

# Perceptions of Counselor Supervision: An Examination of Stoltenberg's Model From the Perspectives of Supervisor and Supervisee

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We used Stoltenberg's (1981) developmental model of counselor supervision in an examination of relational consequences of supervisors' and supervisees' disagreements about a supervisee's counseling sophistication. We also sought support for Stoltenberg's proposed optimal supervision environments. Eight-seven supervisors and 77 supervisees from 31 randomly selected university counseling and clinical psychology programs around the United States categorized supervisees as belonging to one of four developmental levels. They also provided demographic information, estimated supervisory behavior frequencies, and made satisfaction and impact ratings. Results indicated that (a) supervisors perceived themselves as varying their behavior with supervisees of different developmental levels in a manner that accorded with Stoltenberg's model, (b) supervisees did not perceive the differences reported in supervisors' behaviors, and (c) supervisees reported significantly less satisfaction and impact when they were in mismatched pairs with supervisors, although supervisors did not. In subsequent analyses, we found that supervisees preferred supervision that was characterized by a collegial relation with a focus on trainee personal development and self-understanding.

The importance of developmental perspectives in counselor supervision is underscored by the creation of a variety of theoretical models (e.g., Blocher, 1983; Littrell, Lee-Borden, & Lorenz, 1979; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981; Yogev, 1982). A tacit assumption of these models is that supervisors have accurate and detailed knowledge of supervisees' particular developmental levels and vary their behavior accordingly. Stoltenberg's counselor complexity model is explicit enough in its prescription of optimal supervision behaviors with supervisees of varying sophistication to permit examination of this assumption.

Stoltenberg's (1981) model integrates Hogan's (1964) model of counselor development with Hunt's (1971) conceptual systems theory of cognitive/personality development. From these two theories, Stoltenberg constructed a four-stage description of supervisee characteristics. In this counselor complexity model, supervisees are characterized as progressing from relative dependence on their supervisors for explicit direction in counseling practices (Level 1) to professional autonomy (Level 4). The model also prescribes optimal supervisor behaviors at each level of sophistication.

Six empirical investigations have examined the veracity of Stoltenberg's (1981) counselor complexity model (Friedlander & Ward, 1984; Heppner & Roehlke, 1984; Miars et al., 1983; Resing & Daniels, 1983; Wiley & Ray, 1986; Worthington, 1984). All but Heppner and Roehlke found support for the

elements of the supervision dyad that Stoltenberg proposed as varying across developmental levels. In previous studies, some methods may have limited the generalizability of findings. For instance, some investigators sampled supervisees and supervisors from a single training site (Heppner & Roehlke, 1984; Miars et al., 1983). Other researchers included only one experience level of trainees (e.g., Heppner & Handley, 1981) or interpreted discrete periods in training (e.g., number of practica) to constitute a particular stage of development (Friedlander & Ward, 1984; Heppner & Roehlke, 1984; Miars et al., 1983; Resing & Daniels, 1983; Worthington, 1984).

In the present study, we investigated perceived changes in the frequency of supervisory behaviors with supervisees of different levels of sophistication. We hypothesized that (a) supervisors and supervisees would perceive variation in the supervision environment according to the developmental level of supervisees in a manner consistent with the counselor complexity model and (b) agreement between supervisors and trainees on trainee level of development would relate positively to trainees' and supervisors' self-assessments of satisfaction.

## Method

### Participants

The numbers of supervisors and supervisees who responded to the questionnaire were 87 and 77, respectively, from a total of 31 schools. Supervisors averaged 40.4 years of age, 12.9 years in counseling practice, and 9.6 years of supervising; 48% were women. Supervisees averaged 30.2 years of age, had counseled for a mean of 2.7 years, and had been supervised for a mean of 2.7 years; 55% were women.

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## Procedure

Questionnaire packets were sent to 75 randomly selected APA approved university clinical and counseling programs throughout the United States. Each packet contained a letter to the program director requesting that four smaller packets of questionnaires be randomly distributed to faculty supervisors on the staff. These supervisors were asked to distribute questionnaire packets to one male and one female student they had recently supervised or were currently supervising. Supervisors were asked to avoid choosing only students whom they liked and were requested to provide intern-level trainees if possible.

## Instruments

Parallel forms of the same four-part questionnaire with different phrasing for supervisors and supervisees were used in this study. In the first section of the questionnaires, respondents were asked to indicate their age, gender, years of counseling, and years of supervising trainees (for supervisors) or years of receiving therapy supervision (for supervisees). The second section, containing 37 brief items describing supervisory behaviors, were drawn from questionnaires used by Miars et al. (1983) and Allen, Szollos, and Williams (1986), with 7 items included to more adequately sample constructs in the counselor complexity model. All responses took the form of frequency estimates on 5-point Likert scales. The third section contained 5 items used by Heppner and Handley (1981) to assess feelings of satisfaction and personal impact of supervision on 5-point Likert scales. In the final section, both supervisors and supervisees were asked to circle one of four paragraphs that they deemed most descriptive of the supervisee. These paragraphs described the essential supervisee characteristics at each of the four developmental levels proposed by Stoltenberg (1981).

## Results

As a data-reduction technique, factor analyses were performed on questionnaire responses. Rotated principal factor analysis produced eight and five clusters for the supervisor's and supervisee's questionnaires, respectively. The internal consistency of each cluster was then determined by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Any resultant cluster that did not manifest an alpha of at least 0.62 was dropped from analyses. The resultant clusters, which follow, mirrored the variety of supervisory roles explicated by Hess (1980): Teacher (seven items describing supervisors as telling supervisees what to do with their clients), Counselor (nine items describing supervision as therapy), Respectful Sharing (five items referring to a sharing, mutually respecting, and self-revealing interaction), Satisfied Colleague (four items describing a collegial, mutually satisfying relationship), Dynamic Counselor (four items describing a psychodynamic supervision style), Perceived Impact (two items assessing the impact that supervisors thought they had had on their supervisees), Laissez-Faire (two items describing supervisors as taking a loosely controlling supervision stance and encouraging diversity), and Preparation (two items describing the amount of preparation supervisors made for supervision sessions).

To test the hypothesis that supervisors would report varying their supervisory behavior according to the developmental level of supervisees, we then performed multivariate analyses on those clusters. Three of the eight clusters achieved signifi-

cance for discriminations in responding for the four developmental levels: Counselor,  $F(27, 218) = 1.54, p < .05$ ; Satisfied Colleague,  $F(12, 233) = 4.20, p < .0001$ ; and Perceived Impact,  $F(6, 160) = 2.20, p < .05$ . In our analysis of specific items that contributed to these significant outcomes, Duncan's multiple-range tests revealed that structuring and directing in supervision contacts decreased as supervisees were perceived to be at higher developmental levels. On the other hand, a supportive relationship and relating to supervisees in the role of counselor (e.g., a focus on supervisees' personal development) were most frequent with supervisors of trainees at Levels 2 and 4. Collegial and consultative relationships were reported with increasing frequency as supervisees advanced in development. These self-reported behavioral differences by supervisors were consistent with Stoltenberg's (1981) explication of the optimal supervision environments for supervisees at the four developmental levels.

Five reliable clusters resulted from a factor analysis and subsequent internal consistency analyses of the supervisee's questionnaire, yielding Supervisor as Mentor (10 items describing the supervisory relationship as close, sharing, and mutually respecting), Supervisor as Counselor (10 items describing supervisors as taking a counselor role in promoting supervisee emotional growth), Directive Supervisor (7 items describing supervisors as directive and explicitly instructing), Supervisor as Dynamic Counselor (4 items describing supervisors as approaching supervision as similar to psychodynamic counseling), and Process-Centered Supervision (3 items describing a supervision focus on the relational aspects of both supervision and counseling contacts).

The clusters of the supervisee's questionnaire were examined for variation with regard to supervisee's self-reported level of development. None of the five multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA)  $F$  values for these clusters reached significance. To assess the possibility that supervisees might perceive variation in their supervision when their supervisors' assessments of trainee level of development were used, we computed five additional MANOVAs. Again, all  $F$  values failed to reach significance. It seems that supervisees did not perceive the variation in behavior that their supervisors indicated that they made while supervising counselors at different developmental levels.

## Satisfaction Effects for Congruent and Incongruent Pairs

The second hypothesis of this study was that feelings of satisfaction with and impact of the particular supervision experience would be affected by dyads' agreement or disagreement about the trainee's counseling sophistication. To determine this status, we deemed pairs to be in agreement if the supervisor and the supervisee of that pair endorsed the same level of development for the supervisee. There were 63 pairs in the study, of which 26 agreed and 37 disagreed.

Mean endorsements for items written to gauge feelings of satisfaction and impact appear in Table 1 along with univariate and multivariate analyses for the effect of being in congruent versus incongruent dyads. Items 1 and 5 assessed

Table 1  
Satisfaction and Impact Means for Congruent Versus  
Incongruent Dyads

Item	Congruent	Incongruent	Univariate <i>F</i> value
<b>Supervisor<sup>a</sup></b>			
Overall supervisor satisfaction	4.62	4.35	1.77
Impact on changing counselor attitudes	4.08	3.62	4.33*
Helped change supervisee as person	2.85	2.73	0.16
Influence on supervisee as young professional	3.65	3.35	2.01
Willing to supervise this trainee again	4.58	4.08	3.75
<b>Supervisee<sup>b</sup></b>			
Overall supervisee satisfaction	4.73	4.05	9.07**
Impact on changing my attitudes as counselor	4.42	3.76	7.78**
Helped change me as a person	3.65	2.89	6.64**
Influence on my professional identity	4.00	3.22	10.17**
Willing to be supervised again	4.62	3.76	7.75**

Note. Satisfaction and impact ratings were as follows: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree somewhat; 3 = unsure or neutral; 4 = agree somewhat; 5 = strongly agree.

<sup>a</sup> Overall multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA):  $F(5, 57) = 1.14$ ,  $p < .35$ . <sup>b</sup> Overall MANOVA:  $F(5, 57) = 2.57$ ,  $p < .04$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

satisfaction with supervision, whereas Items 2, 3, and 4 assessed the impact supervisors had on supervisees' attitude and behavior change. There was a strong difference between the effects of agreeing about developmental level for supervisees relative to supervisors.

Even though one item significantly distinguished supervisors' responses in congruent versus incongruent pairs, the overall MANOVA statistic was nonsignificant. Thus, differences in perceptions about counselors' level of development did not affect supervisors' satisfaction or the impact that they believed they had on supervisees. In contrast, congruence was a potent factor from the perspective of supervisees. Trainees in incongruent dyads indicated that the experience was less satisfactory and had less impact on their development. For supervisees, all five items provided significant discriminations, yielding a reliable multivariate  $F$  value,  $F(5, 57) = 2.57$ ,  $p < .04$ .

### Relation Between Satisfaction and Supervisory Behavior

We used additional MANOVAs to examine specific aspects of supervision that supervisees preferred by contrasting differ-

ences in the frequency of supervisory behaviors between highly satisfied and less satisfied supervisees. Degree of satisfaction was determined by summing the two satisfaction items. The criterion for inclusion in the satisfied group was that the sum of the two items included at least one *highly enthusiastic* and one *moderately enthusiastic* rating (sum > 8 out of 10). Forty-six counselors described themselves as satisfied, and 17 described themselves as dissatisfied or neutral. A similar procedure, with the three impact items, was used to dichotomize supervisees into those who reported that their supervision experience had an impact on them as counselors and those who reported that it did not. We examined variation in perception of supervisory behaviors for these groups by one-factor MANOVAs. For groupings made by ratings of satisfaction, four of five clusters on the supervisee's questionnaire indicated significant differences. For groupings made by ratings of impact, a virtually identical pattern of outcomes was found.

In a second set of analyses, we examined whether ratings of supervisor behaviors varied as a function of satisfaction and developmental level. A total of five MANOVAs that crossed impact ratings with developmental level yielded only one isolated significant outcome. We carried out this same analysis again, this time crossing high versus low satisfaction by developmental level, with similarly insignificant results. Thus, no support was found for the contention that supervisees who were treated as if they were at a more sophisticated level would report the greatest satisfaction or impact.

Together, these outcomes suggest that supervisees preferred a specific kind of relationship with supervisors. They rated most highly those experiences in which supervisors were seen as providing a relatively more collegial, self-reflexive, and mutually respectful interaction. The preferred relationship also had elements of a counseling analogue (e.g., a focus on furthering supervisee self-understanding and personal development). Supervision experiences in which supervisors took a directive or authoritarian stance with supervisees were negatively evaluated.

### Discussion

The results of this study provide partial support for the viability of Stoltenberg's (1981) counselor complexity model. Supervisors clearly rated their supervision behaviors as differing in frequency with supervisees whom they perceived to be at different developmental levels, in a manner consistent with that model. When working with more developmentally advanced counselors, supervisors reportedly engaged in less structured preparation, adopted a more collegial stance, and indicated greater satisfaction with the process. They also perceived themselves as having relatively more impact on counselors who were experiencing conflicts between autonomy and dependency. These results are consistent with those of Wiley and Ray (1986).

In contrast to supervisors, counselors of different developmental levels perceived no differences in supervisor behavior. Trainee responses to the items in the clusters were not affected by their assessed level of development, regardless of whether that assessment was made by the trainees themselves or by

their supervisors. Thus, supervisees were not able to discriminate differences in supervisory behaviors even though their supervisors reliably indicated that such variation existed. This result mirrors the findings of Worthington (1984) and may be explained by the conclusion of Resing and Daniels (1983) that supervisees are not able to specifically describe what they need from a supervisor.

This discrepancy may be explained in several ways. First, it is possible that supervisors' self-reports of differential treatments are not veridical indicators of their actual interchanges with supervisees (cf. Yogev & Pion, 1984). Verification of this possibility would require assessment of actual supervisor behavior by external methods of observation. A second possibility is that counselor trainees do not have enough experience to make subtle discriminations about how they are being treated in supervision (Resing & Daniels, 1983; Worthington, 1984). An explanation similar to that suggested by others (e.g., Allen et al., 1986; Friedlander & Ward, 1984; Resing & Daniels, 1983; Worthington, 1984) is that greater satisfaction with supervision is related more to supervisors' general style, theory, and assumptions than to particular structural aspects of supervision.

This latter interpretation is given further credence by analyses of the effects of agreement or disagreement between supervision pair members on their feelings of satisfaction with and impact of their supervision experience. When supervisor and trainee agreed on the trainee's developmental level, trainees rated the supervision experience highly in terms of satisfaction and impact. Conversely, disagreement between them was strongly related to low ratings of satisfaction and impact by trainees. These relations were robust even though the supervisees were unable to reliably state specific supervisor behaviors that contributed to their satisfaction. The possibility that supervisees are sensitive to supervisors' general attitudes about the degree to which they are valued may well explain the mixed outcomes others have reported regarding relations between congruence and satisfaction (e.g., Heppner & Handley, 1981; Wiley & Ray, 1986). Thus, in combination with other outcomes (Allen et al., 1986; Friedlander & Ward, 1984), our results provide support for the argument that the general assumptive sets and attitudinal stances of supervisors outweigh the impact of specific supervision structure, format, and technique.

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