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Ego Development and Student Counselors' Phenomenological Experiences in Live Supervision

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Abstract

An interpretive phenomenological qualitative research design was used to explore student counselors' experiences in live supervision, with specific attention to ego development as a potential lens shaping student counselors' experiences. Participants (N = 9) completed the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) and semi-structured interviews. Three primary themes emerged: (a) roles, (b) processes, and (c) outcomes. Findings were considered from the perspective of ego development. Implications for counselor preparation and future research are suggested.

Keywords: live supervision, ego development, phenomenology, family counseling

Clinical utilization and research of live supervision has decreased in the last decade (Koltz & Feit, 2012), raising important questions about the relevance of live supervision in contemporary contexts. Recent literature identifies methodological (i.e., direct versus indirect observations) and developmental approaches to supervision as two gaps in current couples and family counseling literature (Champe & Kleist, 2003; Storm, Todd, Sprenkle, & Morgan, 2001). The current study explored student counselors' phenomenological experiences in live supervision, with specific attention to ego development as a potential lens shaping student counselors' experiences.

Review of the Literature

Live supervision is a supervisory intervention entailing the presence of the supervisor at the time of the clinical session, with supervisor observation and involvement transpiring in the same counseling room and/or an adjacent space. Live supervision has concurrently been cited as a most effective (Anderson, Schlossberg, & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000) and conceivably most detrimental (Lee & Everett, 2004) supervision method. Extant research on live supervision has primarily explored salient features, effects on the counseling process, and potential liabilities.

Salient Features of Live Supervision

From the perspective of the supervisee, the most beneficial features of live supervision include concrete instructions, validation, appropriate matching, and collaboration that feels present but not excessive or intrusive (Hendrickson, Veach, & LeRoy, 2002; Koltz & Feit, 2012). Clinical suggestions congruent with the supervisees' own case conceptualizations are favored. Supervisees also report the importance of supervisors being well informed about clinical cases and the student's level of clinical experience (Anderson et al., 2000).

Beneficial components of live supervision identified by supervisors overlap with those reported by supervisees. Chief features of live supervision identified by supervisors include opportunities to offer direct or structured interventions, promote skill development, and build supervisee self-sufficiency (Hendrickson et al., 2002). Direct feedback balanced with affirmation fosters live supervision milieus wherein mistakes may be welcomed as learning opportunities (Anderson et al., 2000).

Effects of Live Supervision

The effects of live supervision on supervisees, supervisors, and client outcomes have also been a topic of interest. Overall, live supervisor interventions do not appear to have a negative or dominating influence on the process or content of a counseling session (Champe & Kleist, 2003). Minimal effect differences were found for a sample of 65 (n = 65) novice counselors-in-training across modes of session intervention, including spontaneous supervisor entrances, predetermined counselor exits, in-session telephone calls, and no interruptions (Mauzey, Harris, & Trusty, 2001). Frequency of engagement appears more disruptive to trainees than the type of supervisor intervention (Moorhouse & Carr, 1999). Comparison of counselor and client ratings of live supervision from 394 individual, couple, and family cases revealed that counselors perceived live supervision making a more positive difference on the progress of a problem over the course of the therapy; clients reported confusion at times about roles of different parties involved in live supervision (Bartle-Haring, Silverthorn, Meyer, & Toviessi, 2009).

Findings suggest live supervision has a positive effect on the professional development of both supervisees and supervisor. Interviews conducted by Hendrickson and colleagues (2002) indicated that student counselor anxiety decreased as a function of a positive supervisory relationship. Supervisors reported that live supervision not only increased confidence in their supervisees but also enhanced perceptions of their own supervisory and clinical skills (Hendrickson et al., 2002).

Potential Liabilities of Live Supervision

Time constraints are a frequently cited drawback to live supervision (Hendrickson et al., 2002). A survey of 160 marriage and family therapist trainees indicated discrepancies existed between supervisees and supervisors regarding the best use of time (Anderson et al., 2000). Specifically, supervisees reported misuse of time from excessive supervisory phone-ins and when clinical instructions were incongruent with the supervisee's client conceptualization. Further, as the supervisees' developmental needs changed, direct intervention time initially viewed as helpful was viewed as intrusive or detrimental to supervision (Anderson et al., 2000).

Compared to other supervisory interventions, live supervision can elicit a unique "performance anxiety" (Mauzey et al., 2001). Supervisees may be fearful of exposing personal or professional inadequacies. Unaddressed anxiety may contribute to the development of defense mechanisms inhibitive of learning, such as attempting to reduce the supervisor's power or avoiding uncomfortable topics. Given potentially detrimental short- and long-term outcomes, further investigation of individual supervisees' experiences of live supervision is warranted; however, no studies could be located to date that explicitly considered the potential impact of student counselors' developmental levels on their phenomenological experiences within live supervision.

Ego Development

As originally described by Jane Loevinger (1976), ego development is the master personality trait, integrating all other components and organizing an individual's conceptualization of self, others, and the larger world. Ego development proceeds along a hierarchical, invariant, and increasingly complex sequence of nine stages ranging from a self-focused *Impulsive* stage (E2) to an *Integrated* stage (E9) able to reconcile conflicting demands of self and other (Loevinger, 1976). The *Impulsive* stage (E2) describes an individual driven by physical needs who sees the world, self, and others in simple dichotomies. The *Self-Protective* stage (E3) includes individuals who seek immediate gratification and find it difficult to take responsibility, thus assigning blame to external forces. Individuals at this stage also have a fear of being caught and punished for wrongdoings. Individuals in the *Conformist* stage (E4) accept socially accepted rules, simply because what society approves is right. Those in the *Self-Aware* stage (E5) define their interpersonal relationships in terms of emotions and begin to understand that society's constructions of what is appropriate may not always be what is best for specific groups. The *Conscientious* stage (E6) brings about the realization of multiple possibilities, giving the individual a sense of choice. These individuals use reasoning and self-evaluation to make decisions, as opposed to following group norms. The *Individualistic* stage (E7) highlights the beginning of acceptance toward individual differences and a realization that individuals can partake in varying roles at the same time. The *Autonomous* stage (E8) includes individuals that understand that the environment and people are complex entities, leading to a tolerance for others and their behaviors. The *Integrated* stage (E9) is a stage that many people do not reach. This stage has been compared to Maslow's stage of Self-Actualization where an individual realizes their full potential and the full potential of others (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Generally, at lower levels of ego development perceptions of experience are more simplistic and undifferentiated; at higher levels, perceptions reflect greater self-awareness, flexibility,

and autonomy. Hy and Loevinger (1996) and Noam (1998) provide strong overviews of the ego development scheme.

Advanced ego development enhances student counselors' capacities to negotiate complex situations, exhibit empathy, and employ self-care (Lambie, Smith, & Ieva, 2009). Achievement of higher developmental levels is necessary to acquire advanced competencies such as multicultural awareness (Watt, Robinson, & Lupton-Smith, 2002) and ethical knowledge (Lambie, Ieva, Mullen, & Hayes, 2011). Loevinger's framework is particularly substantiated for examination of phenomenological experiences within live supervision, as a major function of the ego system is "anxiety gating." Student counselors' tend to recognize only what is in their existing self-systems. Observations or experiences that do not fit in existing cognitive schemas are anxiety producing and avoided (Loevinger 1976), which can be detrimental to effective clinical supervision and counselor development. The purpose of this study was to apply ego development (Loevinger, 1976) as a theoretical lens to consider student counselors' phenomenological experiences in live supervision.

Method

Research Tradition

This research utilized a sequential transformative mixed methods approach (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Participants completed the *Washington University Sentence Completion Test* (WUSCT; Hy & Loevinger, 1996) at the start and conclusion of live supervision to determine their ego development levels. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were utilized to explore participants' live supervision experiences. An interpretive phenomenological design was utilized to analyze the interview data as phenomenological research seeks to discover and describe the meaning of participants' lived experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). Within this methodology, participants' subjective experiences and a "fresh" researcher perspective or "epoche" (Moustakas, 1994) are emphasized. Phenomenological analysis also permits exploration of the shared essences of participants' experiences as well as variations within experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants' ego developmental levels were taken into account when considering the essences of participants' experiences.

Participants

Participants were nine master's-level student counselors from a preexisting cohort in a counselor education program located in the Southeast and accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Participants ranged in age from 22–55 years old, with a median age of 24. All participants were female; eight participants self-identified as Caucasian and one participant self-identified as Latina. Participants were enrolled in the first of three semesters of a family counseling internship conducted at an on-campus family counseling training center. Participants attended one of two weekly live supervision sessions with their peers. Live supervision sessions lasted 4–5 hours, with each student conducting one 50-minute family counseling session and also observing peer sessions. Supervision was conducted by a university faculty member (one female and one male) with over 20 years of experience in Counselor Education. Supervisors utilized an integrated developmental

model for supervision (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998). These supervision teams met in an observation room providing immediate feedback for student counselors. Walk-ins from supervisors were a possible method of observation and supervision. Table 1 provides a summary of participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics and Ego Levels

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Pre-LS Ego	Post-LS Ego
1 (A)	F	32	Caucasian	E5	E6
2 (B)	F	55	Latina	E6	E6
3 (C)	F	26	Caucasian	E6	E5
4 (D)	F	24	Caucasian	E5	E5
5 (E)	F	22	Caucasian	E6	E6
6 (F)	F	22	Caucasian	E5	E5
7 (G)	F	23	Caucasian	E6	E6
8 (H)	F	24	Caucasian	E6	E6
9 (I)	F	23	Caucasian	E6	E6

Note. Pre-LS Ego indicates WUSCT score at the start of live supervision. Post-LS Ego indicates WUSCT at conclusion of 10-week live supervision experience.

Procedure

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted for this study. Prior to the interviews, participants completed an informed consent and a demographic questionnaire. The WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996), a measure of ego development, was also administered to participants during the first and last week of the 10-week family counseling internship to assess participants' developmental positions. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted privately with one of the primary researchers and ranged in length from 30–50 minutes.

Research Team and Positionality

At the time of data collection, the primary researchers (manuscript authors) were doctoral students enrolled at the same Counselor Education and Supervision program as the master's-level research participants. Each team member had experience co-supervising live supervision groups. Both authors identify as female, one identifying as Caucasian and the other identifying as Bi-racial. Assumptions about live supervision held by the researchers included: live supervision is beneficial to personal and professional growth; live supervision can be anxiety provoking; and live supervision provides an opportunity for students to gain feedback from their supervisor and their peers. Throughout the study, the research team continued to meet to discuss whether their beliefs interfered with data analysis and attempted to bracket prior assumptions.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The WUSCT is a semi-projective ego development assessment consisting of 36 sentence stems. Participants are instructed to complete each sentence stem. Sample statements include "I feel sorry. . ." and "When I am criticized. . ." (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Levels of meaning are rated for whole responses to each sentence stem and an algorithm is used to determine participants' assessed stages on Loevinger's ego development schema. The WUSCT has demonstrated high levels of inter-rater reliability, internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity (Gilmore & Durkin, 2001; Loevinger, 1998). Open-ended semi-structured interview questions were used to explore participants' experiences within live supervision, whether or not their goals for live supervision were met, what changes they would make to the live supervision process, perceptions their supervisor or cohort peers may hold about them as a future counselor, and how these perspectives impact their view of self. Sample questions included: (a) Talk about your overall impression of live supervision; (b) How did your experience in live supervision fit with what you expected?; (c) How has live supervision changed the way you think about yourself as a future counselor?; (d) From your perspective, what do you see as most challenging in the live supervision experience?; and (e) If you could go through the live supervision experience again, what would you like to be different? What would you like to be the same?

Data Analysis

WUSCT. Participants' WUSCT assessments were coded and scored by the two researchers, who are each trained in the proper methods for scoring the WUSCT. An expert rater served as a consultant to the researchers. Inter-rater reliability was established at .95 for overall WUSCT scores before scoring began. As verbosity can confound results of the WUSCT, researchers paid specific attention to the length of response and perceived verbal abilities of the respondent during scoring. Participants' developmental levels based on their WUSCT scores were used as an interpretive lens when coding the interview data. The authors were then able to use ego development as a framework for understanding participants' lived experiences in live supervision.

Interviews. Interview questions provided to participants were developed using ego development theory as a guide. Ego development theory emphasizes changes to how one understands oneself, others, and broader experiences in increasingly complex ways (Loevinger, 1998) Following transcription of each interview, data analysis commenced using guidelines outlined by Wertz (2005) for interpretive phenomenological research in counseling [psychology] settings. First, each researcher reviewed the transcripts, making note of initial impressions or reactions. The researchers then met to review and bracket potential biases. Unique participant statements were identified as the desired "meaning unit." The researchers then divided the transcriptions, each conducting a preliminary review of half of the participants' individual cases. Following this round of analysis, the researchers convened to discuss statements provided by all participants as well as statements of experience that differed across participants. Identifying converging and diverging experiences was particularly relevant to the current data analysis given the study purpose to understand the potential influence of ego developmental levels on participants' phenomenological perspectives of live supervision. Finally, moving continuously from parts to wholes, the researchers clustered the unique participant

statements in order to uncover the structural organization (primary themes and sub-themes) of the participants' lived experiences. Member checking and an external auditor were utilized to enhance trustworthiness of the findings.

Findings

WUSCT

Three of the eight participants occupied the Self-Aware (E5) position at the start of live supervision and three participants occupied this position at the conclusion. Six of the participants occupied a *Conscientious* (E6) position at the start and conclusion of live supervision. A summary of participant ego levels at the start and conclusion of live supervision is provided in Table 1.

Interviews

Three primary themes were identified: (a) roles, (b) processes, and (c) growth. The primary themes were encompassed by a meta-theme of anxiety. Across each of the themes, participants expressed tensions between perceived versus desired expression of phenomena as well as helpful versus less helpful experiences. Resolution of tensions experienced in the three primary thematic domains decreased or amplified participants' anxiety. Sub-themes of each primary theme were also identified.

Roles

The first primary theme identified was roles. Within this theme, participants described perceived and desired roles of the (a) self, (b) supervisor, (c) peers, and (d) clients within live supervision. Participants' capacities to negotiate inherent ambiguities and/or tensions within the live supervision process appeared to mediate levels of anxiety experienced.

Role of self. Performing well was one of the roles of self that was delineated by participants. Participants described performing in front of others as a fear carried into the live supervision experience. Generally, performance anxiety appeared to decrease for participants as live supervision transpired. Participant 6 reflected,

> I think I was more intimidated about it in the beginning, before it started and in anticipating it. . . and "Oh, my gosh, [the supervisor] is going to be watching me and everyone else, so I have to be perfect." And I was pleasantly surprised that I did not feel that way during session, even though I was on camera.

Although many participants described a decrease in performance anxiety, anxiety did not appear to be fully resolved by the end of the live supervision period. Participants experienced some challenge related to the multiple roles held by their supervisors, including grade evaluator, academic advisor, and prospective future professional reference. Participants desired to receive feedback but also wanted to be viewed as competent. Participant 7 described the fear of making a mistake as the most challenging aspect of live supervision. She noted,

> If you do something right, they might compliment you for it, but if you make a mistake, you can tell when you go into the [observation] room and they just don't

want to say anything to you. . . you have to deal with knowing that you've done something wrong in front of everyone, including your supervisor.

A second role of the self described by participants related to a desire to contribute. As described by Participant 1, one dimension of contributing included "putting my two cents in and also not necessarily agreeing with [the supervisor] all of the time." Another dimension of contributing related to serving as a resource and support for other students in the live supervision cohort. However, while the desire to contribute to other students' experiences was identified by most of the participants, this role was difficult for many participants because of their own anxiety. Participant 9 reflected,

I felt like especially after I had counseled I was really hyped up and thinking about it, like I couldn't concentrate on it and even before the counseling I was going through like what I was going to do. . . That was the most challenging aspect of it because I wanted to focus on them so I could give them feedback and learn from them, but I just was too, like focused on my own stuff.

Role of supervisor. The role of the supervisor was the most discussed sub-category of the roles themes. Participants described actions and relational qualities that were most and least helpful. Participants' capacities to navigate tensions between perceived and desired roles of the supervisor appeared to mediate anxiety felt in live supervision.

A first role of the supervisor described by participants was serving as a source of support. Participants expressed a feeling of security knowing the supervisor was there "just in case." Trust was instrumental to achieving the desired feeling of support. Participant 8 stated, "[The supervisor] was kind of hard to read. In the beginning I was like, 'Oh she doesn't like me'." In contrast, Participant 4 reflected, "I just need a lot of positive validation. . . I don't want to say [the supervisor] is a father-figure, but someone who I trust and will come to for advice."

Participants also discussed the provision of challenge as a role of the supervisor. Some participants desired support, but also craved autonomy, appreciating freedoms given by the supervisor to "run the session the way [they] wanted to." Participant 5 commented, "He makes me think about things I don't always think about right away." Participant 3 reflected, "When I ask him a question, he'll ask me to come up with my own kind of solutions."

A final role of the supervisor related to being there for the supervision group as a whole versus being there for the individual supervisee. Participants felt positively about processing sessions as a large group; however, one-on-one feedback ("even for 5 minutes") about their specific session was prioritized. Participant 1 discussed,

I expected a bit more supervision, but I didn't really think about the fact that there were four of us that evening, so like obviously we can't get supervision the whole time. . . we just got, I mean like, it was a good 15 minutes or so each time, so that was pretty good. . . I was just under the impression that it would be longer.

The scheduling of participants' live supervision sessions also appeared meaningful, with participants occupying the last time slot of the evening making statements about receiving less individual feedback than the other participants received.

Role of peers. The third sub-theme identified within the primary theme of roles was the role of peers. Overall, participants felt the shared experience had strengthened relationships within the cohort. Participants reflected on increased competencies to serve as future consultants and collaborators. Within group variations of the quality of group dynamics existed, however, with participants' assessments ranging from "surviving," "tolerating," "adapting," to "friends" that occupy both personal and professional roles. Participants also expressed some divide and comparison between the two nightly supervision groups.

A second role of peers discussed by participants was to be a source of additional feedback. Participant 7 noted,

> I would say that it was really helpful to have a bunch of eyes watching my session going and really validating to come back to the [observation] room to hear people say, "Oh, good job!" and to come back in and be like, "You guys saw everything that happened and now I can talk to you about it." It's great to kind of have that parallel, people experience it with you.

A number of participants advised that peer feedback helped them to see strengths that they may not have recognized within themselves. Interestingly, participants waivered in their belief of positive feedback given by peers, stating at times that their peers may have perceived them as more competent than they were in reality. For example, Participant 9 remarked, "I feel like people in live supervision maybe thought I was better than I am *[laughs]* just because I had a good family. If they have gotten to see a video of my not so easy family. . . " Participant 5 reflected,

> I think they give me, my abilities more credit than I do, which is good and bad… that can be really good because they can build up my confidence and abilities, but they also, I think, sometimes don't give me as much feedback as I would like.

A final described role of peers was serving as a source of validation. Some participants described peers' perceptions as very important; for others, peer validation (as opposed to supervisor validation) was not emphasized. Discrepancies existed among participants in the role of peer validation as illustrated by the following two participant statements.

> So, I may think that I have done a good job, but in order to really believe that I have done a good job, I need to hear it from others. . . If I think I have done a good job and I hear criticism, I'm very likely to change my opinion, so I would say that others influence me a lot. (Participant 7)

> I mean, it's encouraging to have other people see and acknowledge, um, things that I am good at. . . That's encouraging, but I don't know if it has a huge impact on how I view myself. I feel pretty confident in myself that I can learn how to do this. (Participant 6)

Role of clients. The role of clients in live supervision was the final sub-category of roles identified by the researchers. Only one participant explicitly discussed the therapeutic relationship, naming it as the most challenging aspect of live supervision. The remaining references to clients considered the role of clients only in relation to

complicating the desired live supervision experience. Six of the nine participants spoke to "showing up" as the primary role of clients. As illustrated by Participant 2's remark,

> So personally, I had three sessions when were supposed to have eight. . . not because we didn't try but because the families didn't show up. You know how families are. . . because [the clients] don't necessarily understand the need in the same way we do.

Some participants appeared more tolerant of complexities in clients' engagement in counseling. Participant 3 reflected, "I just had to deal with it. . . you can't control your families." Participants also evaluated the "worthiness" of live supervision clients, expressing the desire to switch the family assigned to their live supervision slot for a more challenging client family on their caseload.

Processes

The second primary theme was processes. Within this theme, participants discussed (a) feedback and (b) elements of the supervision environment (e.g., scheduling) that impacted their experiences in live supervision. Similar to the theme of roles, participants' capacities to navigate inherent ambiguities in live supervision varied.

Feedback. Feedback was the most prominent interpersonal process discussed by participants. Participant 3 reflected, "Even though I wanted direct feedback, I want to know the things I can improve on, that's really a daunting idea." Feedback that was specific and concrete was preferred and "comforting." On the other hand, if expectations for desired feedback were not perceived as met, the participant encountered tremendous struggle. Participant 2 commented, "I want to know what I was going right or wrong… to me it was very ambiguous. . . I couldn't find the answer."

Some participants noted a preference for feedback that was initiated by the supervisor, feeling some uncertainty of their own voice or expertise. Participant 9 stated,

> He'd kind of be like "How did you feel about it?" If you said good, he would be like good. . . and unless you asked a specific question, which I guess maybe I should have asked more specific questions, but I feel like he didn't initiate giving as much feedback as maybe I thought he would.

Participants also favored feedback that was attentive to their personal and emerging theoretical approaches. Over the course of live supervision, participants appeared to vacillate between wanting to model their sessions after their peers' sessions, but to also develop their own clinical voice. Supervisor feedback was important in helping validate this emerging clinical voice.

A final dimension of feedback related to the mode in which it was delivered. At the time of the study, bug-in-ear technology had been acquired and introduced to participants but was not yet integrated into live supervision. Several participants wished this technology had been available, as they felt the supervisors might have provided more direct feedback had this not necessitated interrupting a session. Tensions emerged wherein participants expressed wanting feedback but also having concerns about how this might be perceived by the client. Participant 6 discussed,

> It just kind of seems like when the supervisor goes in there's kind of this power conflict in front of the family, and I think that sometimes it could possibly

undermine the actual counselor and how the family views the counselor, so if we had the bug-in-the-ear we would have avoided that.

One particularly poignant story that emerged in the interviews related to a session the supervisor had intervened on three times, but without sufficient explanation perceived by Participant 2.

> That day [the supervisor] came into my sessions three times. . . that doesn't bother me. . . . Like the first time, to me, its not really that different. . . the second time I was like, "Oh my God, what am I doing wrong?". . . but she didn't tell me. . . and the third time I was like, "What am I doing so wrong?" She didn't tell me. . . why don't you give me feedback? And I don't know. . . it makes you think it is because my children have a job? Because I am Latina? I know it's not. . . but. . .

Supervision environment. The second sub-category identified under the theme of processes was the supervision environment. Within this category, participants reflected on organizing live supervision into two small groups, managing cohort dynamics and scheduling logistics. Within each topic, participants expressed some ambivalence; for example, participants both desired the opportunity to observe and gain feedback from the entire cohort, yet also appreciated the more intimate climate the smaller grouping afforded. Similarly, participants perceived cohesion in the cohort stemming from the shared experience, yet also spoke of divisions within the larger group.

Scheduling challenges was the most discussed facet of the supervision environment. Student counselors participating in the referenced live supervision internship course were also enrolled in an accelerated summer coursework curriculum. As a result, students would often attend two 4-hour classes immediately prior to a 3 to 4 hour live supervision evening session. Participant 1 reflected on wanting to be present for her clients yet also feeling tired; she stated, "I would be thinking, 'Man, I am going to be so exhausted by the time my family gets here. How am I going to get through this?'" Students in the first and last sessions of the evening expressed the greatest difficulty, describing an experience of "rushing around," "feeling frazzled," but also of learning to be more flexible and ready for demands they might encounter in professional practice.

Growth

The third primary theme was growth. In this theme, participants focused on the changes that occurred due to the live supervision process. Participants discussed areas of personal growth and professional growth. Specifically, eight of the nine participants reported noticeable growth in their overall confidence. When asked how the live supervision process changed her, Participant 4 stated, "I would say confidence has changed a lot." She went on to mention that there are times where she still feels nervous, but after experiencing live supervision, this nervousness is very different. Participant 9 noted a quieting of her ruminating thoughts.

Participants also became more comfortable with their clinical skills and with topics that present in marriage, couple, and family counseling. Live supervision helped foster professional confidence, with Participant 7 reflecting, "It helps to have [colleagues] rooting behind you, supporting you the whole time, and getting the constructive [feedback]."

Participants reported how their professional growth impacted their abilities to consult with colleagues and to give and receive feedback. Professional growth also led to participants feeling prepared for future endeavors in the counseling profession. Participant 6 stated, "I feel like I've grown as far as my comfort level, my confidence, flexibility, and ability to role with the punches." Further, live supervision strengthened professional identities for some participants. As summarized by Participant 6,

> I have been able to identify myself more as a family counselor. . . . I truly believe that the core of any help that we can provide for anyone, is working with the family, and that system. . . . I feel that I have identified that I want to be a counselor as opposed to a psychologist or social worker.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore student counselors' phenomenological perceptions of live supervision, with specific attention to the potential influence of ego development. Findings indicated roles, processes, and outcomes as three primary themes emerging from participants' experiences. Resolution of tensions within each of the three themes mediated students' experience of anxiety as a meta-theme. Overall, the findings from this study were congruent with extant live supervision literature. Salient aspects of live supervision identified by participants included feedback specific to their own clinical cases, validation, appropriate matching, and supervision that feels present but not excessive or intrusive (Hendrickson et al., 2002; Koltz & Feit, 2012). Most participants also reported live supervision to have had a positive impact on their professional development, as evidenced by decreased anxiety and greater confidence in their own clinical skills and approach (Hendrickson et al., 2002). Further, time constraints and "performance anxiety" were the most discussed challenges of live supervision, which also supports previous research (Hendrickson et al., 2002; Mauzey et al., 2001; Wong, 1997).

Ego Developmental Considerations

Previous live supervision research has emphasized salient factors, effects, and potential liabilities; however, consideration of student counselors' live supervision from an ego developmental perspective presents a new contribution to the literature. Three (n = 3) participants occupied a Self-Aware (E5) developmental position, the modal level reported in research studies using this developmental construct (Sheaffer, Sias, Toriello, & Cubero, 2008; Watt et al., 2002). The Self-Aware (E5) stage is specifically characterized by increased self-awareness and an emerging capacity to consider multiple perspectives. Attention is also increasingly given at this stage to developing interpersonal relationships (Loevinger, 1976). Six participants (n = 6) occupied a Conscientious (E6) ego developmental position, which is higher than some studies of counseling students, but has also been reported in extant counseling literature (Lawson & Foster, 2005). The Conscientious (E6) stage is characterized by self-criticism, adherence to self-evaluated standards, and a preoccupation with achievement and motives. A new sense of responsibility to others emerges, with guilt now resulting from hurting others over breaking pre-established rules. Additionally, the individual is now able to conceptualize a self that is seen apart from the group (Loevinger, 1976).

Applying this developmental lens to the current findings, it seems participants' developmental positions may have mediated their capacity to negotiate inherent ambiguities within the live supervision process and, thus, to resolve tensions necessary to reduce anxiety. Participants ranged in capacities for dualistic ("I couldn't find the answer") over multiplistic conceptualizations ("I know there's no right or wrong"). Participants displaying greater tolerance of ambiguity and greater propensity to consider multiple perspectives were less likely to personalize or feel insecure about challenges inherent to the experience itself (e.g., client no-shows, time constraints, supervisor interruptions). Additionally, participants occupying more advanced developmental positions seemed better able to view themselves and their experience as connected but apart from the larger experience of the cohort.

Specific to the primary theme of roles, a developmental perspective may be applied to understanding tensions between some participants' desire to support others but challenge enacting this role. Though participants seemed to have an emerging sense of responsibility to others, Self-Aware (E5) and Conscientious (E6) ego developmental positions are also characterized by a self-consciousness and self-criticism that may have rendered focusing on others difficult. Tensions between responsibility to others and self-consciousness may also help explain most participants' failure to see the role of clients beyond that of "showing up."

Developmental considerations appeared to be particularly relative to participants' perceptions of the role of the supervisor and processes of feedback. Though collaborative, the supervisory relationship carries inherent power and may unduly influence supervisees' conceptualizations of themselves as novice clinicians. Participants concurrently desired autonomy but also for the supervisor to serve as a safe base to return to. Further, if supervision feedback transpired in-session (particularly in front of a client), direct follow-up with the participant regarding the intent of this, as well as to process the experience, was instrumental to perceptions of the experience as developmental over punitive.

Implications for Supervision/Counselor Preparation

Several implications can be drawn from this study. Immediate feedback is desired by student counselors in a live supervision setting but is not always given. If there is not allotted time for feedback, even a brief discussion is helpful. Supervisors should also give the same energy to the feedback provided to student counselors, regardless of their order in the rotation cycle. For example, a student who is observed in the last time slot should be given a similar amount of time to receive and process feedback as the first student. Processing the live supervision experience is always important, but it becomes particularly important if the supervisor steps into or intervenes in the session in some way. Students would like to express what this experience was like for them and also to grasp what the supervisor's intentions were for this intervention.

Clinical supervision can provide an environment to catalyze student counselors' developmental growth; however, there are risks associated with supervising from a developmental perspective. Confronting more challenging material carries risk as familiar structures for interpreting experience are disrupted (Noam, 1998). At each transition point there is potential for both growth and maladjustment due to the unstable nature of fledgling schema (Noam, 1998). Supervisors supporting student counselors through developmental transitions must give sufficient attention to the unique vulnerabilities

surrounding a transition from the Self-Aware (E5) to Conscientious (E6), including loss of self, perfectionism, and rigidity (Noam, 1998). To maximize growth and minimize miseducation, experiences must be structurally disequilibrating (Manners, Durkin, & Nesdale, 2004), balancing developmentally appropriate challenge and support (Hunt, 1975). Growth-producing events must also be personally salient, emotionally engaging, and interpersonal (Manners et al., 2004). In short, enduring the vulnerability necessary for advancement requires personal investment and relational support. The risks of conducting live supervision are worth the benefits. Participants of this study cited unique benefits that could only come out of a live supervision format. If the supervisor is aware and understands the above-mentioned risks and ego developmental levels, the supervisor can best match their students' needs to mitigate these risks.

Implications for Future Research

Future research is warranted to study the group dynamics within live supervision settings. Group dynamics can potentially impact the experiences of counselors-in-training influencing how they view roles, outcomes, processes, etc. of the live supervision process, regardless of ego development levels. Supervisors may be able to gauge when their trainees require challenge or when they require support, but sometimes this distinction is tough. Developmental research could benefit from a study that explores moments when anxiety needs to be supported and nurtured versus moments when anxiety needs to be challenged to help the student grow. One participant in the current study regressed in their ego development level. Attention should be given to experiences that may lead to regression. Additionally, as this participant represented points of cultural and age diversity, future research should examine the potential roles of gender, age, and culture on live supervision and ego development. Lastly, this study should be replicated with a single supervisor among groups; with a longer period of time in the live supervision contexts; and with the ideal size of a large supervision group.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. First, two supervision groups existed that were led by different supervisors. The sheer dynamics of each group and leadership styles of these supervisors limit the findings of this study. Second, the live supervision groups were made of 4–5 students from a larger cohort of nine students who also participated in weekly group supervision together. Some students bonded in the group supervision context as well as live supervision context, while others only knew each other from one setting. The same is true with the supervisors; some students had the same supervisor for each experience, while others did not. This also limits the findings of this study as variant group dynamics and supervisor styles were present. Third, the researchers were doctoral students at the time and had an existing relationship with the participants and a power differential existed within this relationship. Next, this study had limited ethnic, racial, and age diversity. It appears that outlying students (i.e., Participants 1 and 2) had a different experience in live supervision, but delving deeper into this was outside the scope of the present study. Finally, some fluctuation appeared in participants' ego development scores across the two assessment points. Though beyond the scope of this manuscript, future research should explore potential causal impacts of live supervision on students' ego development.

Conclusion

Live supervision is a clinical modality that carries inherent benefits and risks. Given that ego development research with counseling students has generally found students to occupy Self-Aware (E5) and Conscientious (E6) developmental positions, familiarity with strengths, challenges, and developmental growth edges surrounding these stages seems particularly relevant. By understanding the influence ego developmental positions can have on individual student counselors' phenomenological experiences in live supervision, live supervision environments may be optimized to meet student counselors' clinical and developmental needs.

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