework and their first clinical practicum during their second semester of a five-semester program. Additional criteria for participant selection included willingness to participate in a recorded interview and follow-up interview if necessary. Participants received no payment or remuneration for their involvement

in this research study. To protect the identity of each participant, they were assigned

pseudonyms: Samantha, Andrew, Isabelle, Stephanie, Catherine, Violet, Elizabeth, Lily, Carmen

and Mary. Participants included nine females and one male. Ages of participants ranged from

22 to 25 years old. No other demographics information was formally collected from participants.

Researchers

The researchers were enrolled in their first year of a Ph.D. program in counselor

education. They represent varied age (ranging from 25-60 years old), as well as various racial

and ethnic backgrounds: a Korean male, two Caucasian females, an African-American female,

and a Caucasian male. While half of the researchers had previous experience supervising

counselors in the field, none had supervised counselors-in-training in an academic setting. The

researchers co-taught a didactic practicum course that the participants were enrolled in and

several of the researchers were also group and individual supervisors for the participants of this

study. However, data was collected by another member of the research team and not the

participants' individual practicum supervisor.

An assumption of phenomenological research is that researchers cannot detach from their

own presuppositions. Therefore, one of the initial tasks of the researchers was to "bracket"

preconceived notions regarding the investigated phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Bracketing is an

attempt to prevent past knowledge from influencing the content and analysis of the participants'

presented experience (Giorgi, 2009). The researchers met multiple times before beginning data

collection to discuss assumptions, biases, or past experiences regarding trust, counselor

supervision, the experience of being a masters-level supervisee, the experience of being a

supervisor, as well as other topics that influenced how each researcher approached the study.

Such discussions were intended to facilitate more accurate reporting of the participants' lived experiences.

Procedure

All methods and procedures for this study were approved through the university's Internal Review Board (IRB) to ensure protection of human subjects and privacy of data.

Interview. Using a semi-structured interview design, a flexible interview guide was created with questions intended to illuminate the development of trust between the masters-level practicum student and his or her doctoral-level supervisor. Determining interview questions was a two-stage process. First, an extensive review of relevant literature on trust development was conducted. Second, the study's five researchers discussed ways to condense and combine questions and to modify ambiguous terms. Through this process, five interview questions were chosen: 1) *Describe your practicum experience as a supervisee,* 2) *How do you define trust?* 3) *In what ways can trust be created in the supervision relationship?* 4) *How would you describe your level of trust with your supervisor?* 5) *What are aspects of the ideal trusting relationship between a doctoral-level supervisor and masters-level supervisee?*

Researchers video-recorded in-person interviews with 10 participants. Each researcher interviewed two participants chosen from a list of potential volunteers. In the interest of confidentiality, researchers chose participants to interview who were not also one of the researcher's individual practicum supervisees. Participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent document before being interviewed. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Interviews were interactive and open-ended, congruent with phenomenological methodology. Researchers transcribed the video-recorded interviews verbatim,

changing the participants' names to pseudonyms and concealing any identifying information to protect the identity of the participant.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis. Analysis of the transcribed interviews followed Creswell's (2007) three-stage analysis strategy: 1) prepare and organize data; 2) reduce the data into themes; and 3) represent the data. After preparing the transcribed interviews, researchers reduced the data into categories through a process of identifying codes and clustering codes under overarching experiential themes that emerged. The researchers highlighted "significant statements," sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2007). A master list of themes and categories were produced by tallying frequency of codes, combining codes into broader themes or "meaning units" and then organizing them into meaningful segments relevant to the investigation. The researchers articulated the data into descriptions of "what" the participants experienced with the phenomenon and "how" the experience happened (Creswell, 2007). Themes were validated through member checks, frequency count of codes, extended engagement in the field, as well as through triangulation of information, a review of relevant research literature, and overall adherence to phenomenological methodology.

Findings

In this study, six main themes were identified in the 10 transcribed interviews: (1) Focus, (2) Investment, (3) Safety, (4) Honesty, (5) Expertise, and (6) Evaluation. These themes surfaced from a total of 185 codes identified in the transcribed interviews, 107 with a frequency count of two or more.

Focus

Participants spoke of the focus of supervision as being important to the development of trust, particularly in the early stages of the supervisory relationship. Multiple participants highlighted the importance of keeping the supervisee's needs as the focus of the session. Specifically, participants talked about "time well-spent" when the supervisees felt that their needs, concerns, fears, and uncertainties were addressed in supervision. In these instances, participants felt they had gleaned the most value possible from the supervisory relationship and this helped to ease their anxiety in their new role. Samantha said:

> I know I've had supervisors before in other contexts where they would suddenly start talking about their experience and you're sitting there going 'that was not related to what I was talking about' and so you trust them less…And it isn't so much that I feel my supervision should be just about me; it's about me, but it's also about the clients I'm working with and the job I'm doing for them. So, I feel like if the person I'm working with is going to focus on themselves then I can't rely on them for the help I need to help the people I'm working with.

Participants noted that in the times they felt most supported, their supervisor used basic counseling skills: active listening, making eye contact, using open-questions, reflecting, paraphrasing, re-framing, even punctuality and over-all professionalism. These skills helped to create a safe base from which the supervisee felt comfortable to explore options. Samantha described her relationship with her supervisor:

> I know that she's gonna keep me focused in our supervision sessions and help me really get the most out of my experience; that she'll listen to everything I have to say and she'll have really great advice. That she lets me, you know, she always makes sure that I'm thinking on my own too. She's not just guiding me or telling me what to do. She tries to get me to think for myself too and then steps in where she thinks I need help.

Violet described a similar experience with her supervisor who let her try out her new role without over-correcting or controlling her:

> He's not…um…controlling, I guess. He just lets me go on my own path and that helps me a lot. It's really important… He is not quick to say 'you should do it

this way and that way.' He helps me figure out what the best way is. He's not telling me what to do.

Systematic organization within each session seemed important to the trust-building process as well. Participants described several of the tasks of supervision that they found the most helpful to building a trusting relationship with their supervisor, such as attending to the processing needs of the supervisee as discussed above, taking time to watch video clips of the supervisee counseling, case conceptualization, help with specific counseling techniques, and periodic journaling. Lily expressed her appreciation of weekly journaling, especially, as a helpful aspect of the supervision relationship that extended beyond their 60-minute weekly meeting:

> I actually do think that the journals help too because there's something where, maybe in the moment I can't articulate it, but when he gives me a topic it's really something that we've been talking about in session and I know he's really listening to what I say.

Participants felt that a lack of focus in sessions negatively impacted their relationship with their supervisor and their overall impression of the supervision process. Samantha commented:

> Sometimes you have a whole lot of things you want to talk about... and it takes a while to process and then I get there (to group supervision) and it's sort of frustrating…There were a couple of times where we've been really loosey-goosey in (group supervision) and people have been able to talk about everything and really go into it but there were a couple of times where I sort of held back because I knew we were going to something else…

Carmen also noted a preference for individual supervision over group supervision because of the increased focus and use of time: "(In group supervision), because there are so many of us, sometimes we have a tendency to get off topic (laughing)… Sometimes we don't get to talk about the things that I want to talk about… but in individual supervision we get to talk about what I want to talk about." While these participants noted other benefits of the group

supervision experience, most felt that the individual supervision experience represented a more focused time of support that facilitated trust in their individual supervisor as they tackled unknown, often anxiety-provoking territory in their first practicum experience.

Investment

A second theme clearly articulated by the participants was *investment*, revealing that trust was facilitated in the relationship if the supervisor was clearly interested in the development, learning, and growth of the supervisee. Mary stated, "I think one thing that really facilitates trust in supervision is having the sense that the supervisor is there for you, cares about you above what they're getting out of it; (the supervisee's) personal and professional growth is the priority." Isabelle spoke of appreciating a supervisor who serves as an advocate, thereby accurately reflecting the interests of the supervisee, particularly to those responsible for the final evaluation of the supervisee:

> To me, you would want to know that the person who is your supervisor is kind of your advocate in a way. We know that our doctoral supervisor is interacting with our faculty member and sharing everything with them (for evaluation)…I guess, we also need to feel that they're not just going around to the faculty person saying all of the bad things about us or what is wrong with us. You want to have some kind of feeling that they are working for you in a way.

Participants noted the importance of personal respect in the development of a trusting relationship, as well as specific ways in which they felt their supervisors conveyed such respect for them. Lily found that her supervisor's willingness to challenge her demonstrated respect, as her supervisor knew that she could handle the challenge. Lily said,

> A lot of trust comes from his willingness to challenge me on some things too….For instance, I tend to like person-centered theory and I've told him that. And he said to me, not in so many words, but the gist was that you can be lazy with person-centered because the client is supposed to do all of the work. And I told him why that didn't really apply for how I saw it, but I really appreciate that he challenged me on it and made me defend my decision. It wasn't just an, 'Ok. Ok.' He said it in a nice way like, 'I'm just going to play devil's advocate.' And I

think because he challenges me, I feel like he respects what I have to say in a way. You know, he wants to hear my reasoning.

Lily went on to say, "Trust is about having the best interest of the other person and I really feel like the ideal supervisors wants to see their supervisee grow. I know that he has a lot of stuff going on… but I feel like he does want to help me."

Carmen explained how she prefers feedback in supervision—not all "fluff", but a balance of affirming what she is currently doing well and challenging her in other areas. To her, this represents personal respect. She said:

> And then there's the areas that I need to work on and I want the honest feedback. And the fact that it's positive and I don't feel attacked or that she's belittling me… (Feedback) doesn't have to be super fluffy… but so long as they don't say it in a way that puts me on the defensive.

Violet shared similar sentiments, noting that she would be skeptical of a supervisor who only had affirming feedback without the balance of constructive criticism. She commented, "My supervisor is very affirming and I like that a lot… But I wouldn't want somebody to be affirming all the time. Balance is important." Appreciation for a balance between challenging and supporting was also reiterated by Catherine in the following:

> I trust a supervisor who is honest with me and not only about the things that I need to improve on, but also about what I'm doing well… You can always get the 'you are doing this really well' but challenging the person is also really important. My supervisor challenges me to think about my clients; things that I may not have noticed.

The participants appeared to have a sense that challenging a supervisee was not always an easy or comfortable task for the supervisor, but they felt it represented personal respect as well as the supervisor's investment in and commitment to the growth and development of them as supervisees.

Participants also spoke of dependability as an aspect of investment, indicating their appreciation for consistency in their supervisors' behaviors. Stephanie stated: "Trust is being able to depend on my supervisor that he will give me good suggestions, straight-forward feedback." Other participants noted that their supervisors are consistently on-time for supervision sessions, rarely re-schedule, and have meaningful activities planned for supervision.

Safety

Safety was a third theme reflected in the participants' narratives. Multiple participants stated that their supervisor "has my best interests in mind." Others used words and phrases such as "empathy," a "sense of understanding," and "comfort," to describe positive qualities of their supervisors and the supervisory relationship. Participants described appreciating supervision sessions in which they felt they would "not being judged" and would have "no fear of rejection." Such supervision characteristics seemed to contribute to a sense of safety, which allowed supervisees to be open with supervisors and disclose information that might otherwise be difficult to disclose in a relationship characterized by evaluation. Andrew said, "Trust is when two people can bring anything they want to the table, they can say whatever and not feel judgment…the biggest thing is not feeling like you have to hold back and knowing that whatever you say or whatever you bring up is not going to change your opinion of them personally." Stephanie shared a similar thought:

> I guess the fact that even though we are talking about practicum, we are also talking about growing into the professional world. (In supervision) we can talk about my stress level, the things that are kind of going on in my life that may be affecting my performance… Trust is very important to be able to talk about those things. Being comfortable with your (supervisor). Not feeling judged or anything about things that may come off wrong, or things that I am doing wrong.

Catherine spoke of her early fear of rejection (she feared her supervisor would find her inadequate as a counselor), but she also described how the non-judgmental atmosphere created by her supervisor served to allay such fears:

> Trust to me is being open and honest without fear of rejection and knowing you can say what you want to say...feeling like you will not be judged negatively... My supervisor did this in the same way that you do in a counseling relationship: you are warm, you are open and you just make the other person feel really comfortable. When I first met my supervisor I felt really comfortable and I was able to disclose something that I probably would not have shared with anyone else. But it really started off our relationship in a good way.

Although not explicitly stated, several participants appeared to describe counselor developmental matching as creating a safe environment in the supervision relationship that led to the development of trust. Violet articulated her frustration when her supervisor would not give her concrete answers to the questions she asked him. In describing the one thing in her relationship with her supervisor that inhibits trust, she said: "That is the one thing that I could hold back on. Like asking him about the hours—how do we log hours and where should they go? To him, it's like it doesn't matter because you are getting the hours anyway. I mean, I need an answer. Maybe he doesn't know. But at the same time, he just pushes those questions away like they don't matter. Those things I might not ask him—I'd ask somebody else." Carmen's supervisors seem to have emphasized the developmental process with her, and this gave Carmen comfort when she struggled through new tasks and skills:

> I don't feel pressured by my supervisors. They definitely provide me with feedback and areas that I can improve in, but I don't feel pressure to get it done before the next meeting. You know? They're not like, 'Oh, you have to get this done and you're half way through the semester and you haven't done this yet.' So I think not being pressured definitely helps. I think just emphasizing that it's a learning process and that I'm not going to be able to do it right off the bat. You know, I'm just going to have to struggle my way through it until it just clicks.

Consistency exhibited by supervisors also appeared to contribute to the level of safety felt by supervisees. Samantha expressed that she feels more comfortable when she is able to predict how her supervisor will react to issues she brings to supervision:

> I guess part of it is certainty, knowing you can rely on that person, knowing you can generally predict how they will react to certain things, what they'll do. Not like predict everything they'll say, but more the idea that they're consistent, so you feel that you can trust them because you know that they're not going to freak out unexpectedly about something…They're dependable, yeah, consistent, and you can rely on them… My supervisor is open, calm and consistent.

Carmen also expressed an appreciation for calmness and consistency in her supervisor's demeanor, saying: "I can trust my supervisor with what I bring to her and she doesn't react negatively." Similarly, Elizabeth described the importance of reliability:

> I would say that trust is when one person feels the other person is reliable to do what they say they're going to do. Reliable to keep your information, things that you tell them, to yourself and only use them for the supervisee's benefit…My supervisor will do what she says she'll do. She'll be there on time, I trust what she says to me, she's honest and not misleading me.

Honesty

Of the ten participants interviewed, nine mentioned honesty as a major contributing factor to the development of trust with their supervisor. Specifically, honesty was described as being present in interactions between the supervisee and supervisor in two main ways. First, the supervisor's formative and summative evaluations of the supervisee were congruent with the supervisee's performance, including instances of both affirmation and corrective feedback . Second, the supervisor was congruent within herself or himself. In other words, the supervisor did not appear to embellish his or her skill level and was willing to be honest about moments when he or she made mistakes.

Elizabeth, in particular, spoke extensively about the importance of honesty in the supervisory relationship. She described a parallel between the supervisory relationship and her counseling relationship with her clients, recognizing a human tendency to want to focus on positive aspects of the relationship, rather than to offer a message that challenges:

> I think honesty always helps trust develop. It is essential so that would, you know, that's something that I would think about my client. If I'm honest with them and they are honest with me, then trust will continue to grow. If my client had an issue trusting me, I would want that client to be comfortable enough to tell me so then we can work on it and make it better. I think probably voicing it will grow trust in our relationship. And probably stopping putting the nice little spin on things at the end would help. That's not really authentic on my part.

Similar to Elizabeth, Stephanie described the concept of honesty multiple times throughout the interview. Stephanie used the word "transparency" to convey the concept of open, honest conversation with her supervisor in which she felt confident about her supervisor's estimation of her skills as a new counselor—both the areas in which she excelled and the areas in which she needed additional support and practice:

> I'm the kind of person who needs to trust someone to know that they are being real with me and tell me if there is a problem and that helps me trust… My supervisor is very transparent with me, very genuine. He just sort of leaves things open so that I have space to express… it is a very comfortable environment.

Carmen also found that honest feedback from her supervisor facilitated trust, although she also noted the importance of timing in offering a challenging feedback: "I also think being genuine and honest about feedback helps. If I bring something up, it would be helpful to get feedback in a timely manner. Because if I get feedback on something that I did a month ago, well, I've still been doing that thing in the meantime!"

Several of the participants spoke of the respect they have for their supervisors who seem "real," who show their "human side," who are willing to discuss a time they made a mistake or

didn't have an immediate answer to a dilemma. Violet discussed the concept of supervisor self-disclosure: "I think for the supervisors it is important to disclose some of themselves. I think that helps a lot. Maybe not everything about their personal lives, but making them seem like you know, they're human too." This is in contrast to other participants who stated that they find that maintaining the focus of supervision on the needs of the supervisee facilitated trust. It appears that balance is appreciated in regards to self-disclosure. Indeed, Violet continued, "I think my supervisor is good at this. He doesn't say too much (about his own experience). He doesn't say too little either. He obviously keeps his personal life separate. I think that's important. But just telling his experience with counseling has helped me." Lily expressed similar sentiments regarding supervisor self-disclosure, emphasizing the "human" side:

> I think something that has really helped me is that my supervisor gives me examples from his experience, like anecdotal evidence, kind of like, 'hey, I've been there too.' I guess, a little bit of self-disclosure. I really feel like I can relate to him. He's not perfect, but here's what he has done to better himself. I think if I put him up on a pedestal which I tend to do with doctoral students, then it would be hard for me to trust him because I just couldn't be myself.

> In responding to a question about whether it is easier to trust a supervisor who is similar to him, Andrew responded that he felt it is most important for a supervisor to be open and honest with his or her supervisee, rather than exactly alike in every aspect:

> I think just being honest, umm, just upfront, kinda like in techniques class when we learned about broaching-- just bringing up, 'you know, you're a practicum student-- I get it-- I know what you've been through; I've been through it as well. But I want you to bring your experiences as well because maybe I haven't experienced the same exact things.' So, just, you know, putting it out there, that this is what it is to be honest with me.

Expertise

"Expertise" received a high enough frequency count in coding that researchers made the decision to list it as a theme, although it was significantly less-represented in the participants'

descriptions than the other six themes. Indeed, when the concept of expertise was mentioned,

participants described expertise, or level of knowledge, of the supervisor as important, but not as

important as other factors that contributed more directly to the relationship such as concepts of

safety, focus, honesty and investment. In describing expertise, participants used words and

phrases such as "credibility," "knows what she is talking about," "applied knowledge," "real-

world experience," and "insight" to describe positive aspects of expertise. Interestingly, all of

these words and phrases related to the supervisors' *counseling* experience and skills; none of the

participants spoke of the supervisor's *supervisory* skills or experience. This is interesting but not

necessarily surprising, as counseling students are seldom aware of the process or theory of

counselor supervision as separate from counseling itself.

Most of the participants spoke of expertise in passing, usually as it related to another

topic. Elizabeth spoke more at length, explaining how her supervisor's experience in the field

made Elizabeth feel more confident in her own work, seeing her supervisor as a trailblazer who

paved a clear path for her to follow:

> My trust has developed with my supervisor through her sharing similar
> experiences with me. I know she has done this before so she has a leg to stand on
> so to speak. Her information she gives me is reliable. She's not just telling me
> what she thinks; she's telling me what has happened before. So, experience really,
> experience of the supervisor in things related to what I'm doing has been really
> helpful.

Carmen expressed a unique perspective within the theme of expertise. The other

participants spoke of expertise in terms of viewing their supervisors as an "expert." Carmen

found it equally important for the supervisor to view herself or himself as "expert," and she

described how this contributes to a supervisee's sense of trust in a supervisor:

> I think something that goes along with giving feedback is being confident in your
> feedback and not being like, 'Well, you know, I'm not sure if this was the best
> way to go about it…' because then it makes me not trust that they believe what

they are saying or have a good idea of what they're saying… Their confidence doesn't have to be every time I ask a question, they have an answer. That's fine if they don't know an answer as long as they can go find an answer for me… But definitely being confident in their knowledge of the counseling process. And how they express that knowledge.

Evaluation

Evaluation appeared to be a source of anxiety for many of the participants. Understanding that their supervisor was responsible for their evaluation created a barrier to what they shared in supervision. Several participants relayed a sense of regret that they could not share more with their supervisor about their fears and uncertainties in their new role. Participants felt that they had to balance what they shared about their struggles with evidence that they were capable of handling various situations. Many participants wondered how the information about them would be used. At the university in which the study was conducted, doctoral-level supervisors provided recommendations about practicum supervisees to a faculty member who ultimately decided whether the student passed or failed practicum. Practicum students trusted their doctoral-level supervisors to represent their progress to the faculty member accurately and fairly. Isabelle commented on the stress inherent in this organizational structure, saying:

> I guess sometimes you feel like, 'Is everything I'm saying to my supervisor being judged? Like, if I complain about something does that come off as-- or, if I am having trouble with something at my site does that come off as me not being flexible or not being adaptive? Are they mentally making note, 'Oh, she can't deal with this situation or that situation'? So sometimes I do feel kind of guarded, like, not from anything my supervisor has done, but just being that a part of their job is to evaluate you. So it does put a little bit of a barrier I think…It's kind of a mystery if you don't really see what this person is doing for me when they're not in my face. How are they interacting with somebody else about me. I don't know. Like you don't really know what happens when they're not with you. It just seems like some kind of black hole coming after me, and I don't know what's happening."

Elizabeth found the practice of taping supervision sessions to be "awkward" and "not genuine," as if both the supervisor and supervisee were performing for an audience. In addition, the sense that everything she said was being permanently documented was an added source of anxiety and made her especially mindful of how she represented herself in session:

> What's hard for me is the taping. I'm thinking that if I said that I'm having trouble with this then the professor is going to be like, 'Oh, dear, she's not fit to be a counselor. So, if we were just there alone without the camera rolling I would probably say a lot more and maybe express more fear. I might be more authentic about it. And it's not necessarily that I don't trust my supervisor; it's just, what, I mean, the information is recorded and what will you do with that information? It's different than taping our clients because we're talking about school and that is relevant to everything. I mean, you are evaluating us. So, I'm hesitant to say things sometimes that might reflect negatively.

Samantha expressed similar anxiety regarding the constant watchful eye of the supervisor: "Yeah, and the other thing too that's also scary for some people is the whole idea that we are being watching all the time by the whole review process. That's a little freaky; it's a little big-brother."

Though it was clear that evaluation represented a significant source of anxiety for the participants, a few spoke of ways their supervisor made the experience less intimidating. For Isabelle, it was important that she had a sense of collaboration between herself and her supervisor: "What I think has been helpful so far is that (supervision) has a collaborative feeling like we're working together versus her just saying you need to do this or you need to do that." Mary found the same to be true of her supervisor and said:

> One thing I really appreciate about my supervisor is that I feel like I can talk to her as a colleague or as an equal and at the same time there is that, that power difference, that challenges me in a positive way. So it's not like I'm in a complete comfort zone as with friends, but I can talk with her just as easily as with someone I am really close with but also have that authority in the relationship that on her part I think is really important, but on the flipside I think that it would undermine trust if the supervisor was arrogant about their power and authority, or

if they were treating you like a client, trying to assess what's going on with your mental symptoms. I think that would be really inappropriate.

Carmen was the only participant who was able to speak positively about the assessment process. For her, it seemed that her supervisor made assessment a normal and expected part of every supervision session. In her comments, Carmen appeared to show an appreciation for consistent formative assessment, which has been recommended in supervision literature (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Carmen commented:

> I really appreciated insight from the supervisor and the assessment too, the open assessment. My supervisor provided me with my overall assessment at the midterm. So, she opened all that information up to me so that I would know what was going on with me, what her assessment of me was… It was a little uncomfortable, but it is so much more advantageous to know that it definitely outweighs. I mean, it is minimally uncomfortable for me because I really appreciate the feedback. I want to know what I'm doing well so that I don't really need to focus on those things. They're already happening.

Discussion

In this study, participants spoke of their experience as a first semester practicum student working with a doctoral-level practicum supervisor. While many of the participants knew their practicum supervisor through prior interaction, either as a classmate, teaching assistant, or socially, the supervisory relationship was a new and distinctly different relationship, which has been discussed in previous clinical supervision literature (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Scarborough, Bernard, & Morse, 2006). Participants spoke of warm exchanges, empathic listening, and maintaining an open attitude as initial supervisor behaviors that helped to build a working relationship, allowing the student to feel comfortable sharing information about themselves and aspects of their clinical experience in supervision.

As the semester progressed, the supervisees appreciated a supervisor who challenged them to take a new perspective, provided honest feedback about progress made, and allowed

open discussions about personal struggles. Some participants described this experience as "uncomfortable," but most portrayed it in highly positive terms, describing it as a process that helped them to grow both personally and professionally. While it is likely that participants may not have previously considered their relationship with their supervisor in terms of "trust development" specifically, it was evident that these participants took notice of specific supervisor behaviors, which had important impacts on their working relationship.

This qualitative exploration of trust development between doctoral-level supervisors and master's-level practicum students in counselor education confirms previous related research and extends the body of literature in several important ways. Kramer (1996) described predictability, consistency and safety as elements fostering trust in a hierarchical relationship in an organization, though not specifically in a supervisory relationship or academic setting. Using phrases such as "consistent," "reliable," "has my best interests in mind," a "sense of understanding," "empathy," and "no fear of rejection," participants in the current study spoke of these concepts as well, stating that they were elements that led the participants to trust in their supervisors (further described under the theme "safety").

Scarborough et al.'s (2006) review of literature discusses challenges related to the multiple roles doctoral students play on the university campuses as they "move between roles of student, teaching assistant, instructor, supervisor, supervisee, counselor, group counselor, mentor, mentee, personal confidant, and peer/classmate" (pg. 51). The resulting dual relationships and overlapping authority positions of doctoral supervisors and their masters-levels supervisees were described by participants in the current study. Lily spoke directly about this "dual relationship":

> I had been in a class with my supervisor last semester and I wasn't aware that he was going to be my doctoral supervisor at the time. So it was kind of a little uncomfortable at first. But on the other hand, I got to see a lot of him so I really got to know his personality… Although, I think it's easier to go from being a

classmate to being an evaluator—to go from a less restrictive to a more restrictive relationship, because now if he's my classmate in the future he's going to have seen some journals from me that, well, you know, have some personal things.

Worthington and Stern's (1985) study of the effects of supervisor and supervisee degree level and gender on the supervisory relationship found that supervisor status as either a faculty member or a doctoral student made no significant difference in supervision relationship ratings. Though participants in this study spoke of the challenge of changing their relationship with a doctoral student from classmate/colleague to supervisor, most agreed that once the transition occurred, seeing their doctoral-level supervisor as an authority figure was not difficult. Carmen stated, "Well, I've had class with a few of the doctoral students, but even then I didn't really see them as on my level. I mean, they all have been doing this for so much longer than I have."

Participants in this study also provided evidence of a preference for a developmental model of supervision, although this was not explicitly stated. Participants' preferences for structure in supervision sessions, concrete directions, clearly stated expectations, and open evaluation all reflect previously described theories and tasks of developmental counselor supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Although perhaps not aware of it herself, Violet's plea for her supervisor to take her concerns seriously is a plea for her supervisor to match her developmentally:

> The only thing that concerns me with my supervisor is that I know he has been through the process of being a master's student and has gone through life experiences so he knows a lot of things—things that I find are a big deal, but that might not be a big deal to him because he knows that they aren't in the long run. But right now, in the moment, it is a big deal.

Participants in this study revealed many different ways of viewing trust development with their practicum supervisor. One element that was common among every single interview was the idea that trust is central to an effective supervisory relationship. Lily described trust as

"absolutely essential." "There is no way that I could even go into this process without trusting. I mean, it's a lot of vulnerability," Lily said. Participants also emphasized that they see trust as a mutual process between supervisee and supervisor; it is equally important for a supervisor to trust the supervisee as it is for the supervisee to trust the supervisor:

> Supervision is not like a friendship, really, in that it is more formal, but it is like whatever I say is not going to affect how I feel about you kind of thing. Whatever I want to talk about we will talk about and we'll deal with it. Like, I'll tell you how that makes me feel and you can tell me how you are experiencing me. It's a very mutual exchange because I think the more each person comes to a level playing field, the less you are afraid to share and the less you hold back. It's mutual, you know, we kind of meet each other at the same place.

Limitations

The researchers in this study have identified several limitations. First, while the study's use of a sample of students who were previously known to the supervisors before the start of the supervision relationship provides several advantages, it also is a limitation, as a level of interpersonal trust might have already been established. Interviews for this study were conducted at the midterm of the semester; conducting a follow-up interview at the end of the semester would have allowed more time for the supervision relationship to solidify as distinct from other previous relationships (classmate, instructor, etc).

Additionally, the dual roles played by the researchers (who were also supervisors) might have prohibited full disclosure in the interviews. Though researchers took care not to interview their own supervisees, and though every effort was made to protect the identities of the participants, the perception or fear might have existed that information would be disclosed to the participants' supervisors (which could have negatively affected their evaluation in the course). In an attempt to mitigate this fear, the informed consent form for this study included a statement explaining that interviewees' identities would be concealed and that information disclosed in the

research interviews would not impact the participant's class grade. Researchers did not have the impression that this was a concern of participants, yet, concern over how this information would be used and who might have access to it was likely a consideration in the minds of the participants as they shared their experiences, perhaps limiting the scope of what they revealed.

Finally, the participants' relationships with the institution within which this study was situated might have also impacted their supervision experiences as has been indicated in previous research (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). This issue was not explored in this pilot study. Regardless of the level of trust in his or her supervisor, a supervisee may experience differing levels of trust in the institution itself based on prior experiences within that institution.

Implications

Through training in supervisory methods (required by CACREP Standards, 2009), doctoral-level supervisors are made aware that trust is a critical element of a strong supervisory relationship. This study explored how trust might develop between a doctoral-level supervisor and a masters-level supervisee, a particularly relevant topic given the unique challenges faced by doctoral-level supervisors as compared to Ph.D. faculty supervisors. Such challenges can include dual relationships with supervisees, as doctoral-level supervisors are sometimes classmates, acquaintances while participating in the university culture, or even work colleagues in the context of their graduate assistantships (Scarborough, Bernard, & Morse, 2006). This pilot study reveals relational behaviors of doctoral-level supervisors that masters-level supervisees consider important to the development of trust. Awareness that these elements are potentially significant to individual supervisees can be helpful to supervisors in their efforts to establish the expectations and boundaries of the supervisory relationship. In addition, concerns of the

masters-level supervisees that could potentially lead to the decline of trust are illuminated through this study.

Counselor development is marked by its own rich sequence of change: a dialectic process that involves moving through the contradictions of previous assumptions towards a synthesis or integration of the old and the new (Reiman, 1995). Critical to this process, the supervisory relationship provides a context in which supervisees' phenomenological meaning making and self-evaluation occurs. These important aspects of counselor development both rely upon and contribute to the development of a trusting relationship. The six themes that emerged in this study indicate ways in which doctoral-level supervisors might foster trust in their supervisory relationships, thereby positively influencing the development of masters-level supervisees.

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