

Doctoral Students Supervising Master's Students: A Focus Group Addressing Training in Multiple Relationships

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*Presented at the 116th Annual Convention of the
American Psychological Association, Boston, MA, August 15, 2008*



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Agenda

Presenter introductions

- Introduction
- Method
- Results
- Discussion



Introduction

Advanced doctoral students in applied disciplines are trained to provide supervision

- Training includes didactic and experiential components
- Often results in multiple roles, role conflicts, boundary issues, and role stress for the trainee within a program
- Occurs while the trainee is also developing a professional identity

Current Research

Literature on multiple relationships faced by advanced doctoral students is sparse

- Indicates that supervisors are unaware and unprepared for power dynamics and evaluative responsibilities (Scarborough, Bernard, & Morse, 2006)
- Faculty and students move in and out of various roles
- Multiple relationships are unavoidable
- Students tend to perceive multiple relationships more negatively than faculty (Kolbert, Morgan, & Brendel, 2002)

Research Questions

To what extent

1. do doctoral student supervisors describe an awareness of multiple relationship and boundary issues in the context of acting as a supervisor to master's level trainees in a related program?
2. have doctoral student supervisors experienced multiple relationships, boundary issues, and role stress as a result of their work as a supervisor for master's students in a related graduate program?
3. have past experiences both within and outside of the program prepared doctoral students for their role as a doctoral supervisor especially with regard to multiple relationships, boundary issues, and role stress?

Method: Participants

- N = 4
 - Counseling psychology doctoral students
 - Recently completed practicum supervising master's level trainees
- 3 female; 1 male
- All Caucasian
- Mean age = 28 years (range 24-33)
- Mean graduate training = 4.5 years (range 3-5)
- Mean counseling/clinical experience = 4 years (range 3-5)

Method: Measures

- Supervision questionnaire (developed by authors)
 - 15 questions in Likert form
 - Examples of domains assessed:
 - Perception of power, professional identity as supervisor/counselor, level of stress, perception of responsibility
 - 5 specific to multiple relationships with supervisees

Method: Measures (cont.)

- Semi-structured focus group
 - Interview questions based upon insights from sparse literature (e.g., Scarborough et al., 2006) & authors own experience
- Examples of question themes:
 - Past supervisory experience influencing role as supervisor, specific multiple relationship experiences, awareness/management of multiple relationships, role conflicts

Method: Procedure

- Indiana University IRB approval
- 9 potential participants “available”
 - Group e-mail for participation – 4 responses to participate
- Prior to focus group participants completed informed consent and supervision questionnaire
- Focus group
 - 90 minutes & digitally recorded
 - Conducted by two of the authors
 - Third author viewed focus group through a video feed in separate room

Method: Data Analysis

- The focus group generated rich and complex data
- Each researcher took notes during the focus group
- Later, researchers watched the focus group footage and formed preliminary themes and categories
- Eventual agreement on 6 themes and 12 categories
(1 category became a theme)
- Using a constant-comparative method (Merriam, 1998)

Method: Data Analysis

- Awareness of biases and assumptions
- Preventative measures employed to avoid confirmation bias and increase trustworthiness
 - Role as learners (Glesne, 2005)
 - Reflective thinking
 - Looking for counter examples
 - Member checks

Results: Thematic Summary

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Multiple Relationships are Inevitable | |
| 2. Defining Multiple Relationships | a. Broaden definition
b. Triangular/three-way relationships |
| 3. Experience of Multiple Relationships as a Doctoral Student | a. Supervisor and supervisee role at the same time
b. Faculty multiple roles with doctoral students |
| 4. Experiential Learning | a. Aspirations as a supervisor
b. Managing multiple roles |
| 5. Appropriate Supervision Boundaries | a. Differing opinions between individuals
b. Boundaries depend on contextual factors |
| 6. Most Challenging Aspects of Supervising | a. Interpersonal feedback
b. Cross-cultural supervision
c. Fostering supervisee self-awareness |

Results: Theme 1

Multiple Relationships are Inevitable

“I think what happens is one person, you know, stays in a place long enough and then they build that many relationships and different partnerships in the community that, you know, you work at a college counseling center in a university town for 10 years, you’re gonna start maybe being a teacher... You start to see these names and people again... There’s not always a way to avoid it and so you have to deal with it... need careful decision making about how you’re gonna respond to it because I think it’s not always avoidable.” (1:37:00)

Results: Theme 2

Defining Multiple Relationships

Category #1 – Broaden Definition

“I’d like to see a broader one [definition of multiple relationships], I mean, I think that’s why I brought up my whole three-way relationship... I think the way it’s implied and the way I read it in the ethics code is that it is a one-to-one not a by association of a certain party. I think triangles of any form make just make everything a lot more complicated.” (1:43:50)

Results: Theme 2

Defining Multiple Relationships

Category #2 – Triangular/Three-way Relationships

“... myself and a fellow first year student were pretty close friends and we were at the same site. Her supervisor who was a fourth or fifth year doctoral student and I were close friends. So you see the triangle we are forming here? So that was difficult in the sense of when I had just kind of general things I wanted to share of what it was like for me being in my first practicum... not looking for supervision but just looking for support. MY friend who was her supervisor didn't feel like he could give that to me because it would kind of give him too much information about the site. He wanted to really keep that restricted within his relationship with his supervisee. At the same time... the first year practicum friend had a difficult relationship with her supervisor... so she couldn't come to me to talk about it either... So it was like not necessarily dual roles but three-way roles within a doctoral program... It impacted our interactions with multiple people.”

Results: Theme 3

Experience of Multiple Relationships as Doctoral Student

Category #1 – Supervisor & Supervisee Role at Same Time

“I think the supervision that I was receiving at the time that I was a supervisor because I was also a supervisee over at CAPS. I think having that experience at the same time was unique to me and may be different than if had I stopped being in supervision for a while, even for a semester I think it would have felt different, but I had that constant influence of kind of knowing what my supervisor would say in that situation. And I had a little bit of cognitive dissonance or tension about, you know, knowing my developmental level was much more advanced and then starting to work with these... counselors at the very beginning of their development. So I then kind of had to... natural reaction of what my supervisor would do with me in that instance and change it to fit my supervisee’s developmental level, so that was a challenge.” (0:34:40)

Results: Theme 3

Experience of Multiple Relationships as Doctoral Student

Category #2 – Faculty Multiple Roles with Doctoral Students

“It was actually a very painful experience for me as a supervisee because I felt like the personal relationship between the professors was starting to really impact what I could and couldn’t say. I felt like I was actually getting a harder treatment by my clinical supervisor, because of, you know, problems with this other professor. I think some of that is inherent in just being in a doctoral program where there is going to be multiple... you gonna have some people that are doing supervision that are professors are also teaching multiple classes... I mean there is just a small number of people, people take on a couple different roles in order to really do their jobs... you’re going to end up with multiple relationships.” (1:02:47)

Results: Theme 4

Experiential Learning

Category #1 – Aspirations as a Supervisor

“Inside the field . . . I had . . . 3 supervisors before, clinical supervisors before I became a clinical supervisor and I know that in all of them there was a lack of communication about how I would be evaluated. I would never see the evaluation form until it was actually being handed to me. . . So I think just a general different kind of level of formal communication about expectations was something that really influenced me to make sure that I want those things to be made explicit with my supervisees because it’s, that would have been a comforting thing for me.” (29:20)

Results: Theme 4

Experiential Learning

Category #2 – Managing Multiple Relationships

“I think my awareness of [multiple relationships] really just grew out of my experience with it, with the three way type of relationship. For me it felt much more personal. So even if there were discussions about it they weren’t as salient because the experience speaks much more loudly than a warning.” (1:18:10)

Results: Theme 5

Appropriate Supervision Boundaries

Category #1 – Differing Opinions

- “I wouldn’t want my supervisor to talk about any, I mean, if we had some kind of discussions of something more personal after . . . that would be more okay with me than if during they wanted to tell me all sorts of things about their personal lives to me . . . It’s like with clients, it’s like, a whole bunch of self-disclosure can for me taint the relationship. I want to come to the person as a professional and have them help me grow as a professional.” (55:44)
- “I think that’s part of being professional though, being able to be a professional enough person to decipher how to maneuver that.” (56:39)

Results: Theme 5

Appropriate Supervision Boundaries

Category #2 – Contextual Nature of Appropriate Boundaries

- “I think that the formality and structure of our training as supervisors right now. . . all of this freshness . . . is very different than from being this far removed from an academic institution . . . Some of the formality and strict boundaries of it dissipate over that time. I just expect that they would.” (57:30)
- I think also the structure of environments like hospitals . . . agencies are very different when you have interactions with your supervisor all throughout the day. . . You know, staff meetings, where it’s not as client focused . . . and other staff members are asking questions about your personal life, and you’re just being friendly. It’s part of relationship building as a staff member.” (58:25)

Results: Theme 6

Most Challenging Aspects of Supervision

- Interpersonal feedback
- Cross-cultural supervision
- Fostering supervisees' awareness of how their values, morals, and behaviors impact therapy

Discussion:

Summary of Findings

- Multiple relationships are unavoidable and complex – a finding consistent with other literature
- The potential problems of multiple relationships are not always predictable
- The best way to learn to handle multiple relationships is through experience
- Boundary issues are often context dependent

Discussion: Study Limitations

- Investigator bias
- Sample issues
 - ✦ Small number of participants
 - ✦ Lack of cultural diversity
 - ✦ Limited perspective of one training program
- Lack of an external audit of findings
- Limited to doctoral student perspective

Discussion:

Implications for Training

- Be proactive in avoiding multiple relationships when possible
- Multiple relationships are unavoidable, thus training focus should be on how to manage them
- Empower the “underdog”
- Foster an attitude of awareness of role stress in the program
 - ✦ Share our results with faculty
 - ✦ Provide opportunities to process multiple roles
- Provide opportunities to process supervision experiences- post-practicum, peer support

Discussion:

Implications for Practice

- Role induction
- Clarify expectations
- Use supervision contracts
- Share evaluative instrument
- Create atmosphere where talking about power and relationship is encouraged
- Check-in with supervisees at various points in time

Discussion:

Implications for Research

- Larger N
- Greater diversity
 - Cultural
 - Programmatic
- Survey instruments (e.g., across multiple programs) that address multiple relationships and related issues
 - Role stress (e.g., supervisor and supervisee at same time)
 - Faculty multiple roles with students
- Theoretical orientation of practice and/or supervision impact perception and responses to multiple relationships?

Discussion:

Implications for Research

- Perspective other than doctoral supervisor
 - Master's supervisee
 - Faculty
- How are multiple relationships resolved? – clinical process studies
- How do multiple relationships influence supervision outcomes?
 - Supervisor/supervisee development
 - Supervisor/supervisee satisfaction with supervision
 - Client outcome