Supervisee Empowerment: Does Gender Make a Difference?

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This study used a content analysis of audiotapes of clinical supervisory sessions to examine the effect of supervisee gender on the influence strategies used in the counseling clinical supervisory dyad.

Counseling supervision has been conceptualized as an influence process in which supervisors use personal attributes and professional techniques to facilitate change in the supervisee (Robyak, Goodyear, & Prange, 1987; Strong & Matross, 1973). The use of these influence strategies by supervisors may have either a facilitative or an inhibitory effect on the supervisee's personal and professional development. Supervisors have an ethical responsibility to provide an environment that will enhance supervisees' skills and allow supervisees to devise effective strategies for working with clients (American Association of Counseling and Development [AACD], 1990; Holloway, 1992). Developmental models of supervision suggest that the goal of supervision is to allow supervisees to proceed through a progression of developmental stages and tasks and to establish a therapist identity of their own, replacing an external supervisor with an internal one (Blocher, 1983; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981; Watkins, 1992). Conoley (1994) called this "supervision as empowerment" (p. 48). Hawkins and Shohet (1989) claimed that one of the aims of supervision is to

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help the therapist-in-training develop a healthy internal supervisor. Supervisees should require less and less direction from their supervisors over time, and should take more initiative in decision making on their own. To help supervisees accomplish these developmental tasks, supervisors must use influence strategies that, over time, will enhance supervisee empowerment.

The use of influence strategies is determined, in part, by the inherent hierarchical structure of the supervisory dyad. The evaluative role of the supervisor underscores the power differential in the supervisory dyad (Hunter & Pinsky, 1994). In addition, personal characteristics that supervisors and supervisees bring to the supervisory relationship may play a role. Among these, supervisee gender has been suggested as affecting influence strategies (Goodyear, 1990; Hartman & Brieger, 1992; Twohey & Volker, 1993). Given the well-documented importance of gender as a moderator in many interpersonal interactions (Goodyear, 1990; Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry, 1991), it is not difficult to imagine that supervisee gender could affect the influence strategies used in supervisory process.

Much of the writing on the role of gender in clinical supervision is theoretical. (For reviews of this literature, see Granello, 1996, or Munson, 1987). Although there are some empirical studies that address gender configurations in supervision (Behling, Curtis, & Foster, 1988; Thyer, Sowers-Hoag, & Love, 1988; Worthington & Stern, 1985), there is a lack of empirical research that specifically relates supervisee gender to influence strategies used in the dyad. Only one study (Nelson & Holloway, 1990) used empirical, observational research to uncover these gender-based differences. Using content analysis, Nelson and Holloway found that supervisors of both genders failed to encourage or support their female supervisees' assumption of power. In addition, they found that female supervisees relinquished their power in deference to the supervisor more often than did male supervisees. Nelson and Holloway argued that the lack of equal status among male and female supervisees may result in the disempowerment of women in the supervisory process and may negatively influence the development of a female counselor's professional identity.

One other study used self-report questionnaires to address the effect of supervisee gender on influence strategies in the supervisory dyad (Goodyear, 1990). The results of this study must be interpreted with caution. Self-reports may have limited meaning for understanding the actual process of supervision, because self-reports of perceptions may not accurately reflect reality (Borders, 1989). In addition, there is usually little recognition of one's own particular gender biases (Brodsky, 1980). Goodyear used a self-report questionnaire with 68 supervisees in a clinical setting to assess the which of eight strategies they would be likely to use when in a conflict situation with their supervisors. Supervisors were given a parallel instrument and asked to rate their particular supervisee's likelihood of using these strategies. Goodyear found that both supervisors and supervisees perceived that female supervisees were significantly more likely to use a personal-dependent influence strategy. This strategy was captured with statements such as, "Smile a lot," "Tell them I really need help and support," and "Tell them how important this is to me" (p. 76). These findings, although based on self-report, are consistent with the hypothesis that male and female supervisees use different influence strategies within the supervisory dyad.

In the absence of a larger pool of empirical research on how supervisee gender affects influence strategies in clinical supervision, observational research from other fields can be extrapolated for its relevance to counseling supervision. Within the field of counseling, the most widely cited study on the effect of client gender on influence strategies was conducted by Cooke and Kipnis in 1986. They studied the influence styles of therapists using a content analysis of audiotapes from counselor–client dyads. They found that both male and female therapists used significantly more instruction statements with female clients and significantly more explanation statements with male clients. They suggested that these results indicated that therapists seemed to view female clients as needing to be told what to do, and the male clients as needing a better understanding of thoughts and feelings. Heatherington and Allen (1984) also used content analysis of the counseling dyad to analyze patterns of complementarity and symmetry in the dyad. They found that dyads with male clients engaged in significantly more asymmetric patterns of influence in which either the client or the counselor was perceived to be in control. Dyads with female clients, on the other hand, had significantly more patterns of complementarity. The authors suggested that dyads with male clients were more focused on hierarchy, whereas dyads with female clients were more focused on relationship building.

From the field of education, a 1991 study of teachers-in-training (Kraft) used a content analysis of supervisory dyads and found that female trainees asked their supervisors for significantly more information, opinions, or suggestions, and did so nearly three times as often as male trainees. In addition, supervisors of both sexes sought significantly more information, opinions, and suggestions from male supervisees than from female supervisees, and made more attempts to control the behavior of female subordinates. Supervisors of both sexes accepted and used the ideas of male sub-

ordinates significantly more often than those of female subordinates, and spent significantly more time telling female trainees what to do rather than asking for ideas, whereas the reverse was true with male trainees. This observational field research in education yielded results similar to the findings of Nelson and Holloway in clinical supervision (1990).

The results of these observational studies of men and women in hierarchical dyads suggest that male and female subordinates may use very different influence strategies, and that their supervisors may engage in influence strategies that are, at least in part, determined by the gender of the subordinate. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of supervisee gender to the dimension of influence in clinical supervision. Each member of the dyad is influenced by the other; therefore, both supervisor and supervisee influence strategies were investigated. It was hypothesized that both male and female supervisors would (a) make more supportive comments to female supervisees, (b) ask for more opinions and suggestions from male supervisees, and (c) give more opinions and suggestions to female supervisees. In addition, it was hypothesized that female supervisees would ask for more information, and that male supervisees would give more information.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 20 counseling supervisees in their master's degree practicum or internship classes, or in post-master's supervision for licensure, and their clinical field supervisors. The sample was divided into two dyad types based on supervisee sex. Supervisory dyads included the following pairs: 3 male supervisor–male supervisee, 4 male supervisor–female supervisee, 7 female supervisor–male supervisee, and 6 female supervisor–female supervisee.

Supervisees. Supervisees were equally divided by sex. They reported their mean age as 32.3 (for male supervisees, $M = 32.00$, $SD = 7.79$; for female supervisees, $M = 32.60$, $SD = 9.12$). They reported their theoretical orientations as follows: eclectic, 65%; cognitive, 15%; person-centered, 10%; behavioral, 5%; and psychodynamic, 5%. All reported counseling as their primary discipline, and they reported a mean of .76 years ($SD = 0.47$) years of experience. Supervisees were either in their master's internship (70%) or practicum (15%), or were post–master's degree students under supervision for counseling licensure (15%). Ninety percent ($n = 18$) self-reported as White, 5% ($n = 1$) as African American, and 5% ($n = 1$) as Other.

Supervisors. Supervisor sex was 35% male ($n = 7$) and 65% female ($n = 13$). Supervisors reported their mean age as 43.6 (for male supervisors, $M = 49.57$, $SD = 7.53$; for female supervisors, $M = 40.39$, $SD = 6.63$). They reported their theoretical orientations as follows: eclectic, 35%; person-centered, 30%; cognitive, 15%; psychodynamic, 15%; and behavioral, 5%. The majority of supervisors (60%) self-identified their primary professional orientation as counselor. The remainder self-identified as psychologist (30%) or social worker (10%). They reported their mean number of years in practice as 14.85 ($SD = 9.17$), with an average of 6.1 years as a clinical supervisor ($SD = 6.61$), and with a range from 0.3 years to 30 years. They self-reported primarily as White (95%), with one supervisor identifying as African American (5%).

Procedure

The raw data consisted of audiotaped supervision sessions acquired for each of the 20 supervisor–supervisee dyads. The audiotapes were obtained during a 5-month period.

Counseling practicum and internship faculty at 15 universities with counselor education master's programs from nine states were contacted for participation. Initial contacts were made at counseling conferences with follow-up phone calls. Eleven universities participated. Of the 4 remaining universities, 3 declined to participate for reasons of confidentiality and 1 because the students enrolled in practicum and internship did not receive individual on-site supervision. Of the 11 universities that participated, 235 packets containing audiotapes were mailed, and 22 tapes were returned (a return rate of 9.26%). Of the 22 returned tapes, 3 were inaudible and 2 were blank. Therefore there were 17 usable tapes (7.23% of the original mailing). Because sampling the student population did not yield sufficient supervisory pairs, 16 individuals who held master's degrees but were not yet licensed were asked to participate. Of the 16 packets sent, 3 were returned (a return rate of 18.75%), and all 3 were usable.

Supervisees agreeing to participate were given a packet containing a blank audiocassette tape, demographics forms, and consent forms for supervisors and supervisees. Participants were requested to provide an audiotape of a supervision session that occurred after a minimum of three previous sessions. This minimized the impact of introductory sessions and assured that a minimal supervisory relationship had been established (Goodyear, 1990; Schiavone & Jessell, 1988). To meet the criteria, supervisory sessions must have been individual and at least 30 minutes in duration. Audiotapes and forms were returned directly to the

first author, via mail, in a sealed packet. Client confidentiality was respected by analyzing only the process, and not the content, of the audiotaped session, and no client names appeared in transcripts or on the rating forms used in the data analysis.

Measures

The Blumberg Interactional Analysis System (BIA; Blumberg, 1970), modified for use in counseling supervision (Holloway, 1982) was used to analyze the discourse of the supervision sessions. The BIA was originally conceptualized as an instrument for supervisors of teachers to rate their own participation in supervision and to gain insight into their behavior and its effects. Since its original publication, however, it has been used by researchers wishing to use independent raters to analyze the patterns of interaction in the counseling clinical supervisory dyad (Holloway, 1982; Holloway & Wampold, 1983; Holloway & Wolleat, 1981; Rickards, 1984). The BIA records the reciprocal influence of both supervisor and supervisee, rather than using a unidirectional approach.

In 1982, Holloway modified the BIA for use with counselors and their clinical supervisors. She combined several categories and added new ones to allow for the rating of verbal responses that occur in supervision. The modified categories are the following:

1. Supervisor gives supportive communication and praise
2. Supervisor gives or asks for factual information
3. Supervisor asks for opinions or suggestions
4. Supervisor gives opinions or suggestions
5. Supervisor is defensive or critical
6. Supervisee asks for information, opinions, or suggestion
7. Supervisee gives information, opinions, or suggestions
8. Supervisee exhibits positive social-emotional behavior, including self-disclosure or praise
9. Supervisee exhibits negative social-emotional behavior, including defensiveness or tension-producing behavior
10. Silence
11. Playing a tape of the counseling session

In Holloway's 1984 review of the research literature on the instruments used to assess counseling and supervision, she found that the revised BIA scale was the rating scale most frequently used by observers to rate the supervisory session. In studies using the modified BIA, interrater reliability reports range from r = .72 (Holloway & Wampold, 1983), r = .75 (Holloway & Wolleat, 1981), to r = .78 (Holloway, 1982).

To score the revised BIA, the number of responses marked by the raters for each of the 11 categories for each audiocassette tape was totaled. Then for each tape, the number of responses in each category was divided by the total number of responses for that tape to arrive at a proportion of occurrences for each tape for each category. This proportional scoring allowed for comparisons across tapes with different numbers of total responses.

Data Preparation

A transcription was prepared for each audiotape of the minutes 5 through 25, for a total of 20 minutes per tape. This time frame was selected to avoid introductory and concluding social comments, and to avoid variability in the length of scored periods due to the differing lengths of the sessions (Rickards, 1984).

The audiotapes were scored by two doctoral student raters, one male and one female, who were unaware of the nature of the study, and who signed statements assuring confidentiality of the information contained in the audiotapes. The raters were trained together in the use of the revised BIA. At the end of the training session, they had achieved an interrater reliability of .85. The recorded interviews and transcripts were randomly distributed to the two raters, and five tapes were given to both raters to test interrater reliability. The raters were not told which tapes were duplicates. The overall interrater reliability for category discrimination on the five duplicate tapes was .81.

RESULTS

Differences Based on Supervisee Gender

To test whether supervisee gender affected influence strategies, one-tailed t tests were conducted on 5 of the 11 categories of the revised BIA for which hypotheses were developed. Table 1 presents the t values for each of the BIA categories used in this study.

Supervisors differed significantly ($p < .05$) in their treatment of male and female supervisees in revised BIA Category 3. Both male and female supervisors asked for significantly more opinions or suggestions, including requests for analysis or evaluation of counseling or supervision sessions, from male supervisees.

Differences Based on Gender and Length of Relationship

In addition, ANOVAs were performed which used as independent variables supervisee gender and several demographic variables,

TABLE 1

Differences in Influence Strategies by Supervisee Gender as Measured by BIA Categories

Modified BIA Category	Male Supervisee		Female Supervisee		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
1	13.20	7.14	13.03	2.80	.05
3	3.15	2.70	1.29	1.47	1.92*
4	14.04	5.37	13.93	8.23	.04
6	2.07	1.51	2.75	3.54	.56
7	30.86	10.63	33.51	13.66	.48

Note. For male supervisees, $n = 10$; for female supervisees, $n = 10$; for each category, $df = 18$.
*$p < .05$.

including supervisor gender, theoretical orientation, supervisor experience level, and length of time the supervisor and supervisee have worked together. Only one of these, length of the supervisory relationship, interacted with supervisee gender to significantly affect the influence strategies used, with three BIA categories yielding significantly different results for male and female supervisees over time. The first significant interaction was for Category 4, with supervisors giving significantly different amounts of opinions or suggestions to male and female supervisees at different times in the supervisory relationship, $F(2,14) = 4.74$, $p < .05$. Among dyads with male students, those who had been in supervisory relationships for more than a year were given significantly fewer opinions and suggestions by the supervisor than those in a relationship less than 6 months. Dyads with female students were given significantly more opinions and suggestions by their supervisors in relationships lasting over 1 year than those in relationships lasting less than 6 months. For the second significant interaction, category 6, the data indicate that male and female supervisees asked for opinions and information at different rates, based on the length of the supervisory relationship, $F(2,14) = 5.23$, $p < .05$. The percentage of responses of male students asking for opinions and information remained relatively stable over time with no significant differences based on length of relationship. Female students in relationships lasting 6 months to a year asked for significantly more opinions and information than those in relationships lasting less than 6 months. Female students in relationships lasting more than one year asked for significantly fewer opinions and suggestions than those in relationships lasting between 6 months and 1 year. For the third significant interaction,

category 7, the data indicate that male and female supervisees give information and suggestions at different rates, based on the length of the supervisory relationship, $F(2,14) = 4.37$, $p < .05$. Male students in relationships lasting longer than 1 year gave significantly more opinions than those in relationships lasting less than 6 months. Female students in relationships lasting longer than 1 year gave significantly fewer opinions than those in relationships lasting less than 6 months.

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that supervisors in this study asked for significantly more opinions and suggestions from male supervisees than from female supervisees. On average, male supervisees were asked for their opinions more than twice as often as female supervisees. This is consistent with the findings of other research (Kraft, 1991; Nelson & Holloway, 1990).

Male supervisees in longer supervisory relationships found that they were told what to do by their supervisors less often, and were able to voice their own opinions and suggestions more often. Female supervisees in longer supervisory relationships, on the other hand, were told what to do by their supervisors more often, and were able to generate their own responses less often than were male supervisees. Although these results must be interpreted with caution, they do raise the question of whether the developmental models of supervision can be applied equally to male and female supervisees. The experiences of the male supervisees seemed to mirror the developmental models. With less external direction given over time, the male supervisees were encouraged to develop healthy internal supervisors by making more decisions on their own. Female supervisees, however, did not follow the path suggested by the developmental models of supervision. For the female supervisees in this study, either the developmental models were inappropriate, or the experiences provided the female supervisees did not allow for their natural development to occur.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations may have significantly influenced the results. The first of these is small sample size. A sample size of 20 dyads required an effect size of .60 to retain a power of .75 (Borenstein & Cohen, 1988). The small sample size was the result of a very low return rate, despite the fact that collection of the audiotapes continued for five months, repeated phone calls and mailings were made, and a cash incentive was offered for participation. Another

limitation of the study is that the participants were self-selected, and it is not clear what characteristics distinguished participants from nonparticipants. Finally, some researchers have claimed that gender effect alone is not sufficient to accurately predict behavior. Sex role orientation has been suggested as a confounding variable (Fong & Borders, 1985). In general, findings related to sex-role orientation are mixed, and it has been suggested that the construct of sex role orientation has not been adequately defined to allow a clear exploration of this variable (Cook, 1985; Nelson, 1989).

Implications for Supervisors and Educators

The current study raises questions regarding the experiences of male and female supervisees in clinical supervision. The results of some of the statistical analyses support the idea that male and female supervisees may have differing experiences, whereas other analyses indicate that there are no differences based on gender. Given the significant results, several tentative implications can be drawn. Due to the limitations, this must be done with caution, and they must be validated through further research.

The supervisor has the primary responsibility to address issues affecting the supervisory relationship (Hartman & Brieger, 1992; Nadelson, Belitsky, Seeman, & Ablow, 1994). The power in the dyad inherently belongs to the supervisor, and the supervisor has the ethical responsibility to provide a climate which will enhance the supervisee's skills (AACD, 1990; Holloway, 1992). The results of this research indicate that the rhetorical strategies used for male and female supervisees, at least for the participants in this study, were not always equal.

Changing supervisor behavior, however, may not be sufficient. Although the responsibility for creating a growth-promoting environment belongs to the supervisor, the findings of the significant interactions in this study suggest that the use of influence attempts is reciprocal. Supervision is not the didactic disbursement of information. Responses by supervisors affect responses by supervisees, and vice versa. This would indicate that supervisors must be sensitive to the effects that they have upon their supervisees, and conversely, how their supervisees affect them. In the training of supervisors, it is not sufficient for supervisors to address only their own gender-based biases. Awareness of how the interactional patterns of those they supervise can generate differing responses could also be included in training. Supervisors-in-training might engage in role playing in which supervisees attempt to assume or to defer their power. Supervisors could gain an understanding of their own reactions to these supervisee behaviors and practice several responses.

The finding that supervisors ask for more opinions or suggestions from male supervisees could be addressed in the training of supervisors. Awareness of this tendency may assist supervisors in developing a conscious plan to encourage female supervisees to offer opinions and suggestions. Blumberg (1970) recommended that supervisors make audiotapes of their own supervision and play them back in order to further their understanding of the use of their influence strategies. The concept of taping and analyzing a session is already familiar to supervisors (Kagan's Interpersonal Process Recall [IPR] model, Kagan, 1976), and only needs to be expanded to include the supervisory session. This strategy may help supervisors in moderating the effects of their gender biases.

Finally, the demographic data from this study indicate that one-half of the supervisors had received formal training, with 20% of the respondents stating they had been trained through course work and 30% indicating they had received training through a workshop. This suggests that even if large gender differences were found in the supervisory session, including such information in the formal training of supervisors would not be sufficient to reach the majority of supervisors.

The findings of this research, although tentative, raise some serious questions about the supervisory experiences of male and female supervisees. Although the counseling profession adheres to developmental models of supervision, male and female supervisees may not be given the same opportunities to develop into independent practitioners. In this study, supervisors of both sexes did not enhance the developmental potential of female supervisees at the same level they did for male supervisees. Although more research must be conducted to validate these findings, this study can bring the issue of the development of female counselors to the forefront and remind counseling educators and supervisors to attend to their unintentional gender biases and to find ways to enhance female supervisee development.

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