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A Qualitative Study of Supervisors' Reflections on Providing Sanctioned Supervision

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Sanctioned supervision, sometimes referred to as mandated supervision or professional monitoring, is intended to protect the public, reduce further counselor ethical/legal violations, and improve the professional practice of the counselor adjudicated for unprofessional behavior. Sanctioned supervision is a common remediation intervention required by state regulatory boards. However, there is a lack of research on the practice of sanctioned supervision and the perceptions of sanctioned supervisors. A qualitative research approach was used to better understand the experiences of four supervisors who provided sanctioned supervision within the past year as part of a state regulatory board remediation process. The main themes from the qualitative study included the following: supervisors finding the supervision process to be unique from traditional supervision, and supervisors experiencing ambivalence about the sanctioned supervision

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process. Practice considerations for supervisors providing sanctioned supervision are discussed.

KEYWORDS sanctioned supervision, regulatory boards, mandated supervision, monitoring

INTRODUCTION

State counseling boards' primary function is to protect the public and establish standards by which all licensees are expected to comply. Counselor licensees who are adjudicated for unprofessional conduct (e.g., boundary violations, basic practice issues, license/scope of practice problems) as specified with the state regulations of counseling practice are required to face formal discipline (Cobia & Pipes, 2002). Common sanctions may include fines, letter of reprimand, continuing education, probation, sanctioned supervision, evaluation for mental health issues, suspension of license, and revocation of license (Boland-Prom, 2009).

Although some licensees who are adjudicated for unprofessional conduct have their licenses revoked or suspended, it is more common that counselors face formal remediation (Walzer & Miltimore, 1993). Remediation occurs when the regulatory board determines that the licensees' violation is related to deficiencies in skills or knowledge, or when the licensees are experiencing personal circumstances that impede their ability to effectively function as a counselor. Board remediation efforts may include one—or more—of the following sanctions: continuing education, completion of an ethics course, personal counseling, a limited scope of practice, volunteer work, and mandated oversight of practice provided by a colleague (Boland-Prom, 2009; Walzer & Miltimore, 1993). Counselors who are adjudicated for unprofessional conduct may be permitted to practice with a requirement that their practice is supervised, or monitored, by a specified colleague (Walzer & Miltimore, 1993).

Board-mandated oversight of a counselor's practice by a colleague is typically referred to as sanctioned supervision (Rapisarda & Britton, 2007; Walzer & Miltimore, 1993), mandated supervision (Cobia & Pipes, 2002; Thomas, 2010), or monitoring (Walzer & Miltimore, 1993). The relationship between the concepts of supervision and monitoring has yet to be adequately explored in the professional literature. Generally, monitoring is described as a policing or protecting function in which counselors are interviewed, and their practices and records are reviewed. Walzer and Miltimore (1993) suggested that in the helping professions, monitoring of records and practices is nuanced—more so than in other professions involving objective practices (e.g., prescribing medications)—and as such, all monitoring of counselor licensees should involve sanctioned supervision. Sanctioned supervision

involves teaching and training that occurs through a series of meetings and over a period of time, and involves counselors' disclosure of their work with clients. Walzer and Miltimore also suggested that in sanctioned supervision, a systematic review of the licensee's clinical work should occur "with an eye toward recidivistic tendencies" (p. 571). Monitoring has been described as serving the purpose of observation and control, and sanctioned supervision has been described as serving more of an evaluative and instructional function.

Both monitoring and sanctioned supervision have in common the aim of correcting behavior through training, and "both a monitor and a supervisor have the authority to intercede in work that is found to be faulty" (Walzer & Miltimore, 1993, p. 571). In this article, the terms *sanctioned supervision* or *supervision* will be used to describe board-mandated supervision intended to remediate a counselor licensee through evaluation and instruction.

Most licensees who are mandated to board-sanctioned intervention do not result in suspension or revocation, yet some form of remediation is required. To date, no research has assessed the effectiveness of sanctioned supervision, but sanctioned supervision is widely considered one remediation strategy that may enhance supervisees' development and improve their practices (Cobia & Pipes, 2002). Despite a lack of evidence to support sanctioned supervision as an effective intervention (Walzer & Miltimore, 1993), it is widely believed that licensees, whose violations do not rise to requiring licensure revocation or suspension, may benefit from entering into sanctioned supervision (Cobia & Pipes, 2002). Conceptual and theoretical support for sanctioned supervision is rooted in developmental models of supervision in which counselors can learn and practice new professional skills until reaching mastery (Cobia & Pipes, 2002). Sanctioned supervision also relates to social learning theory in that counselors in mandated supervision learn standard of care from their supervisor (Cobia & Pipes, 2002).

Sanctioned supervision is a useful remediation as it is intended to protect the public, reduce further violations, and also improve the professional practice of the counselor adjudicated for unprofessional behavior. Boland-Prom (2009) conducted a review of 27 state regulatory boards' actions against 874 social workers and found the most frequent sanctions to be reprimand letters, supervision of practice, and discontinuation of licensure. Supervision of practice (i.e., sanctioned supervision) was required in 11.5% of the cases (Boland-Prom, 2009).

Sanctioned supervision is a high-stakes process for all parties involved—the state licensure board, the supervising counselor, and most importantly for the sanctioned counselors. Thomas (2010) reported that supervisors should consider the role of boards and supervisors, assessment process, supervision goals, transference, and the methods they will utilize. Thomas (2010) suggested that the primary objectives of sanctioned supervision involve protecting the client, remediating the supervisee, and gatekeeping the profession.

As the supervision relationship is important to outcomes, Thomas (2010) encouraged sanctioned supervisors to be aware of supervisee transference and their supervisor countertransference (e.g., taking on the role of counselor to the supervisee). Consequently, supervisors must distinguish between supervisee incompetence (e.g., knowledge or skill deficit) versus supervisee impairment (e.g., reduced professional functioning due to mental health-related issues) for which a more appropriate intervention may be for the supervisee to enter into counseling (Thomas, 2010). Sanctioned supervisors serve as role models to supervisees; therefore it is particularly important that the supervisor does not enter a dual-role relationship of providing both supervision and counseling to the supervisee (Remley & Herlihy, 2014). Forrest, Elman, Gizara, and Vacha-Haase (1999) emphasized the importance of being able to understand distinctions between incompetent, unethical, and impaired practitioners as a way of selecting effective remediation plans. While personal, social, or emotional problems may have contributed to the unprofessional conduct, sanctioned supervisors must maintain a focus on supervision, not providing counseling to their supervisees.

It is likely that most counselors have not had any supervision training specific to the sanctioned supervision process. Consequently, supervisors are likely to adapt their typical model of supervision with sanctioned supervisees. Thomas (2010) reported that foundational strategies in supervision include the following: strengthening the working alliance, clarifying expectations, teaching concepts, and providing feedback. More specifically, Thomas (2010) suggested that sanctioned supervisors should focus on supervisees' strengths and frame the narrative of sanctioned supervision as a learning opportunity. Sanctioned supervisors can help supervisees reflect upon the behaviors that led to the complaint, consider the consequences of the behavior upon the client, postulate reasons why they may have engaged in the unprofessional conduct, and recognize how their thinking and behaviors have changed since the onset of the complaint.

The potential vicarious liability in the process is a concern of sanctioned supervisors—specifically, will they be held legally responsible if counselors they are supervising engage in future unprofessional conduct? Magnuson, Norem, and Wilcoxon (2000) reported that supervisors may be legally liable if their supervisees are negligent and/or if the supervisor is providing inadequate supervision. The expectation that supervisors are responsible for the behavior of supervisees may preclude counselors from volunteering to serve in a supervisor role (Guest, 1999). A supervisor's concerns may be heightened if he or she is asked to serve as a sanctioned supervisor for a counselor who has already been adjudicated for unprofessional conduct.

Clarity regarding state regulatory board expectations, information about the reason the supervisee was disciplined, and regular consultation with the board can provide support for sanctioned supervisors. Supervision agreements between supervisor and supervisee can also clarify the process and offer some

protection from misunderstandings that may result in legal action (Guest, 1999). Supervision contracts should include agreements by both parties and include goals, supervision schedule and duration, supervision modality, evaluation methods, documentation procedures, disclosure to clients, fee arrangements, and emergency procedures (Magnuson et al., 2000).

Although one article addressed theoretical issues associated with monitoring (i.e., Cobia & Pipes, 2002), and one study addressed non-sanctioned supervisors' reactions to the concept of monitoring (i.e., Rapisarda & Britton, 2007), no empirical research—across disciplines—has addressed the experience of individuals who have actually provided sanctioned supervision. There is a need for research that explores supervisees' and sanctioned supervisors' experiences and reactions to this unique form of supervision. An enhanced understanding of the sanctioned supervision process may serve to improve supervisors' ability to provide quality sanctioned supervision.

Rapisarda and Britton (2007) conducted a focus group in which counselors discussed their perceptions of the effectiveness of sanctioned supervision. However, none of the members of the focus group had ever engaged in sanctioned supervision and as such, their perceptions were speculative. The results of this study indicated that professionals believe sanctioned supervision is of great importance to the field. The study also pointed to suggestions for enhancing the sanctioned supervision process. Rapisarda and Britton (2007) highlighted the importance of interviewing supervisors who have provided sanctioned supervision, and developing an understanding of the process that is rooted in actual experiences.

Although sanctioned supervision is frequently used by counselor regulatory boards, little is known about supervisors' insights or reactions to this unique supervision process (W. Hegarty, personal communication, May 9, 2014; W. Hegarty is the Deputy Director of the Ohio Counselor, Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapist Board). This study is an attempt to enhance understanding of the sanctioned supervision process. More specifically, this study is an attempt to identify sanctioned supervisors' reactions to the board-sanctioned supervision process. This study addresses the questions, "How do supervisors experience the sanctioned supervision process?" and "From sanctioned supervisors' perspectives, what considerations are salient in relation to sanctioned supervision?"

METHOD

Because the purpose of the study was to focus on how participants understand their experiences, qualitative research methods were employed (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative methodology was particularly appropriate because there was no available research upon which to design a quantitative study (Hunt, 2011), and because there is a limited number of counselors who have served as

sanctioned supervisors. A single-case case study approach (Yin, 2008) was utilized to investigate a single phenomenon (i.e., sanctioned supervision) as experienced by multiple supervisors. The case study method of inquiry is appropriate for answering *how* research questions, and is often used in the study of applied practices (Yin, 2008). The case study approach allows the researcher to represent a single culture (i.e., sanctioned supervisors) among the larger culture (i.e., counseling supervisors; Stake, 2000). Because the research study focused on a specific incident (i.e., serving as a sanctioned supervisor) within professional counseling practice, case study methods are a useful approach (Patton, 2002). Merriam (2009) suggested that basic qualitative inquiry provides a detailed account of a phenomenon and invites new understanding. Case-study analysis has flexibility with regard to methods of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009); interviewing was used as the primary means of data collection. A secondary means of data collection included archival review of the supervisory notes, evaluations, and records of interaction as documented by the supervisors who participated in this study.

Role of the Researcher

Monitoring how preconceived assumptions are included in a qualitative study is a challenge for researchers (Hays & Wood, 2011). The principal investigators (hereafter referred to as the research team) were a faculty member associated with a counselor education program, a clinical program director at a mental health agency, and a counseling graduate student in her final year of training. The faculty member also served as a member of the state counseling board and as the ethics liaison for the board's counselor ethics cases. The clinical program director and graduate student had no affiliation with the state counseling board or ethics cases.

The clinical program director conducted the interviews and the research team members all independently reviewed the transcriptions. The research team hypothesized that the sanctioned supervisors would have reactions and perceptions related to the experience of providing sanctioned supervision. As no members of the research team have had experience providing sanctioned supervision, they were uncertain as to what these reactions might include.

The primary author had the experience of serving for six years on the state counseling board. In the process of her work, she had a role in the process of connecting the sanctioned supervisors with the adjudicated counselor who was mandated to receive sanctioned supervision. The primary author had an interest in this topic due to her perspectives on the strengths and challenges of the sanctioned supervision process. Her previous connection with the board may have influenced the participation of the board and the sanctioned supervisors. The primary author likely had the strongest initial assumptions

regarding the sanctioned supervision process. Overall, the research team members were attentive to how their “experience, worldview and assumptions contributed to shaping the data” (Hunt, 2010, p. 70).

Establishing Trustworthiness

The research team utilized several procedures to increase trustworthiness. Creswell (2007) recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two trustworthiness procedures. As such, process notes and peer review were used to ensure the credibility of this study. Similar to journaling, process notes were written by the interviewer immediately following each interview (i.e., within 30 minutes) to help the interviewer describe her immediate speculations, feelings, problems, hunches, impressions, and prejudices (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Fassinger, 2005), a process often referred to as bracketing researcher assumptions and expectations (Rennie, 1994). Process notes were also written—by the research team—throughout the data analysis procedures and served as a method for the principal investigators to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and assumptions while reviewing the data. This approach helped establish a transparency in the review process and facilitated researchers’ awareness of their thoughts and feelings through the duration of the data review process.

Throughout the investigation, the research team also consulted a peer reviewer, an individual with expertise in supervision and qualitative research who was not affiliated with the research project. The peer reviewer reviewed and provided feedback on the transcribed data, the analysis procedure, and the semi-structured interview protocols. This peer reviewer’s feedback was incorporated into the data analysis procedures.

Interview Questions

The interview questions were developed from a review of the literature and the primary investigator’s experience working with sanctioned supervisors. The interview questions were based upon the research questions “How do supervisors experience the sanctioned supervision process?” and “From sanctioned supervisors’ perspectives, what considerations are salient in relation to sanctioned supervision?” The questions were modified from a larger list of questions and reduced by the research team to a few broad, open-ended interview questions. These questions included “Please describe for me any challenges and/or obstacles related to providing sanctioned supervision” and “Having engaged in sanctioned supervision, discuss your thoughts on the sanctioned supervision process.” Based upon participants’ responses in the first round of interviews, interview questions that explored the presented themes in greater detail were developed for the second round of interviews (e.g., “Some participants discussed that the monitoring process was different

from traditional supervision. Can you provide a specific example of how your supervision style was different?”).

Participants

The authors interviewed four sanctioned supervisors who represented a purposeful sample of those providing sanctioned supervision as part of a state regulatory board remediation process. A Midwestern state counseling, social worker, and marriage and family therapist board volunteered to provide a list of licensees who had provided sanctioned supervision. The board provided a list of 21 supervisors. Inclusion criteria included the following: (a) had provided sanctioned supervision within the past year, (b) the supervisor was licensed as a counselor, and (c) the supervisee was licensed as a counselor. The assumption was made that supervisors who more recently supervised would harbor better recollections of their reactions to the experience. In addition, the researchers were interested in the experiences of counselor supervisors providing supervision to other licensed counselors. Thus, those who were licensed social workers or those who provided supervision to social workers were not invited to participate in the study. Of the 21 sanctioned supervisors, 4 met the inclusion criteria and were invited to participate in the study. All four of the supervisors who were initially approached to take part in the study agreed to participate; they each worked in private practice or community agencies. The four participants (two females, two males) selected were assigned pseudonyms. Three of the four participants had provided sanctioned supervision to one supervisee and one of the participants (i.e., Leslie) had provided sanctioned supervision to two supervisees. Each supervisor possessed master's degrees in counseling, and their years of supervision experience are as follows: Ron, 24 years; Tom, 16 years; Tammy, 12 years; and Leslie, 10 years. All participants self-identified as being Caucasian and were from different regions of the Mid-western state.

Data Analysis

Following Yin's (2008) recommendation, multiple sources of data were used in an effort to increase the credibility of the results. Data were collected during two separate audio-recorded interviews with each of the participants and through a thorough review of archival records (i.e., the sanctioned supervisors' supervisory notes, evaluations, and other relevant records of interaction). The interviews were conducted individually and represented the interviewer's one-on-one engagement with each participant. Overall involvement with the participants consisted of more than three hours of direct interaction over the process of the research study. The interviews were transcribed by a graduate student and analyzed independently by the research team. The researchers clustered the statements to develop meaning and depth of the sanctioned

supervision experience. The researchers identified and grouped the statements into themes that represented a *thick description* (i.e., an interpretation of the meanings, intentions, strategy, motivations that characterize the experience; Schwandt, 2001) of the participants' experiences and presented a description of the experience across participants.

After independently analyzing the data (i.e., transcribed interviews and archival records), the research team met to discuss their findings. The research team recorded analytic notes and questions that surfaced during interviews and documentation review. Consistent with Yin's recommendations (2008), the archival records were used as way of corroborating and expanding interview data. The research team used an emic approach (Mathison, 1993) in data collection, which involves reviewing interview transcripts and archival records and grouping similar ideas into themes.

FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of the data, the findings suggested that two major themes, *Different Process* (from traditional supervision) and *Supervisor Ambivalence*, conceptualized the supervisors' experience of the sanctioned supervision process. The first theme, *Different Process*, was defined as the experience of the participants that the supervision process differed from traditional supervision. Participants reported that sanctioned supervision involves a more active, directive supervisory stance than is typical in their practice. The second theme, *Supervisor Ambivalence*, related to the participants' perception that their role as a sanctioned supervisor, although beneficial, involved a number of professional concerns. Participants noted that they felt that they were doing a service to the profession through their role as a sanctioned supervisor, yet they also felt that they lacked the supports needed to effectively engage in sanctioned supervision.

Different Process

Participants identified that the process of providing sanctioned supervision—and their subsequent supervision style—differed from their traditional approach to supervision. Participants noted that during the sanctioned supervision process, they adapted their daily style of supervision to meet the needs of the sanctioned supervisees. Specifically, participants mentioned that compared to traditional supervision, they were more active and directive during the sanctioned supervisory process. For example, Leslie stated, "You just have to be more clear; here are the expectations, stop being vague . . . more of a teaching place around why what they did was wrong. There are a lot of times where you are not negotiating boundaries, you are saying this is the way it is going to be." Tammy stated, ". . . when you have breached, you're

having to say 'no,' we need to come up with a clear-cut plan that we need to be very measurable. I need to be comfortable as your supervising counselor that this is not—hopefully—going to happen again.”

Participants noted that establishing and structuring a weekly scheduled meeting was not something they regularly did with all supervisees, yet it was expected that they would engage in weekly meetings with their sanctioned supervisees. Tammy explained: “I don’t necessarily have sit-down meetings with the people I work with every week where we review what they’ve been doing. Whereas, of course, I did with the [sanctioned supervisee].” Tom supported Tammy’s assertion, stating, “[The sanctioned supervisee and I] met on a weekly basis. I traditionally do not meet with a person that frequently.”

In addition to formalized, weekly meetings, participants indicated they were more likely to set out clear supervision expectations. For all participants, a contract was an important element of setting clear expectations and boundaries. Leslie mentioned that she developed a clear set of guidelines around the behavior that the supervisee was working to remediate: “[We developed] a very concrete plan around what the ethics violations was and how we were going to prevent it from happening again.” Ron also supported the idea of developing a formalized agreement with supervisees: “I wanted a contract that described the nature of our relationship—what my role and responsibilities were and her [role and responsibilities].”

Participants noted that in traditional supervisory relationships, they generally do not have a difficult time establishing a trusting relationship with their supervisees. However, in a sanctioned supervision relationship, participants mentioned that a trusting supervision relationship with the supervisee was slower to develop. According to Leslie, “The difference to me is much more checking in and having to build trust. When I do supervision for people who are going for their counseling license, these people kind of have my trust until they do something wrong. But, in sanctioned supervision cases, I’m having to go, ‘Okay, we already know you have this issue so we need to address it right off the bat.’” Leslie continued: “In my case it was not someone who was a brand-new clinician, it was more of a senior clinician I think it’s a bigger trust issue they have breached, because it’s not just a lack of knowledge.”

Tammy also explained the difficulties she experienced with trust. She identified that because the supervisee had already committed an ethical violation, it added to her concern that that the supervisee may be more likely to engage in this behavior in the future: “The supposition is that the person has made a mistake and needs to have some assistance to stop doing that kind of stuff.”

Participants also noted that in sanctioned supervision, they operated from a more directive stance of supervision than endorsed in a traditional supervisory setting. Tom offered his perspective that the process of being directive with his supervisee helped to decrease the supervisee’s overall

resistance to the process. Tom identified that having clear expectations for his supervisee and including specific, honest feedback in his evaluation helped to strengthen his relationship with the supervisee: "I think I've actually gotten to know [sanctioned supervisee] quite a bit better. I think in supervision, sometimes you tend to not be frank; this requires that I be frank." Tom followed up on this idea by stating, "I had [the sanctioned supervisee] develop a plan and then monitored that and saw that [sanctioned supervisee] followed through on the plan."

Participants also noted that they more readily attended to personal dynamics in an effort to help supervisees remediate deficiencies. Tom expressed that he perceived a need to, at times, integrate therapeutic issues into the sanctioned supervision. Tom stated, "It was a little troubling to me that there were so many therapeutic issues involved and that is not really supposed to be my role as a supervisor. Yet, to get to some of the core issues, we had to address some of those issues as well. So that was troubling, but I felt it was necessary." Leslie, too, stated, "I am going to check around to see are there other issues going on . . . recognizing it is not just the thing they got in trouble with, there was some trigger and recognizing what the trigger was that got them into that place, a lack of boundaries, a lack of taking care of themselves"

Supervisor Ambivalence

The second major theme identified is related to the sanctioned supervisors' ambivalence about the benefits and uncertainties associated with providing sanctioned supervision, and confusion or ambivalence about their role. Leslie expressed this ambivalence by stating both her concerns about providing sanctioned supervision from a liability standpoint, as well as the value she found in providing sanctioned supervision when she stated, "It's a huge liability issue because you're basically taking on someone that you know is a huge problem. They don't even work for my organization and it's not like I accept payment It's just that I'm doing it as a kindness, something charitable."

Other participants were able to identify several benefits to their role as a sanctioned supervisor. Ron shared that the learning experience was particularly beneficial to his own growth as a supervisor: "I had never supervised anyone for an ethical violation and I learned a ton and it was challenging. It forced me to really read the law again and sharpen up on those type of situations" Similar to Ron, Tammy identified the learning experience as a benefit: "It was a good learning experience. Good for me if I need to do it again. I had never done [sanctioned supervision] before so I learned about it. It was good to see how things worked out." Tom mentioned that he enjoyed having contact with the regulatory board: "It's been interesting to have some interactions with the board. Just to know there are folks up

there who are doing clinical work as well and to have some interaction is good.”

Participants noted that they felt their own skill as a supervisor developed as a result of engaging in sanctioned supervision. According to Leslie, “Personally, it does make me better as a supervisor . . . it does push you as a supervisor and I’m pushing my new [supervisees] . . . what did I miss and how can I prevent this? So, that is helpful to be able to learn that piece. It definitely helps to be able to understand and educate people about how to prevent things in the future.” Tom also noted that he enjoyed the relationship with his supervisee: “I haven’t formed that strong of a relationship with other clinicians because we were more involved in administrative kind of tasks. I really enjoyed the experience.”

Participants also noted problematic areas of the sanctioned supervision process, some of which contributed to reluctance to serve as a sanctioned supervisor in the future. The participants identified that not having information related to the violations was a source of confusion or frustration. In addressing his supervisee’s violation, Tom stated, “. . . I didn’t know what went on at all.” Tammy was provided with no details of her supervisee’s case and noted that she felt that the regulatory board may have reacted too harshly to the supervisee in this case, as she did not view the supervisee’s offense as necessarily warranting sanctioned supervision. She stated, “As [the sanctioned supervisee] told me the reasons for the sanctioned supervision and I learned the background of it . . . I honestly did not feel like what she had done had been a violation . . . so I kind of felt she was being punished for something she did not do.” Ron stated, “If I had to do it over again, I would have required her to provide me with more guidance in terms of what the board was looking for . . . I felt completely out there on my own.”

Another challenge noted by participants was related to role confusion; participants were unsure of what areas to focus on with supervisees, and what their responsibilities were as sanctioned supervisors. They were unclear as to whether they should be addressing all clinical skills in the context of all current clinical cases, issues specific to the discipline action in the context of all current clinical cases, or broader issues related to the violation and not current clinical cases. Ron pointed out that his supervisee had clinical deficiencies, yet he felt that his role was to focus on the larger boundary violation for which his supervisee had been disciplined: “I would have liked to have gone more into the clinical stuff, but I didn’t feel it was in the scope of what I was doing specific to the contract that I had with [the sanctioned supervisee].” As indicated, Ron perceived that he was to address only issues specific to the disciplinary action. Leslie perceived that she was to address a wide variety of issues related to the violations. Leslie stated, “Is this just the only one they got caught for? Or are there more ethical issues that just have not come to the surface or are there more out there I should be concerned about? . . . Because I want to address it all.”

Participants noted that, at times, they felt concerned about liability issues associated with providing sanctioned supervision, as well as a lack of clarity of their role (as mentioned earlier in relations to role confusion). A lack of clarity about their roles and responsibilities contributed to their concerns. According to Leslie, “. . . you’re going to supervise this person but there’s no guidance given to me I’m not sure if that’s a liability issue for me.”

DISCUSSION

Participants who served as sanctioned supervisors described two prominent themes regarding their experience: a process that seemed unique or different from traditional supervision, and ambivalence about their sanctioned supervision experiences. These themes reinforced the importance of more closely examining the sanctioned supervision process as unique from traditional clinical supervision.

The differences between the sanctioned supervision process and the traditional supervision process were a primary theme of the study. Although Cobia and Pipes (2002) reported similarities and justification for sanctioned supervision based upon its reliance on traditional models of supervision, the experiences of the participants in this study were reported to be unique. Participants reported that for them, sanctioned supervision was more active, directive, and structured than their traditional supervision sessions. They believed that it was necessary to more clearly articulate the expectations for supervision than with trainees or licensure-seeking supervisees.

Secondary to a lack of clarity regarding their role, participants were unsure about what the focus of supervision should be; supervisors ultimately determined the direction of supervision as it progressed. Because of their perceptions that supervisees’ personal, psychological considerations contributed to the ethical violation, supervisors reported focusing more on personal therapeutic issues with their supervisees (than they typically do in non-sanctioned supervision). Although participants perceived that they clearly understood their responsibilities when providing non-sanctioned supervision, all remarked that they were not necessarily clear regarding the delimitations of their responsibilities and duties as a sanctioned supervisor. This study’s findings suggest it is important that sanctioned supervisors are prepared for how the sanctioned supervision process differs from traditional supervision. Sanctioned supervision may prove to be ineffective if supervisors are not prepared to address the unique issues involved in sanctioned supervision. In addition, unprepared supervisors could be manipulated by their supervisees if the process is not well-structured (Walzer & Miltimore, 1993).

A secondary theme of this research was the participants’ level of ambivalence regarding their sanctioned supervision experience. Participants remarked that they were contributing an important service to the profession

through their role as a sanctioned supervisor, but they perceived that their lack of training in sanctioned supervision, and a lack of clarity around what was specifically expected of them in this new role, was a significant drawback. These aforementioned factors created a situation in which participants struggled to identify the benefits of choosing to serve as a sanctioned supervisor. However, despite this struggle, participants reported that serving as a sanctioned supervisor provided a learning experience for professional growth (e.g., understanding the law, working with the counseling regulatory board) and improved their skills as a clinical supervisor.

Supervisors were more readily able to identify multiple drawbacks to providing sanctioned supervision. They reported that the lack of information related to the ethical violation and relying on self-reports from the supervisee made it difficult to provide focused supervision. For at least one sanctioned supervisor in our study, this lack of understanding of the case led her to sympathize with the supervisee and consequently minimize the violation. Walzer and Miltimore (1993) suggested that a sanctioned supervisor who perceives that the licensee's conduct was not improper may sabotage the counseling regulatory board's efforts to remediate the professional counselor.

Consistent with the results of this study, Walzer and Miltimore (1993) suggested that professional liability concerns are also prominent for many professionals who provide sanctioned supervision. The participants were concerned about their own liability for serving as a sanctioned supervisor, and this related to their lack of clarity surrounding their role and responsibility. Individuals who may be interested in providing sanctioned supervision may fear the liability associated with participating in a disciplinary process toward another professional. Although Walzer and Miltimore (1993) speculated that counselors who are acting in good faith and "serve the public interest in disciplinary cases might be assured immunity from civil suit in connection with these peer review or state agency activities" (p. 582), prospective sanctioned supervisors should remain cautious of the potential legal risks associated with providing mandated supervision. Cobia and Pipes (2002) articulated that prospective supervisors should enter a mandated supervisory relationship only after considering the potential risks and benefits of providing sanctioned supervision. In an effort to minimize supervisor liability, it would be helpful for sanctioned supervisors to have clarity from their state agency around what liability is assumed by the state agency and what is left for the supervisor to assume under his or her own liability insurance. In sum, these liability concerns, as well as the time commitment involved, resulted in participants expressing ambivalence around their supervision experience. Unfortunately, the supervisors' ambivalence could preclude them from agreeing to serve in this role again.

The results of this study were particularly illuminating to the members of the research team who had a limited amount of experience with supervision and interaction with the board. The findings challenged their perspective that the sanctioned supervision process was a well-defined process similar to

traditional supervision. As the researchers are also the instruments, the interaction of the researchers with the participants may have influenced the findings. Initially, the participants were aware that the primary investigator was a former board member and this may have encouraged their willingness to participate in the study, and to possibly portray their experience as more positive than it may have been. Each of the participants was licensed as a counselor and regulated by the state board, which may have also influenced the participants in how they discussed their experience, and may have reduced their intention of being too critical of the licensure board and/or their own performance as a sanctioned supervisor.

Implications for Supervisor Practice

This study's findings may be useful to regulatory boards that use sanctioned supervision as a remediation method. In this study, supervisors' lack of clarity about their role and the board's expectations of sanctioned supervision was a theme that repeatedly emerged. Efforts to clarify these expectations may help support sanctioned supervisors. Boards might consider explicitly defining the sanctioned supervision relationship, and how they define the sanctioned supervision relationship and process. Detailed descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of a sanctioned supervisor might be addressed. Some questions for boards to consider in defining these roles include the following:

- Is the supervisor providing supervision for all of the sanctioned licensees' clinical cases?
- If the supervisor is providing supervision for all cases, does he or she have access to files and clinical information related to these cases?
- Is the supervisor to monitor records?
- Can or should the supervisor have direct knowledge of the supervisees' clinical work (e.g., recordings, live observations of sessions)?
- What is the board's versus the supervisor's role in liability in sanctioned licensees' cases?
- What is the board's recommendation related to supervisor remuneration?

Another question that boards might consider is, Should all sanctioned supervision relationships have the same parameters, and be defined similarly? There may be value in being flexible in defining different supervision relationships. For example, some sanctioned supervision situations may warrant a thorough review and monitoring of all clinical cases while some other situations may only require that the supervision address issues specific to the violation without involvement in all clinical cases. Boards have the authority—and flexibility—to define these relationships. It is important that these expectations are clearly communicated to the sanctioned licensee and his or her supervisor, and conversely, that supervisors seek clarification about their role.

This study's findings also suggest that the sanctioned supervision relationship is unique and, as such, it is important that supervisors providing sanctioned supervision take an intentional approach in managing the sanctioned supervision process. Due to the uniqueness of the experience, and the limited research and literature available to guide supervisors, this study suggests supervisors may need to be creative in seeking supports. Sanctioned supervisors might seek training and workshops, and consult with colleagues throughout the process (Cobia & Pipes, 2002). Individuals who serve as sanctioned supervisors should consult with their own state counseling regulatory board, colleagues, and state professional counseling branches of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and/or Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regarding how to structure and conduct sanctioned supervision.

Supervisors' ambivalence around the sanctioned supervision process may result in a paucity of professional counselors willing to serve in this role. It may be beneficial for counseling regulatory boards to find ways to develop a larger group of available and qualified supervisors who would be willing to serve as supervisors to sanctioned licensees. To enhance supervisors' interest in serving in this role, state counseling regulatory boards may choose to solicit professional counselors through renewal reminders that target those who meet certain experience and supervision requirements.

An intentional statewide process of selection, training, and support managed by the state counseling regulatory board or a state professional counseling association might also encourage supervisors to engage in and have a satisfying experience providing sanctioned supervision (Rapisarda & Britton, 2007). State professional associations could solicit applications from their current membership and recommend specific professionals to serve as sanctioned supervisors. State professional counseling associations could work with the state board to determine the qualifications required to be recommended as a sanctioned supervisor. The qualifications could include maintaining membership in the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the state counseling association, absence of current or future disciplinary action, length of experience as a licensed professional counselor, length of experience as a clinical supervisor, participation in training/orientation on sanctioned supervision and the state counseling regulatory board monitoring process, and the maintenance of supervision-related continuing education. This collaboration model between the state counseling regulatory board and state counseling association may provide structure, support, and intentionality that could support the sanctioned supervision process.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study's chief value lies in it being the first to examine sanctioned supervisors' perspective of the sanctioned supervision process. The findings of

this study provide a starting point to consider how the sanctioned supervision process may be developed. Although the qualitative design used in this study provided rich information related to supervisors' perceptions, future research might employ quantitative research design and explore multiple supervisors' experiences in providing sanctioned supervision. A quantitative design could provide results that are generalizable to all sanctioned supervision relationships.

The results of this study reflected the perspective of a small group of sanctioned supervisors working with a particular counseling regulatory board in one Midwestern state. Therefore there may be differences in the experiences of individuals from other state counseling regulatory boards. A second limitation of this study is that participants were initially contacted to participate in the study by an individual who was connected to the state counseling regulatory board. The participants are currently licensed by that same counseling regulatory board and may have felt the need to self-monitor their responses because of this relationship.

Future research on this topic might more closely examine and define the specific differences between traditional and sanctioned supervision. Due to the small sample size of sanctioned supervisors typically available in states, researchers could develop and pilot a supervision model for sanctioned supervision that would include a blend of traditional supervision techniques and strategies necessary for working with individuals who are being disciplined by a state counseling regulatory board. Research on the effectiveness of such a model could inform sanctioned supervision best practices.

It may also be beneficial for researchers to work with state counseling regulatory boards to increase the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of serving as a sanctioned supervisor. There are currently no published studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of sanctioned supervision on the reduction of problematic behaviors (Cobia & Pipes, 2002), and it's possible that sanctioned supervisors question whether the time and efforts of their intervention are helpful in remediation of the supervisees' issue. Consequently, it may be helpful for supervisors to garner confidence that the time and effort they put into serving as sanctioned supervisors can make a difference in the remediation of a supervisee.

Summary

This research examined the experiences of sanctioned supervisors regarding their participation in the process with the state counseling regulatory board, and gave voice to their perspective. Most professional counselors prefer to be involved in a traditional supervision relationship rather than a disciplinary process with a colleague (Walzer & Miltimore, 1993), yet there is a need for qualified professional counselors to serve as sanctioned supervisors. Our findings reinforced the need to help supervisors better understand sanctioned

supervision, and for state counseling regulatory boards, professional associations, and counselor education programs to enhance the conceptualization and implementation of the sanctioned supervision process in order to empower supervisors, and reduce their ambivalence in serving in this important role.

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