

Developmental changes of supervisees during first practicum

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Abstract:

Little supervision research has tested a particular developmental model or employed a longitudinal design (Borders, 1986; Holloway, 1987; Worthington, 1987). This study investigated short-term changes along three dimensions postulated by Stoltenberg (1981): self-awareness, dependency/autonomy, and theory/skills acquisition. Supervisees (n = 44) completed the Supervisee Levels Questionnaire (SLQ; McNeill, Stoltenberg, & Pierce, 1985) at the beginning and end of first practicum. An analysis of covariance revealed supervisees reported statistically significant gains on all three developmental dimensions. Results provided additional support for a developmental perspective on supervision, but indicated a need to clarify the definition of developmental level.

Keywords: counseling supervision | skills development | developmental model

Article:

Developmental models of counseling supervision have provided a theoretical base for supervision education (Borders, 1986; Borders & Leddick, 1987; Holloway & Hosford, 1983) and increasingly have received the attention of theorists and researchers. These models (e.g., Hogan, 1964; Littrell, Lee-Borden, & Lorenz, 1979; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987) describe a sequential, hierarchical process of counselor development and supervision interventions for each stage of development. Although a growing body of research supports the general tenets of developmental models, reviewers have noted limitations of these studies (e.g., Borders, 1986; Holloway, 1987; Worthington, 1987). Two major criticisms are the few tests of a particular developmental model and the lack of longitudinal investigations.

Two of the models, Hogan's (1964) and Stoltenberg's (1981), have been tested directly. Reising and Daniels (1983) found support for the constructs of Hogan's model of supervision, but Stoltenberg's model has received the most attention. His Counselor Complexity Model is a

composite of Hogan's model and Hunt's (1971) conceptual systems theory. Stoltenberg proposed four stages of counselor growth in self-awareness, autonomy, and acquisition of theory and skills, and described learning environments that were the optimal "match" for each stage.

In one investigation of this model, Miars et al. (1983) asked supervisors to describe their behaviors with supervisees at different levels of experience. The supervisors reported they were more structured, directive, and supportive with inexperienced supervisees, but emphasized personal development, client resistance, and transference/countertransference issues with more experienced interns. Miars et al. concluded these differences were consistent with the model, but the distinctions between experience levels were less specific than Stoltenberg (1981) proposed.

In a comprehensive test of the model, Wiley and Ray (1986) expanded Stoltenberg's (1981) descriptions of supervisee issues and optimal supervision environments at each developmental stage. They reported that supervisors' ratings of supervisees' developmental level and the learning environment they provided during supervision were related to their supervisees' amount of supervised counseling experience. Supervisors generally offered an environment congruent with developmental level. A match of developmental level and environment was not related to either supervisors' or supervisees' ratings of satisfaction.

In contrast to these studies of supervisors' perceptions, McNeill, Stoltenberg, and Pierce (1985) investigated supervisees' perceptions of their levels of development. They devised the Supervision Levels Questionnaire (SLQ) to measure the three dimensions of growth proposed by Stoltenberg (1981). A geographically-diverse group of supervisees were classified into experience levels based on their years of counseling, supervision, and graduate education experience. More experienced supervisees reported having greater self-awareness, autonomy, and knowledge of theory and skills than did beginning supervisees. McNeill et al. concluded the SLQ was a promising assessment instrument, although validity studies- including longitudinal research-were needed.

Most supervision research to date has employed a cross-sectional design (Worthington, 1987). Only Hill, Charles, and Reed (1981) used a longitudinal approach to study changes in counseling skills during doctoral training in counseling psychology. The changes they cited paralleled those described in developmental models of supervision, but their reports were collected in post-hoc, exploratory interviews (Borders, 1986; Holloway, 1987). This led Holloway (1987) to conclude, "At present, the most obvious problem in supervision research is the absence of longitudinal data to investigate developmental change" (p. 213).

A short-term longitudinal study of Stoltenberg's (1981) model was conducted to overcome these research limitations. This study investigated supervisees' perceptions of developmental changes during their first practicum semester. Stoltenberg's model was selected as the focus of the study since it has been described as the "most heuristic model to date" (Worthington, 1984, p. 63). Several studies have provided empirical support for its constructs (e.g., Miars et al., 1983; Wiley & Ray, 1986), and an existing self-report instrument (SLQ; McNeill et al., 1985) measures the dimensions described in the model.

By incorporating a short-term longitudinal approach, this study was an initial investigation of supervisees' self-reported change along the dimensions of self-awareness, autonomy, and acquisition of theory and skills. It also served as a further test of the SLQ as a measure of supervisee developmental change.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were drawn from 46 students enrolled in the practicum course in a master's counseling program (36 semester-hours) at a medium-size university in the Midwest. All students had completed basic academic coursework (e.g., counseling theories, skills, and techniques; testing and measurement); they also had either completed or were concurrently taking additional required courses (e.g., group counseling, career counseling).

All students volunteered to participate, but two did not complete the posttest. The final sample of 44 students (37 females, 7 males) represented both tracks in the counseling program (i.e., school and community agency); their ages ranged from 22 to 58 ($M = 36.10$, $SD = 8.91$).

All students were enrolled in counseling practicum, a one-semester intensive experience requiring a minimum of 35 sessions with five to seven actual clients in the in-house video lab. Students attended weekly small group ($n = 5$ or 6) supervision seminars (3.5 hours each). They received a minimum of 3 hours of individual supervision (live observation and/or videotape review) across the semester, and received feedback on their case notes and treatment plans.

Supervisors were three full-time faculty members assisted by master's-level teaching assistants. There was one female supervisor ($n = 11$) who reported a relationship-based and insight-oriented approach to counseling; one male supervisor ($n = 23$) who reported a Gestalt and family systems orientations to counseling; and one male supervisor ($n = 10$) who indicated a cognitive-behavioral counseling approach.

Instrumentation

Students' perceptions of their developmental levels were assessed by the Supervisee Levels Questionnaire (SLQ; McNeill et al., 1985). The SLQ consists of 24 items organized into three subscales (8 items each) based on Stoltenberg's (1981) model: Self-awareness (SA; "My motivation fluctuates from day to day"), Dependency/Autonomy (DA; "I depend on my supervisor considerably in figuring out how to deal with my clients"), and Theory/Skills acquisition (TS; "I am comfortable in confronting my clients"). Respondents use a 7-point Likert scale to indicate to what extent the statements describe their counseling and supervision behaviors (1 = never, 7 = always; reverse scoring on 14 items).

Four judges independently classified potential items into the three subscales; only items that the judges unanimously agreed upon were retained (McNeill et al., 1985). McNeill et al. (1985) reported Cronbach's alpha scores of .55 (SA), .76 (DA), and .67 (TS). They also found expected

differences in the subscale scores of geographically-diverse supervisees (n = 91) with different years of counseling, supervision, and graduate education experience.

Raw scores for the eight equally weighted items are summed for each subscale score (McNeill et al., 1985); in addition, the three subscales scores were combined for a total score. Pretest and posttest means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Means and Standards Deviations of Supervisees' SLQ Scores

Subscale	Pretest		Posttest	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Self-awareness	37.68	4.09	41.48	3.75
Dependency/Autonomy	38.02	4.99	43.36	4.18
Theory/Skills Acquisition	34.70	3.73	39.43	3.24
Total	110.41	9.93	124.27	8.57

n = 44

Procedure

Students completed the SLQ in the 2nd and 16th weeks of the semester during their group supervision seminar meetings. They also answered a brief demographic questionnaire at the time of the posttest.

Previous researchers reported supervisors emphasized different goals and supervisory roles based on their theoretical orientations or gender (e.g., Goodyear, Abadie, & Efros, 1984; Goodyear & Bradley, 1983; Goodyear & Robyak, 1982; Robyak, Goodyear, & Prange, 1987). For this reason, the data analysis included a check on possible differences between the groups' that might have been attributed to supervisor variables.

To examine the changes from pretest to posttest SLQ scores (for each subscale and the total score), an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on the gain scores, using the pretest scores as the covariate, was performed. This analysis controlled for unequal pretest means among the three supervisor groups and for changes that might be attributed to regression to the means (Cronbach & Furby, 1970; Huck & McLean, 1975; Laird, 1983). The ANCOVA on gain scores (adjusted means; see Table 2) tested whether pre-post gains were the same for each supervisor group, and whether the gains of each group were significant.

RESULTS

Results of the first test in the ANCOVA revealed no significant differences in gain scores (with pretest scores controlled) among the three supervisor groups for SA, $F(2,40) = 2.36, p = .1076$, DA, $F(2,40) = 0.81, p = .4507$, TS, $F(2,40) = 1.47, p = .2411$, and total scores, $F(2,40) = 1.38, p = .2632$. Pre-post gains in SLQ scores, then, were parallel (constant) across the three groups, indicating no interaction effect.

The second step of the ANCOVA tested whether the pre-post gain scores were significantly different from zero for each group. Tests of the adjusted means for each group were statistically significant for each subscale and the total score (see Table 2). Supervisees in all three supervisor

groups reported significant increases in self-awareness, dependency/autonomy, and theory/skills acquisition.

Table 2. Results of the ANOVA on SLQ Gain Scores by Supervisor Group

Group	n	Gain Scores (Adjusted Means) and Standard Errors							
		Self-awareness		Dependency/Autonomy		Theory/Skills Acquisition		Total	
		Adjusted M	Standard Error	Adjusted M	Standard Error	Adjusted M	Standard Error	Adjusted M	Standard Error
1	11	3.69	1.03	6.27	1.03	6.11	.99	16.53	2.37
2	23	2.99	.70	4.75	.71	4.49	.67	12.05	1.63
3	10	5.76	1.07	5.69	1.07	3.76	1.01	15.11	2.48

Note. All tests that the gain scores were equal to zero had probabilities of less than .001. The *t* values for each test that the adjusted means equal zero were equal to $\frac{\text{gain scores}}{\text{standard error}}$

DISCUSSION

Results of this study provided additional support for the constructs of Stoltenberg's (1981) Counselor Complexity Model. After their first semester of practicum, supervisees of all three supervisors reported significant increases on the three dimensions of development in the model. They perceived themselves as more aware of their own motivations and dynamics, less concerned about their performance during a session, and less dependent on their supervisors for directions and support. They also reported more consistent application of acquired skills and knowledge when working with clients.

The results were supportive of the SLQ as a measure of developmental dimensions. The SLQ was able to assess changes in supervisees' perceptions of their growth over one semester, a relatively short period of time. A comparison of the pre-post means in this study (see Table 1) and the cross-sectional SLQ means reported by McNeill et al. (1985) reveal some points for further exploration.

McNeill et al. (1985) divided counseling and clinical psychology doctoral students into three groups (beginning, intermediate, and advanced) based on three measures of experience: years of counseling, supervision, and graduate school. The pretest self-ratings of the master's-level supervisees' in this study were lower than or comparable to the beginning trainees in McNeill et al. 's study. At the end of their first semester of practicum, however, they reported scores comparable to those of the intermediate and advanced trainees who had at least one full year of counseling experience.

Based on McNeill et al. 's (1985) definitions of experience levels, the supervisees in this study would not have been expected to report such substantial gains after only one semester of practicum. One possible explanation for the posttest self-ratings is the difference in the participants' bases of comparison for their ratings. McNeill et al. 's (1985) trainees may have compared themselves to their peers in advanced practica and internships when rating their developmental levels. In contrast, the supervisees in this study perhaps considered the shorter framework of the one-semester practicum and one-semester field-based internship required in their 36-hour program.

The two groups may have had different expectations or definitions of competency on the three dimensions of development.

Other researchers also have remarked on finding higher developmental ratings than would be expected (e.g., Stoltenberg, Solomon, & Ogden, 1986; Wiley & Ray, 1986). Additional studies are needed to determine what "norms" supervisees use in self-ratings on the SLQ and other measures of developmental levels. Definitions of the developmental stages, especially the fourth level "master counselor," need clarification (Wiley & Ray, 1986).

Supervisees in each supervisor group reported parallel increases in self-awareness, autonomy, and theory/skills acquisition. While there were no statistically significant differences among the three groups, the adjusted subscale means of each supervisor group suggest different patterns of changes across the three developmental dimensions (see Table 2). Future researchers should continue to investigate possible influences of supervisor variables on supervisees' progress along the different dimensions. It may be relevant to consider the supervisor's orientation to *supervision* in addition to counseling orientation. Developmental models are more generic than theoretical models of supervision, and are meant to describe the supervision process of counselors of all theoretical orientations. It is not known how a supervisor's behavior might be influenced by the adoption of a developmental approach to supervision.

Both increases and decreases on the developmental dimensions were reported by individual supervisees in each group. Pre-post differences in total SLQ scores ranged from - 6 to + 37. Investigations of the sources of such wide variations in supervisees' self-ratings would be informative for practicing supervisors.

This study was limited in several ways, including the relatively small number of participants from one counseling program and the reliance on one self-report measure of developmental change. Future studies might include supervisors' perceptions of their supervisees' developmental progress along with objective measures of changes (e.g., ratings of actual skill performance). Studies of a variety of supervisees over longer periods of time are needed, since Stoltenberg (1981) theorized individual variables influence the rate of developmental progress and some research has supported this assertion (e.g., Borders, Fong, & Neimeyer, 1986; Miars et al., 1983; Reising & Daniels, 1983; Wiley & Ray, 1986).

The results of this exploratory study provide support for viewing supervision as a developmental process. Further work on developmental models can inform supervisors seeking to enhance supervisee growth.

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