

## The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

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Volume 11 | Number 2

Article 2

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2018

### Shaping Supervisory Working Alliance From a Distance

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#### Recommended Citation

Chamberlain, T., & Smith, C. (2018). Shaping Supervisory Working Alliance From a Distance. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 11(2). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jcps/vol11/iss2/2>

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## Shaping Supervisory Working Alliance From a Distance

### Abstract

As technology advances, more counselor education programs are implementing options for students to complete clinical experiences at a distance from campus which requires distant supervision. Although distance supervision has the benefit of flexibility, it also has challenges such as building rapport and establishing effective communication. Supervisors would benefit from understanding the influence of delivery method on supervisory working alliance in order to monitor supervisee growth and development. This article explores the influence of supervision delivery method on supervisory working alliance. Recommendations for future research and counselor education supervisory practice are provided.

### Keywords

supervision, distance supervision, counselor education, working alliance

### Author's Notes

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Supervision is a key component in training new counselors and professional development for seasoned counselors within the field of counseling and counselor education. Bernard & Goodyear (2014) defined supervision as “an intervention provided by a more senior member of the profession to a more junior colleague or colleagues who typically (but not always) are members of that same profession” (p. 9). Supervision is a distinctive interaction and a specialty within counseling that has many aspects that overlap and draws from education, counseling and consultation (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). Supervision is a relationally driven process between two professionals. How technology influences the supervision relationship is only now beginning to be understood. As the use of technology advances within the field of counseling the need for a clear understanding of the challenges and benefits upon the supervision relationship is essential in order to provide effective supervision. The goal of this paper is to further investigate and critique the available literature on the supervisory relationship and distant supervision.

The advancements in technology have led to the increase use of distance in supervision and in the provision of counseling services within the helping professions (Abney & Maddux, 2004; Nasiri & Mafakheri, 2015). Like most other areas of study, the counseling and counselor education fields have started to utilize the recent technological developments by using *technology-assisted distance practice* (TADP) (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Rousmaniere, Abbass, & Frederickson, 2014). TADP refers to the use of electronic telecommunications to provide counseling or supervision services to clients or supervisees who are not in the same location (McAdams & Wyatt, 2010). Distance supervision within the field of counselor education has grown as evidenced by the increase of on-line programs available to students. In 2009, Coker and Schooley reported that 7 online programs existed. Currently there are 62 nationally accredited MA counseling programs that offer at least 50% of their curriculum in an

online format (CACREP, 2016). With the increase in on-line counseling programs it is likely a corresponding increase in distance supervision has also occurred. In a recent national survey, 33% of the participants which represented 147 programs, indicated that distance supervision was an option within their programs (Carlisle, Hays, Pribesh, & Woods, 2017). For those in on-line only programs 80% indicated that distance supervision was an option (Carlisle et al., 2017). This is a trend that is unlikely to abate.

Historically, the early uses of distance supervision were cumbersome and included mailing videotapes back and forth with the supervisor providing supervision and discussion via telephone (Wetchler, Trepper, McMollum, & Nelson, 1993; Kanz, 2001). Supervision mediums that occur in delayed time such as e-mail and discussion posts are asynchronous have been used for a long while (Chapman, Baker, Nassar-McMillan, & Gerler, 2011). With the advancements in technology, this model has been updated to include a variety of “real time” or synchronous computer-based software applications and devices such as web chats and video conferencing (Johansson, Fredrick, & Andersson, 2016). For example, providing supervision using various software such as Skype or Zoom are becoming more common practices. The strength in synchronous approaches is that it allows for supervisors and supervisee to more closely approximate in-person supervision. It can be anticipated that the increase and further developments in digital recording and technology will have an increasing influence upon the medium used to deliver supervision (Carlisle et al., 2017; Rousemaniere et al., 2014; Watkins, 2011).

As counselor educators continue to explore the uses of technology, the standards and quality that uphold the counseling profession need to reflect these changes. It is important for counselor educators to understand how distance supervision may affect the quality of education

provided to students and ensure that national standards are being met. The 2016 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) establishes minimum standards all programs must meet for students who are receiving clinical supervision. These standards include parameters for how much individual and group supervision a student should receive over the course of their internship and practicum experiences. How each program chooses to meet the minimum standards of providing clinical supervision is up to the counseling program faculty. CACREP does not specify that clinical university supervisors use a specific modality and allows programs to identify if face-to-face, distant or a hybrid format is the best fit. Thus, these standards do not directly address the challenges associated with distance supervision per se, but demand that programs address the issues surrounding distance education themselves.

While the 2016 CACREP standards does not provide specific guidelines, the American Counseling Association 2014 Code of Ethics does specify that when using technology in supervision that supervisors are competent in the use of the technology and necessary precautions for ensuring client confidentiality are taken (ACA, 2014). As Rousemaniere et al., (2014) point out the term “competent use of technology” is often unclear. In addition given the frequency of technology updates competency can fluctuate. Often the most cited concerns about the use of technology in supervision is maintaining client confidentiality. The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) does provide best practice recommendations for clinical supervision. These guidelines suggest that supervision be compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) such as protecting passwords and encryptions in order to maintain client confidentiality (ACES, 2011). This includes for the counselor educator providing a secure way to share clinical video/audio materials, written clinical notes, and the use cloud-based storage security concerns (Lund & Schultz, 2015;

Rousemaniere et al., 2014). Lastly, the ACES best practices guidelines recommend that distance supervision must “clearly approximate face-to-face synchronous contact” (ACES, 2011, p. 5).

Not only is it important to keep these guidelines of clinical supervision in mind as technology continues to advance, but the primary components that contribute to successful supervision need to be considered as well (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Lund & Schultz, 2015). These primary components include the supervisory relationship, support and relief from anxiety, instillation of hope, self-exploration, theoretical rational, and exposure and confrontation of problems (Lampropoulos, 2003). The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is one of these essential elements. The relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee is hierarchical and evaluative in nature, and expands over a period of time. Besides enhancing and fostering the growth of the supervisee this relationship plays a key role in the quality of services provided to a client and serves as a gatekeeping function to the counseling field (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Of all the variables that contribute to effective supervision, the working alliance may be considered one of the most robust and well researched aspects of supervision (Watkins, 2014). Research conducted over the past 20 years has been quite consistent across studies: The value of relationship bond or alliance between supervisor and supervisee has been repeatedly affirmed. Watkins (2014) states, “If there is a preeminent common factor in psychotherapy supervision, the supervision alliance would be it” (pp. 198). Previous studies have found that a strong working alliance is correlated with higher self-efficacy, a greater willingness to take risks such as self-disclosing during supervision, greater satisfaction with supervision and many other elements (Bordin, 1983; Holloway, 1987; Watkins, 2014). However, given the robustness of literature exploring supervisory working alliance few studies have focused on how or if the supervisory relationship is influenced by the use of distance supervision (Watkins,

2014). And while research in distance supervision has occurred much of it has focused upon professionals' attitudes toward distant supervision (Conn, 2009; Munchel, 2015), trainee self-efficacy and satisfaction with distant supervision (Erichsen, Bolliger, & Halupa, 2014; Ladany, 1999). Given the robustness of the literature on the importance of supervisor working alliance few studies have focused on how or if the supervisory relationship is influenced by distance modalities. This paper will explore the existing research on distant clinical supervision and the supervisory working alliance, and provide recommendations for best practice.

### **The Supervisory Relationship and Working Alliance**

Using a common factors approach to counseling addresses the similarities amongst different theoretical approaches and proposes that these commonalities influence the process of change (Wampold, 2010). These common factors found within counseling relationship includes power differentiation, formation of a strong relationship and working alliance, creating an atmosphere that is empathetic and supportive, instillation of hope and the exploration of self through awareness and insight (Morgan & Spenkle, 2007). Similar to the counseling field, studies suggest that there is not a single supervision theory or model that has been found to be better than another (Lampropoulos, 2003). At the forefront of using a common factors approach to describe supervisee growth is the focus upon the supervision relationship. Using the term broadly, the conceptualization of the supervisory relationship includes facilitating Roger's core conditions of empathy, warmth, genuineness and unconditional positive regard and Bordin's supervisory working alliance of bonds, goals, and tasks (Bordin, 1983). It has been thought that it is these unifying factors centered upon the supervision process and relationship that leads to effective and beneficial supervision (Chang, 2013; Morgan & Sprenkle, 2007).

Of these common factors, the working alliance has been found to be one of the most important variables in forming a strong relationship between the supervisor and supervisee (Lampropoulos, 2003). The working alliance was first introduced to the supervision field by Bordin (1983). He discussed the importance of a collaborative and transparent relationship where goals and tasks are shared and agreed upon. This process of working towards a common goal throughout supervision sessions and sharing similar emotional experiences strengthens the working alliance and the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. The three core elements of the working alliance, as outlined by Bordin (1983), are the bond between the supervisor and the supervisee, the collectively established goals that guide supervision and the shared tasks that drive the goal attainment of supervision. Overall, the working alliance influences the emotional bond that is made between the supervisor and the supervisee (Bordin, 1983). Having a strong working alliance is critical to providing beneficial and useful supervision because it sets the stage for many activities that take place throughout supervision (Watkins, 2014).

One aspect that is important to keep in mind when thinking about the working alliance, is that it is bidirectional in nature. The supervisor's and supervisee's actions, thoughts and feelings can influence the working alliance and vice versa. For example, the supervisee's actions have an effect on the supervisor's reaction and the working alliance (Chen & Bernstein, 2000; Efstation, Patton, & Kardash, 1990; White & Queener, 2003). There is robust evidence to support the importance of the working alliance and how it contributes to effective supervisory relationship. However, there are only a few studies that explore the supervisory working alliance within a distance supervision modality.



Another area of consideration that will influence the working alliance is constructive feedback and how this is provided to the supervisee. Schultz and Finger (2003), indicated that face-to-face contact, immediacy, unrestricted dialogue and flexibility contribute to effective supervision. Depending on the type of modality used within distance supervision, synchronous or asynchronous, feedback may be delayed. Both mediums of supervision may lack important components found within face-to-face supervision such as non-verbal language and tone of voice. Both tone of voice and non-verbal language may be lost through various types of asynchronous modalities which is very important to consider when a supervisor is providing feedback to a supervisee because it may be interpreted very differently than what was intended. Additionally, constructive feedback that occurs through written communication such as email, web-chat or posting could be taken in the wrong manner (Chapman et al., 2011; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). Further, clarification of the supervisor's and supervisee's perceptions of the relationship that will be formed needs to be discussed. Specifically, paying close attention to any cultural influences that may define the supervisee-supervisor relationship such as a collectivistic model or an individualistic model (Nasir & Mafakheri, 2015).

### **Review of the Literature**

The counseling field has adapted to the new uses of technology and have started incorporating these uses into practice for both providing counseling services and supervision. Some research has focused on how these changes in technology may change the way in which supervision transpires, particularly how the working alliance is formed. The section below reviews the literature on the working alliance, supervision and any differences that may exist given the modality of supervision.

Chapman et al. (2011) investigated the supervisee's perspective and the use of synchronous and asynchronous modalities in distance supervision. The authors used a single subject qualitative design. The dependent variables consisted of supervisee counseling competence, confidence, and attitude towards using technological education practices within supervision. Supervision involved a text chat room for both individual and group supervision as well as recorded counseling sessions provided to their supervisor. The participants were measured on their perspectives on the counselors' performance of basic counseling behaviors, counselor's self-efficacy which assessed the students' beliefs about their abilities to effectively counsel individuals and their attitudes towards distance education. The participants were measured prior to the start of the semester and then periodically throughout the field based course. Overall Chapman and colleagues (2011) found that despite different modalities of supervision supervisees felt they were able to communicate effectively and perceived increases in their counseling skills. Each participant had indicated an improvement within their overall counseling competence and confidence. Furthermore, the supervisees indicated high levels of competence with the technology used and had high ratings of satisfaction for the practicum course. The high ratings towards asynchronous modalities could be attributed to the high level of confidence and working knowledge with the technology used by the supervisees. Students had volunteered for distance supervision which may have influenced their scores on the attitude measure (Chapman et al., 2011).

While Chapman et al (2011) examined the attitudes and behaviors of the supervisee, this study fails to examine the perception of the supervisory relationship between the supervisor and supervisee throughout the semester. Other critiques that need to be considered when looking at the results of this study include the overall study design, the possible presence of a halo effect of

the participants, and the lack of experimental controls (randomization, manipulation of variables). Due to the low sample size, single-subject design and a descriptive nature inferences about the differences between distant supervision versus face to face cannot be drawn. The low sample size and study design contribute to the possibility of a halo effect. Participants knowing the goals of the study in advance may have influenced the results of this study as well.

An additional quantitative investigation conducted by Lahey (2008) resulted in similar results. The author explored if there were any differences within the supervision working alliance from the perspective of the supervisees enrolled in a traditional master-level's counseling program compared to supervisees enrolled in a distance program. Lahey (2008) utilized the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory-Trainee Version (SWAI-T) among 46 master-level or Ph.D. counseling education students. Fourteen of the 46 supervisees participated in distance supervision and 32 received traditional face-to-face supervision. No significant differences were found between the two different modalities of distance or face-to-face supervision ( $t(42) = .31, p = .76$ ). This indicated that students did not indicate a difference in the working alliance for distant or face-to-face supervision.

There are a number of considerations that need to be addressed when interpreting the results of the previous study. First, the overall demographic information may be influencing the results. For instance, the majority of supervisors (87.4%) of students enrolled in distance programs were clinical supervisors (staff or therapists) versus faculty supervisors. This may influence the role the working alliance has on the supervisory relationship. Another concern of this study, is the overall sample size. Having a small sample limits the generalizability of this study.

In a study conducted by Reese et al. (2009), components of the supervisory working alliance were investigated with practicum level students in a mixed methods design. In this investigation, students were enrolled in a hybrid course which rotated between face-to-face and distance supervision (videoconferencing) every three weeks for a 12-week period. Nine students met with the same faculty supervisor throughout the semester. In addition to measuring the supervisory working alliance, students' satisfaction of supervision, and counseling self-esteem were also measured. These were measured using the Supervisory Satisfaction Questionnaire (SSQ), the SWAI-T version and the Counseling Self-Estimate Inventory (COSE). Supervision (both distant and face-to-face) occurred in a group where students would provide recorded video of the student's counseling session which would foster group discussion. At the end of the 12-week practicum the students were given the measures mentioned above and completed a structured qualitative interview. The quantitative data of this study indicated that no significant differences existed between the distance supervision and face-to-face supervision at all points of measurement ( $t = 0.8, p = 0.46$  and  $t = 0.2, p = 0.86$ ).

However, the participant interviews provided additional depth than the survey assessments provided. Interestingly, students felt that the distant supervision was more structured and rigid than face-to-face supervision. Many discussed that there was a higher emphasis on staying on task and being concise verbally. This led students to perceive that distance supervision focused upon reporting rather than discussion and process type of interactions. Supervisees, also, indicated that distant supervision was less personal but did not believe that this effected the goals of supervision. Participants noted that they were comfortable with their supervisor and felt that it would be important to have a relationship and rapport established prior to beginning a distance type supervisory relationship. Additionally, it was

noted that students in this study felt the distance supervision met their needs, but many would not be comfortable with a relationship that was strictly based on a distance based relationship.

Participants reported that emotional elements such as self-disclosure, emotional expression and willingness to role play were lost in distance supervision (Reese et al, 2009).

There are limitations to the study conducted by Reese and colleagues (2009). Similar to the previous studies low sample size and lack of randomization make the generalizability of the findings to this study less applicable. An important and confounding factor to this study is that supervisees had the opportunity to establish a relationship prior to engaging in supervision.

In a study by Conn, Roberts and Powell (2009) relationships among similar variables were investigated. Conn et al., (2009) compared face-to-face supervision with a hybrid model of clinical supervision which included both distance and face-to face approaches. The hybrid method of supervision included meeting at one face-to-face class for every two technology assisted classes. This led to having a total of 10 technology-based meetings and five face-to-face classes. The students in the hybrid group used a live chat, e-mail and face-to-face communication throughout their supervision. The authors measured the students' attitudes, level of satisfaction and the supervisory working alliance using the Supervisor Working Alliance Inventory—Trainee, the Supervision Questionnaire, and the Web-Based Distance Group Satisfaction Survey. The authors used two subscales within the SWAI-T to focus on the working alliance: rapport and client focus. The results of a series of ANOVAs found that participants receiving hybrid supervision fostered a similar supervisory working alliance to those who received traditional face-to-face supervision (Conn et al., 2009). In addition, both ANOVAs computed on the Rapport and the Client Focus subscale found non significant differences between the two groups. The exact statistics for these subscales, along with a summary of the

other studies can be found in Table 1.

Even though the results of this study did not find a difference within the working alliance

Table 1: Summary of Studies Comparing Distance and Face-to-Face Supervision

Authors	Measurements	Sample Size	Distance Based Supervision Mean (SD)	Face-to-Face Based Supervision Mean (SD)	Statistic	Significance
Reese et al., 2009	SWAI-T Total Scale	9	116.2 (21.0)	115.6 (15.9)	$t = 0.8$ $t = 0.2$	NS
Dickens, 2009	SWAI-T Total Scale	190	109.68 (19.14)	106.74 (16.90)	--	NS
	WAI-T Total Scale		206.15 (28.48)	206.68 (28.76)	F (4,183) = 2.30	
Lahey, 2008	SWAI Total Scale	46	100.57 (14.82)	101.87 (11.72)	$t(42) = .31$	NS
Conn et al., 2009	SWAI-T Rapport Client Focus	76	--	--	--	--
			6.53 (0.58)	6.37 (0.69)	F (1,65) = 1.08	NS
			6.39 (0.66)	6.09 (0.90)	F (1,65) = 2.48	NS

SWAI-T Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory-Trainee  
SWAI Supervisory Working Alliance

WAI-T Working Alliance Inventory-Trainee

between the hybrid methods or face-to-face supervision approaches, it is important to keep in mind that these findings contradict other studies (Chapman et al., 2011; Reese et al., 2009). This could be attributed to the face-to-face meetings the supervisees had in between the distant

supervision. Suggesting that including some form of face-to-face contact is needed for distance supervision to establish a strong working alliance (Conn, et al., 2009; Reese et al., 2009).

Participants in the hybrid model group had the option of meeting with their supervisor at their first meeting either face-to-face or through a live chat. The authors did not specify how this may have influenced the formation of the working alliance within this group.

Similar limitations to this study are present as with the other studies critiqued. The overall small sample size and homogeneity of the sample create concerns about generalizability of these findings.

Dickens (2009) conducted a mixed methodological dissertation with similar results as the previous studies described in this paper. This study surveyed the working alliance among 190 master level counseling students regarding the supervisory working alliance and overall satisfaction. All students participating completed the Working Alliance Inventory-Trainee form (WAI-T), SWAI-T, and SSQ. In addition, if participants included an e-mail address on the demographic questionnaire, eight qualitative questions were asked. Of the 190 participants, 46% received distance supervision and 54% participated in face-to-face supervision. Further, 52% of the sample were practicum students and 48% were internship students. Only eight of the total participants responded to the qualitative open-ended questions. The researcher completed a multivariate analysis of variance MANOVA for the statistical analysis of WAI-T scores to investigate if any differences developed between the way in which the bond between the supervisor and supervisee was formed, advantages and disadvantages to the supervision process (regardless of modality) and the perceptions of the working alliance in a distance setting. Similar to the previous studies, the statistical analysis resulted in nonsignificant difference in the

perceptions of the supervisory working alliance between students who received face-to-face versus distance supervision ( $F(4,183) = 2.306, p = .060$ ).

Many participants, regardless of which supervision group, identified that when the supervisor is personable, knowledgeable, available, utilizes self-disclosures that showcase his or her competencies and expertise, and when goal setting is a collaborative process, the overall supervision process is rated positively. However, concerns were expressed during the qualitative portion of the study. Those who had received distance supervision reported as lack of personalization due to no nonverbal communication and easily misinterpretation of emails and allowing for more distractions (Dickens, 2009). The qualitative portion of this study, supplements the nonsignificant findings of the quantitative measures. These interviews provide insight that the working alliance is formed in similar ways regardless of modality of supervision. Further, the findings of this study also highlight that both modalities of supervision have differences in the application of supervision and both come with different advantages and disadvantages.

An important critique of the study conducted by Dickens (2009) is within the quantitative analysis of the study. Even though the author chose to conduct a MANOVA (instead of running multiple t-tests) which reduced the risk of family-wise error, the author did not provide information regarding effect size and power. Lacking these pieces of information, it is difficult to determine if the author had enough participants to find significant results. Further, only nine of the 190 participants had elected to respond to the qualitative portion of the study which may also limit the findings of this study.

And in the largest study to date, Carlisle (2015) examined supervisory working alliance and three modes of supervision delivery, face-to-face, hybrid, and distance approaches. This



cross section survey study had 671 participants from across the country. Supervisory working alliance was measured using the Working Alliance Inventory-Supervisor (WAI-S) along with additional questions created by the author. The results of this study remain consistent with the previous studies examined. No significance differences on supervisory working alliance were found among the participants regardless of the type of supervision received.

### **Discussion**

The literature indicates mixed results in examining the influence that distance supervision has upon the working alliance. All of the quantitative studies indicated that there were no differences in the working alliance from the students' perspective when receiving distant supervision (Conn et al., 2009; Reese et al., 2009). This result remained consistent in a variety of survey studies with a variety of settings (Carlisle, 2015; Conn, et al., 2009; Dickens, 2009; Lahey, 2008; Reese et al., 2009). The results of these studies are congruent with the results of other research that has investigated other dynamics of the supervision process occurring in a distance setting (Bender & Dykeman, 2016). These studies have found that despite the possible challenges and limitations of distance supervision, it may be a viable source of supervision (Bender & Dykeman, 2016; Chapman et al., 2011).

Interestingly, many of the current studies only used inventories and questionnaires to measure the students' perspective. However, qualitative research indicated that there may be nuanced differences that are not being accounted for when using working alliance assessments (Dickens, 2009; Reese et al., 2009). Mixed methodological studies have found similar results to that of the quantitative findings, but have also revealed some negative aspects of distant supervision that were not accounted for in the questionnaires. These areas included having more rigid sessions and lacked personalization (Reese et al., 2009). Both of these aspects are important

in developing a stronger and more influential working alliance. As Lampropoulos (2003), indicated being flexible and allowing for self-exploration are important common factors that lead to a stronger working alliance. These findings indicate that some of the critical components to the working alliance may be more difficult to address in a distance setting. Another possible rationale for the finding of these studies could be due to the instrumentation. The questionnaires may not fully capture the unique nuances of the supervisory relationship.

The results of both the quantitative and qualitative studies suggest that something unique is missing from supervision research. The mixed results from the qualitative studies show that some students reported less rapport and that the supervision process seemed to be more of a reporting process than focusing on growth and development (Dickens, 2009; Reese et al., 2009) while other studies showed students utilized distance supervision to meet their needs as a student and a future counselor (Carlisle, 2015; Chapman et al., 2011; Conn et al., 2009; and Lahey, 2008). This indicates that possibly the measurements that are being used to measure the working alliance are missing some of the unique aspects of distance supervision. Given the importance of these components and the increasing use of distance supervision more sensitive working alliance assessments are needed.

Given the overall mixed results of the studies reviewed in this paper that distance supervision can be a viable source of supervision with the appropriate circumstances. However, some current concerns still exist such as the notion of being present with a supervisee (Erichsen et al., 2014; Kanz, 2001). It is unclear from the research how supervisors, especially those utilizing a distance modality, try to minimize this concern.

Previous literature also highlighted that distance supervision may provide lower levels of supervision satisfaction (Erichsen et al., 2014; Kanz, 2001). This could be attributed to the

possible barriers that facilitate rapport building and learning such as drawing upon perceptual cues that explore the supervisee's feelings, and the immediacy of pointing out nonverbal cues. Both of these create missed opportunities for learning from the supervisee (Kanz, 2001; McAdams & Wyatt, 2010). Thus, it is important to understand how the working alliance may differ between distance supervision and face-to-face supervision. Further exploring how a distant supervisor ensures these and other barriers such as confidentiality, modeling, demonstration of micro-skills and peer learning are addressed within the supervisory working alliance is critical to providing adequate and quality supervision (Kanz, 2001; Lompropoulos, 2003; Morissette, Bezyak, & Ososkie, 2012).

Even the first pioneers who provided distance supervision through video recordings and mailings had a primary concern of maintaining the supervisory relationship (Wetchler et al., 1996). Wetchler and others (1996) proposed that providing supervision via the telephone would not be isomorphic in nature and lacked the conditions that allow for transparent and open communication that evolves in face-to-face supervision. Additionally, Kanz (2001) discussed the importance of being cognizant of the differences among a cyberspace relationship versus a face-to-face relationship. The studies reviewed (Conn et al., 2009) indicated the importance of addressing the possible differences in these relationships early on in the supervision process however lacked how these concerns, if they arose, were addressed. Not only may the isomorphic process be compromised within a distance format but also parallel processing, transference and countertransference. All of these components are key factors in the supervision relationship (Kanz, 2001; Wetchler et al., 1996). Due to the nature of the distance supervision relationship, supervisors would benefit from being proactive about developing and establishing a strong working alliance early within the supervision process (Conn et al., 2009; Kanz, 2001). The

research examined within this article, calls into question whether distance supervision can meet the suggested best practice guidelines established by ACES of providing supervision that approximates face-to face supervision (ACES, 2011). And while this guideline is not a requirement, the counseling profession is left in a position to determine the best methods for creating a supervisory environment that ensures that students and new professionals are given the very best opportunity for success. There is clearly more work to be done to answer this essential training element.

### **Implications**

Since distance supervision is a trending topic within education and the overall number of programs that utilize distance supervision are growing, counselor educators, faculty supervisors and clinical supervisors need to be aware of the implications this may have on building rapport. In addition, it is also important to consider how this may influence licensing processes (McAdams & Wyatt, 2010).

Supervisors ought to consider the common factors and working alliance when providing distant supervision. Given there is some evidence to support nuanced differences between distant and face-to-face supervision some considerations for supervisory practice are suggested. One way that authors have suggested to ensure a strong working alliance is to establish a relationship in-person before implementing distant supervision (Reese et al., 2009). A more conservative suggestion has been provided by Dickens (2009) who has suggested that distance supervision should only be an option for internship level students (Dickens, 2009). What appears to be clear is that creating strong supervisory working alliance begins prior to the practicum and internship experiences by creating strong faculty/student relationships. These relationships created prior to practicum and internship supervision may assist in creating the

necessary building blocks for a strong supervisory working alliance and increase the effectiveness of supervision regardless of the modality used. This may be especially salient given the short-term nature of semester long courses.

As counselor education programs begin to implement distance supervision several challenges need to be considered. Overall, communication is critical in order to clarify any concerns and in forming an effective supervisory working alliance. Utilizing various forms of feedback in terms of synchronous and asynchronous, length and depth may help facilitate and clarify any expectations that may be unclear (Nasfiri & Mafakheri, 2015). For example, having the supervisor send a short e-mail in between supervision sessions to briefly check-in with the supervisee about any concerns may be one way to increase communication and build the working alliance. In addition, some distance supervision interactions may lean more heavily into reporting about supervisee's work rather than a process orientated approach of exploring thoughts, feelings and reactions to their clinical work (Reese et al., 2009). Intentional efforts toward providing the essential process oriented dynamics of clinical supervision dyad are essential for quality supervision. Supervisor self-evaluation is a critical component of ensuring that supervision dynamics do not erode into a reporting only process.

Interest in receiving distance supervision is not only limited to the school-setting, but also at the state licensure level. Research conducted by McAdams and Wyatt (2010) has shown that there is an increase in the interest of state counseling boards implementing distant supervision or counseling. State boards that currently prohibit the use of technology assisted distance practices indicated that the need for this service is only going to increase as technology advances. This article predicted that at some point within the future all states are going to face this issue of providing distant services (supervision or counseling) and the regulations, benefits and dilemmas

that are associated with it (McAdams & Wyatt, 2010). The research examined within this article, calls into question about whether distance supervision can meet the suggested best practice guidelines established by ACES of providing supervision that approximates face-to face supervision, ethically and traditionally difficult to pinpoint, making it an extremely complex issue to try to standardized nationwide. It is important to further investigate the ways that distant supervision effects the overall process of supervision and what limitations need to be considered when trying to implement such services.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

Given the limited empirical evidence regarding distance supervision, future research should continue to investigate the working alliance and distant supervision. Further given the results of the current research, more research needs to investigate the discrepancies that are present between quantitative and qualitative studies. By researching this area further, the field can better understand if there are unique differences between distant versus face-to-face supervision or if the current quantitative instruments are lacking in capturing the uniqueness of certain aspects of the working alliance.

More advance and a variety methodological techniques ought to be explored on this topic further. Future studies ought to have larger sample sizes and randomization to a specific supervision modality to allow for a greater level of generalizability. Close attention and the unique differences that may be present in qualitative research ought to be strengthen and further explored. Completing a third party observational study of taped recordings between video conferencing and face-to-face supervision would allow for further comparison between these modalities.

Importantly, a proposed area to study within this context is the perceptions of supervisors when conducting distant supervision. The authors of this article reviewed studies that explored only the working alliance from the supervisees' perspective. However, it is important to further explore how the supervisors' experience the working alliance when providing distant supervision.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, as technology advances, supervisors and counselor educators need to be aware of the possible challenges that may be faced while trying to utilize the new approaches to supervision. Counselor educators need to also be aware of the ambiguity of the current research in regards to distant supervision (Bender & Dykeman, 2016; Carlisle, 2015; Carlisle et al, 2017; Chapman et al., 2011; Conn et al., 2009; Erichsen et al., 2014; Reese et al., 2009). The reality for most online programs is that they are able only to offer distant supervision and are may not be able to supplement with face-to-face supervision. The field of counselor education needs to continue to research and develop best practices in distant supervision to serve our students and their clientele. Furthermore, current research on using distant supervision should not emphasize replacing, one form over another but how it can be utilized in both forms to better serve students and supervisees. With mixed results from the above studies, it is important to continue to explore the influence of distant supervision on supervisory working alliance and expand on the literature to include the perspectives of the supervisors.

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