Relational Themes in Counselling Supervision: Broadening and Narrowing Processes

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the experiences of broadening (i.e., thinking and acting creatively and being open to exploring new ways of being) and narrowing (i.e., the experience of perceiving one's choices as limited) in the supervisory process with the aim of identifying key relational themes from the perspective of supervisees. We interviewed 10 novice counsellors using a semi-structured interview protocol in order to understand their perceptions of broadening and narrowing processes during their Master's-level internships. Interviews were analyzed using a variation of the consensual qualitative research method (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Three relational themes were abstracted: (a) the use of power, (b) the balance between challenge and support, and (c) the implementation of structure in the supervision. The findings have implications for counselling supervision practices as well as counsellor education.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude porte sur les expériences « d'élargissement » (en anglais, « broadening », i.e., le fait de penser et d'agir de façon créative, et d'être ouvert à l'exploration de nouvelles manières d'être) et de « rétrécissement » (en anglais, « narrowing », i.e., l'expérience de percevoir ses choix comme étant limités) dans le processus de supervision clinique. L'objectif était d'identifier les principaux thèmes relationnels du point de vue des individus supervisés. À cette fin, nous avons eu des entretiens semi-dirigés avec 10 conseillers et conseillères-novices au cours de leurs stages de deuxième cycle. Les entrevues ont été analysées au moyen d'une approche inspirée de la méthode qualitative consensuelle de Hill, Thompson, et Williams (1997). Trois principaux thèmes relationnels ont été découverts : (a) l'utilisation du pouvoir, (b) l'équilibre entre les défis et le soutien, et (c) l'application d'éléments structurels dans la relation de supervision. Les résultats ont des répercussions sur la formation et la supervision des conseillers et conseillères.

Supervision is considered central to the professional development of counsellors (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001), and it appears that positive supervisory experiences have long-lasting effects on counsellors (Orlinsky, Botermans, & Rønnestad, 2001). Although a robust literature on supervision exists in the mental health professions (Goodyear & Guzzardo, 2000), there is a need for more empirical evidence that supports supervision process interventions. In this study we explored broadening (i.e., thinking and acting creatively and being open to exploring new ways of being) and narrowing (i.e., the experience of perceiving one's choices as limited) processes from the perspective of the supervisees with the aim of identifying key relational themes that foster excitement and growth in supervision.

A strong supervisory relationship is the *sine qua non* of effective counselling supervision (Holloway, 1992; Muse-Burke, Ladany, & Deck, 2001). It is the vehicle by which skills, competence, and a sense of professional identity are developed. The supervisory relationship itself is a core element in the professional development of counsellors (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). However, the lack of a concise definition of "supervisory relationship" (Watkins, 1997) makes it difficult to draw more sophisticated links between the elements found in supervision and the consequences thereof. The scarce links established between supervision processes and outcomes leaves supervisors to base their operating assumptions on intuitive rather than empirical grounds. These assumptions include (a) a parallel process exists between supervision and psychotherapy, (b) accumulated experience as a practitioner qualifies a supervisor *ipso facto,* and (c) novice counsellors require a highly structured and didactic form of supervision (cf. Bernard & Goodyear, 2004; McCarthy, DeBell, Kanuha, & McLeod, 1988).

The longstanding assumption that good counsellors are good supervisors *ipso facto* is problematic; supervision is increasingly being considered distinct from the practice of counselling or psychotherapy (Scott, Ingram, Vitanza, & Smith, 2000). There are some critical functions of the supervisory relationship that have an important impact on relational dynamics; that is, the evaluative and didactic components of supervision, the gate-keeping function of the supervisor for entry into the profession, and the sometimes involuntary participation of the supervisee. Hess (1997) concludes that to conduct supervision as if it were psychotherapy is a violation of the learning contract and may damage the trust that is at the core of this relationship. Hess suggests that this is a form of malpractice and that it may occur because of a lack of formal training in supervision. In other words, without formal training in providing supervision, supervisors tend to adopt the role of psychotherapist with their supervisees because this is a familiar role for them.

Because few supervisors receive supervision training, it is usual for them to rely on their own experiences, good and bad, to guide them. For instance, in a national survey of Canadian supervisors, Johnson and Stewart (2000) found that almost two thirds of respondents received no formal training in clinical supervision. Indeed, experience alone is commonly held as the criterion for becoming a supervisor. Bernard and Goodyear (2004) report that between 85% and 95% of counsellors who have 15 years or more of experience are called upon to engage in supervisory activities. These expert clinicians are understood to be ready to guide novice counsellors in their development. However, relying solely on clinical *savoir faire* to supervise another counsellor may lead to supervisory experiences that are of little use to trainees and, more often than not, to experiences that may ultimately be damaging (Ladany, 2004).

Understanding what constitutes developmentally relevant supervision processes is another challenge for supervisors. While novice counsellors have traditionally been portrayed as highly anxious and needing structured guidance (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1981; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992; Stoltenburg, 1981), the relationships between professional immaturity, anxi-

ety, and the need for directive supervision with a concrete, specific focus are not consistently upheld (Ladany, 2004). Recently, some serious challenges have been levelled against the long-held belief that novices are anxiety-prone and insecure as depicted in many models of counsellor development and that a structured, top-down supervisory approach is the remedy. Goodyear, Wertheimer, Cypers, and Rosemond (2003) cast doubt on the intuitive and deeply ingrained belief in the prominence of anxiety during training and development. They cite several studies (see Chapin & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, Krengel, & Beck, 2002) that explored the link between anxiety and experience and concluded that "it just ain't there as delineated in supervisory theory and literature" (Goodyear et al., p. 72). They propose that the construct of anxiety in counselling trainees needs to be further explored. Barrett and Barber (2005) report than many negative supervisory experiences result from inattention to individual variability in maturation among trainees because developmental models of supervision have consistently failed to make direct links between personal and professional development. Assuming that beginning trainees need highly structured and didactic training and that more experienced trainees benefit most from an open-ended style is, according to Ladany, misguided. While this dichotomous style may be useful in some instances, the undifferentiated way that it is recommended for trainees does not reflect the complexity of the individual trainee's supervisory needs. Counsellor development does not necessarily follow a neat and linear path (Jevne, Sawatzky, & Paré, 2004).

Clearly, a supervisory relationship that is rigidly modelled on the counselling relationship, that is unexamined in this new relational context, and that is not individualized is not optimal. The supervisor's role is adapted neither to the context nor to the specific needs of the supervisee. The cookie-cutter approach to providing supervision is not supported by research that examines helpfulness from the trainee's perspective. Instead, the optimal approach is a combination of supervisory styles and flexibility in the roles adopted by the supervisor. These roles are alternatively labelled as teacher, counsellor, colleague (Bernard, 1979), and consultant, as opposed to active trainer (Bradley & Kottler, 2001). The supervisory style of a consultant involves shared learning, while the active trainer style entails the supervisor carrying most of the responsibility with the flow of information being unidirectional from supervisor to supervisee. The necessity to selectively alternate between these supervisory styles is based on a complex set of factors that are not yet fully understood. Perhaps this confusion and lack of enlightened guidance contributes to supervisors adopting counterproductive styles. Indeed, the supervisory relationship itself may contribute to trainee vulnerability and anxiety (Goodyear et al., 2003). Holloway (1987) argues that the anxiety created by being in an intensive, ongoing, and demanding relationship may supersede the anxiety that is intrinsic to becoming a counsellor. Ostensibly, this anxiety would be compounded by a supervisory style that is neither adapted to the trainees' functioning nor sensitive to their personal ways of being.

A study of counterproductive events conducted by Gray, Ladany, Walker, and Ancis (2001) underscored the deleterious effects that occur when supervisors lack empathy and dismiss their supervisees' thoughts and feelings in the process of

supervision. When 13 counsellors were asked to discuss counterproductive events in supervision, they typically reported that feeling dismissed by their supervisors was a significant impediment to supervision. Specific consequences of this type of counterproductive event included trainees becoming more vigilant and self-protective and less open and committed to supervision. They invariably became distant and mistrustful of the supervisory process, and the supervisory alliance was ruptured. The authors warned that an outcome of adopting this style is a decline in learning gains and diminished counsellor growth.

Conversely, studies depicting "good" supervisory events tend to corroborate the centrality and critical nature of Rogerian conditions in supervision relationships. Worthen and McNeill (1996) reported that the pivotal nature of the quality of the supervisory relationship was clearly evident in all cases reviewed in their study. The supportive aspects of the relationship that had an impact on trainees included affirmation, empathy, and a non-judgemental stance. When these conditions were present, trainees were freed from a hindering sense of inadequacy. This "'freeing' facilitates reduced self-protectiveness and increased receptivity to supervisor input" (Worthen & McNeill, p. 28). Hence, the trainee is more likely to reach the main goals of supervision within the context of a supportive supervisory relationship: the learning and acquisition of counselling skills and the development of a solid counsellor identity (cf. Chen & Bernstein, 2000; Emerson, 1996; Hahn, 2001; Ladany, 2004; Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998).

In the present study, we sought to understand supervisees' experiences of growth-enhancing elements of the supervisory relationship. We believe that the concepts of broadening and narrowing provide useful heuristics that allow supervisees to discuss their experiences of supervision.

Broadening (Fredrickson, 2000, 2001) captures the experiencing of positive emotions. Fredrickson suggests that experiencing positive emotions broadens our thought-action repertoire and increases our resourcefulness, resulting in greater flexibility, enhanced creativity, and unusual thinking (Fredrickson, 2000, p. 2). The experiencing of positive emotions facilitates a person's ability to formulate positive meanings, to act in positive ways (Myers, 2000), and to act to undo the effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2001).

Narrowing is defined in contrast to broadening and results in a person's array of options being reduced. Although it is a constricting process, narrowing is sometimes crucial to structuring and containing experiences. For instance, when counsellors assess clients as being high risks for suicide, it may be more appropriate to think in terms of a short list of appropriate interventions aimed at removing the person from a high-risk situation. Once the person is out of danger, broadening may be helpful in exploring creative, different, and exciting new ways of being in a given situation. Thus, broadening and narrowing are not mutually exclusive concepts; although narrowing may have negative connotations, it is beneficial because it introduces a safe structure in an otherwise ambiguous undertaking (Rathunde, 2000).

Together, broadening and narrowing may help to conceptualize the experiences of the supervisee in the process of supervision. That is, they reflect growth, excitement, and discovery on the one hand, and a sometimes sought-after structure

and safety on the other. This study explored novice counsellors' perceptions of broadening and narrowing in their supervision. Our research questions were (a) What relational conditions do counsellors-in-training identify as contributing to broadening in their counselling supervision? and (b) What relational conditions do counsellors-in-training identify as contributing to their experience of narrowing in counselling supervision?

<div align="center">METHOD</div>

A variation of the consensual qualitative research (CQR) method developed by Hill et al. (1997) was chosen because it (a) can succinctly present large amounts of data, (b) allows for the examination of distinct categories of interest, and (c) allows categories to be easily charted and described across cases (Hill et al.). The CQR method is similar to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory in that it is inductive and it uses the constant comparison approach. In contrast to grounded theory, CQR uses a consensus approach whereby judges independently code transcripts and then meet to discuss emerging themes until they reach consensus. Auditors then verify the fit between the labels and the transcripts. Using multiple judges and auditors introduces several points of view regarding every clinical judgement and therefore reduces the potential biases of a single perspective (Hill et al.).

Participants

The participants were 10 graduate students (9 women and 1 man) in a counselling program at a large Canadian university who had successfully completed their required internships and had completed all requirements for their master's degree in counselling. Their ages ranged from 24 to 47 ($M = 35.8$, $SD = 9.4$).

Clinical Judges and Auditors

Four judges, all women, were divided into two dyads. All four judges were graduate students in a counselling program at a large Canadian university. The auditors were experienced counsellors with over 10 years of experience. Judges were responsible for generating qualitative descriptions of categories. Judges were trained in the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997) for several weeks prior to analyzing data from the current study. Two dyads were formed, and they audited each other's core ideas during consensus meetings. That is, each dyad initially coded different transcripts followed by a consensus meeting with the first author and other dyad present. The first author served as the primary auditor and led all consensus meetings, which resulted in lists of core ideas being generated. The lists were presented to a second auditor (the second author) to verify whether the core ideas accurately reflected the data. Core ideas were clustered to form categories. When consensus on the domains and categories was reached, the resulting scheme was analyzed for higher-order themes, which were once again audited by the first author.

Procedure

All participants signed an informed consent form, which included a statement of ethics approval of the study as well as the goals of the research. Participants

were given definitions of broadening and narrowing and asked whether they experienced these in their internship supervision and to describe these processes as they understood them. Interviewees were asked to discuss their actions and feelings during, and subsequent to, broadening and narrowing episodes. Interviews, which were semi-structured, were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed. The average interview length was about an hour.

In the first analysis, we followed the general CQR method outlined by Hill et al. (1997) and made some modifications by adding a second auditor to ensure that the categories were reflective of the raw data. Judges were given the tapes and transcripts of the interviews. Each dyad of judges was given one interview (audiotape, transcript) at a time and asked to describe the segment in as much detail as possible. Each question initially served the role of a *domain*, an overarching theme that encompasses several core ideas. *Core ideas* are succinct terms or phrases that capture the essence of the answers to the research questions. The judges worked individually on the questions, and then all four judges met with the first auditor to discuss the results in a consensus meeting. The consensus meetings were used to generate core ideas. All material summarized by the primary auditor (the first author) was discussed by the research team (all four judges) until consensus was reached for the core ideas. Once the core ideas were outlined within each domain, the primary investigator charted the data and presented them to an auditor (the second author), who ensured that the core ideas were reflective of the raw data. Data collection and analysis was an iterative process, as the charted data were refined continually as new categories (which were clusters of core ideas) emerged.

Once a final set of domains and categories was negotiated, the second author conducted a re-analysis of the data in order to extract major themes that were considered to be present at a higher level of abstraction. The themes encompassed and collapsed the categories into interpretive conclusions about the relational dynamics involved in broadening and narrowing as perceived by the supervisees. These themes were then audited by the first author and a conclusive set was drawn up to reflect the consensus reached by the two authors.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

Our findings indicate that there were three principal relational themes along a broadening–narrowing continuum that supervisees experienced in supervision. These themes are: (a) power differential, (b) challenge and support, and (c) process focus. Table 1 summarizes the relational processes for each of the three main themes, including the contributions of the supervisors and supervisees, as well as the risks and opportunities connected to each of these themes.

Power Equality vs. Power Differential

When supervisees experienced a power differential in the relationship, they frequently became inauthentic as a result. What created the perceived inequality in the distribution of power? Partly, this imbalance was perceived as being inherent in the ascribed roles. Supervisors have an evaluative function, and counsellors-in-training were aware that they are naturally in a subordinate position; they were

Table 1
Supervisee Perceived Relational Processes

Theme	Relational processes	Supervisor contributions	Supervisee contributions	Risk/opportunity	Supervisee experience
1. Power	1a) Accentuate power differential	Evaluative role; expert stance	Need to please; self-preservation; subordinate/learner	Inauthentic behaviour; disengagement; diminished trust	Narrowing
	1b) Promote egalitarian relationship	Seek supervisee input; transparent; embrace supervisee's input	Open to feedback; receptive to constructive criticism; active engagement	Increased self-efficacy; increased engagement in supervision	Broadening
2. Challenge	2a) Diminish supervisee contribution / knowledge	See supervisee as "blank slate"; not considering developmental needs	Resignation; feeling of disrespect	Anxiety; rejection of supervision as a whole	Narrowing
	2b) Challenge supervisee but reassure	Assuage supervisee FOI; contextualize; respectful of supervisee	Assertive; express needs	Energy invested in client and improvement of process rather than defending self	Broadening
3. Structure	3a) Imposed structure: procrustean bed; content-focused	Boundaries not respected or negotiated; adopt "teacher" role	Passive student role; suffer in silence	Self-blaming; resist supervision; insecurity; role confusion	Narrowing
	3b) Co-structuring; developmental; process-focused	Supervisee development focus; value contribution of supervisee; consultation	"Risk" input; balance between learning from supervisor and expressing opinions	Sense of mutual respect and working toward common goal	Broadening

not remunerated and felt dependent on others for guidance, knowledge, and case assignations. This *one-down* feeling was compounded when supervisors were perceived as not being sensitive to the individual styles of the supervisees and were seen as adopting an expert stance. When supervisors communicated that "it's my way or the highway" and imposed theoretical imperatives, supervisees often responded by playing along. Although they may have been torn between allegiances to self and wanting to be real, they also wanted to please, needed approbation, and feared reprimand. Often supervisees chose self-protection over self-affirmation, and they pretended to agree.

Acquiescence led to disengagement because the supervisees experienced a sense of constriction. Although they may have opted to maintain a position of relative safety by not struggling against a supervisor's impositions, the resulting experience of inauthenticity was uncomfortable. Accommodating and placating created dissonance that eventually resurfaced and was manifested by a need for unofficial supervision (i.e., triangulation), and supervisees secretly followed their own path in counselling with clients.

For this group of participants, supervisee incongruence contributed negatively to the supervision process and they experienced a sense of detachment and lack of trust. Learning was compromised as the learners became resistant and resentful. They reported this experience as a sense of narrowing, and they believed that they were no longer free to explore options or to evolve from within their own preferred models of change. Two participants provided the following perspectives on their narrowing experiences:

> *Participant:* There's a feeling of restriction, there's a feeling of tightness, there's anger … I internalized … I'm needing to fit in this box that she is creating for me, and so I try to, that's my, I try to fit into it … so that's what I do in a [supervision] session with her and then I leave and I'm frustrated and my actions are I end up doing what's true to me. But I'm feeling incongruent because I'm telling her I'm doing this but I'm really not.

> *Participant:* I just didn't conceptualize it the same way that she did … she would put everything in compartments and I would look at it more holistically … I just couldn't do it with clients … My supervisor had a need to have power over people … she wanted me to go to her for advice and direction and she wanted to be a role model and mentor … she was imposing on me … it was like the "mini me" syndrome.

Conversely, supervisees reported thriving in relationships that they considered egalitarian and invested themselves therein. What made a relationship seem egalitarian to supervisees? In general, it was when supervisees perceived that their opinions were sought, valued, and retained when appropriate and when they felt validated and respected. A perceived sense of reciprocity in exchanges resulted when supervisees judged that supervisors were also benefiting from discussions and seeking their input. When supervisee strengths were brought to bear on cases and contributions to supervisor growth acknowledged, supervisees felt that development was a shared quest, and they thrived on that mutuality.

Supervisees who judged their supervisory relationships as being egalitarian typically responded by being receptive to feedback and criticism and declared increases in self-efficacy. Their investment in supervision was experienced as more

profound; they reported feeling committed to the supervisor and to supervision in general, and they often modelled supervisor behaviours. This secure and meaningful attachment to the supervisor and supervisory process propelled them toward growth-enhancing activities such as more reading, consulting, and feeling more confident in taking therapeutic risks. In other words, the counsellors-in-training seemed to make a direct link between egalitarianism and broadening in supervision. One participant provided her perspective on her broadening experiences: "I felt relief, respected, held, I know that's not a feeling word but I felt cared for. I thought I was cared for … I felt very present … I was more engaged … I wasn't shut down anymore … it was an experiential shift for me … the whole experience of feeling a transformation if you will."

Challenge and Support

The second relational dimension of consequence for narrowing and broadening was challenge and support. Supervisees seemed to have idiosyncratic and multiply determined needs for unique combinations of challenging and supportive manoeuvres on the part of their supervisors. When supervisors merely pointed out what could have been improved, supervisees perceived the supervisors as disqualifying their acquired and inherent capacities as helpers. While supervisees welcomed feedback that challenged them to stretch beyond their acquired understandings and technical repertoires, it was better received when delivered in a manner that seemed to reach the individual's need for recognition and self-enhancement. Supervisees felt deflated when feedback was judged as critical and not supportive. What contributed to the supervisees' experiences of being diminished? Our participants described relational dynamics where neither their prior experiences nor their individual strengths were recognized. In some instances, counsellor development was understood to *begin* with internship and was not recognized as a continuation of ongoing professional growth processes (i.e., supervisee as a blank slate).

How did supervisees respond when challenges were levied in the absence of validation? Counsellors-in-training described their sense of self being threatened and compartmentalized as a result of the lack of acknowledgement of prior developmental processes. At times, they felt defensive and needed to justify their own preferences for how they conducted themselves while counselling. They sometimes rejected their supervisors' advice as foreign and incompatible with their needs, but they did so regretfully. Situations where trainees felt disqualified by a perceived lack of recognition were relatively frequent and were easily identified by trainees as leading to narrowing. The impact on process was frequently one of arresting the momentum because some energy became invested in recuperating from a state of immobilization and discouragement. The urge to seek creative solutions and expand understanding was tempered by a need to recoil and tend to "wounds" incurred by the perceived lack of support, which was interpreted as disapproval. One participant recounted that, after she was harshly criticized in a group-format supervision, "The next supervision, I didn't bring up anything even though I should have … I was pretty sad and I was feeling 'is this the right place for me?' You know? Should I be here 'cause everyone here is so good and so …

at first I had thought I was doing okay and I was so excited 'cause it was the first case I brought to supervision." However, after feeling criticized she reported, "I was like 'bad idea,' I was never talking again … I probably looked pretty crushed and I was probably trying to make myself as small as possible so nobody noticed me … my confidence level went down quite a bit."

Conversely, when supervisees were invited to use consolidated gains as scaffolding for further developments, a more constructive dynamic was generated in supervision. This broadening experience was predicated on the supervisees' need to be at once challenged and reassured. What were considered to be challenging and reassuring moments in supervision? Supervisees valued interventions that invited them to think beyond their usual theoretical and technical repertoire, but these challenges needed to occur in the context of a soothing exchange where the supervisees' contributions were clearly recognized.

When supervisors recognized different needs for enhancement and support that the supervisees brought to the table and formulated their feedback to build on strengths, the result was a broadening experience. How did supervisees respond when they were at once praised and challenged? Supervisees reported feeling relief when supervisors praised them or gave them credit for their work. This sense of relief liberated the supervisees from handicapping self-consciousness and allowed them to become more creative, more flexible, and less defensive. Supervisees reported feeling free to focus on reaching their goals. One supervisee reported that her accomplishments with difficult clients were a result of a supportive supervisor. She stated

> That's certainly something I wouldn't have done without her direct encouragement … just having that ongoing support made me do a good job … to contribute to the client's experience … She encouraged me … she helped me to generate a lot of alternatives and [gave me] a lot of positive reinforcement. I know I sound silly but just being told that I was doing a good job and that things seemed to be working out and that I was doing an adequate job as a counsellor … it was just amazing.

When the sense of courage to engage in the supervisory relationship was unhindered by a "not-good-enough" vulnerability, the supervisees were able to entertain other perspectives because they were not caught up in defending their own positions. They perceived their supervisors as contributing to their growth rather than judging their worth. They experienced the supervisor as warm and caring, and they used this secure base as a springboard toward new ways of practicing; their knowledge and experience was thus expanded. One supervisee commented on the importance of being validated:

> I think you need to have someone who is very flexible … very willing to listen to your opinion and not treat you as a student … even though you are a student you're able to contribute to the supervision hour. Having a supervisor who is willing to take what you've done and expand on it as opposed to reducing it.

Structure

The components subsumed within the construct of relational structure compose the third thematic domain of our study: nature and degree of engagement, roles, and boundaries. Participants were readily able to identify the elements of

the structure of the supervisory relationship that they felt were conducive to both growth-enhancing and growth-arresting relational dynamics. Supervisees reported experiencing uncomfortable narrowing processes when they perceived a lack of commitment by their supervisors. Supervisees reported that they could sense their supervisors' reticence and lack of engagement, and, hence, felt like a burden to them. They struggled with having to chase down their supervisors and with not being granted sufficient time during supervision.

Other sensitive issues that affected the supervisees included (a) a lack of clearly established expectations in supervision, (b) interpersonal boundaries that were nonnegotiable, and (c) role confusion that remained unaddressed. The common element in these structural components of the relationship was the sense that the supervisory style and focus were *imposed* and that the supervisee was expected to fit into a pre-existing mould. At times the focus was uniquely on the clients at the expense of the counsellors' developmental needs. When supervisees felt like they were being forced into a "procrustean bed" (i.e., they felt a pressure to adopt their supervisors' approach to working with clients), their perceived alliances with their supervisors fluctuated and the unspoken supervisory blunders became barriers to respect. As a result, counsellors described resisting supervision, and the resulting inertia contributed to narrowing. While supervisees were able to recognize areas of difficulty and assumed part of the responsibility, they were not proactive in negotiating the frame with supervisors. Indeed, many of the violations that the supervisees perceived were never addressed; supervisees suffered in silence.

In this example, the counsellor-in-training felt narrowed because of her supervisor's use of theory to conceptualize her clients:

> He would always answer my questions based on theory. So, he would say, "According to narrative therapy I think that …" and he would go off on all this theory talk that I could never wrap my brain around and I could never understand. And I explained to him quite a few times that I just don't understand theories and they don't really make sense to me. I want concrete examples … I found that really narrowing, like I never knew what to do or how to approach the client after that because he didn't really give me any creative stuff to work with … In his mind everything is based on theory … It was never helpful to me.

This supervisee held back issues as a result. "I didn't really want to bring up issues in supervision because I knew that my questions wouldn't be answered the way I wanted them to be and I knew that he wouldn't answer them helpfully."

Supervisees imagined making the unspoken spoken when envisioning attempts to resolve supervisory impasses. They harboured fantasies about having frank discussions about their needs, setting clear boundaries, delineating and defining roles and responsibilities, and being honest about levels of mutual engagement. While they wanted open negotiations around relationship processes, overall they seemed to wait for the supervisors to broach these topics. Few participants felt comfortable initiating the shift toward co-structuring. One supervisee related an experience with her supervisor in which she took the initiative to structure her supervisory relationship and reported that being proactive contributed to a broadening experience. She stated, "I don't want to take all the credit for it, but I think a lot of it had to do with myself being more directive in what I want or

what I need. So, open communication … not being afraid to ask questions, being committed … I think that helps."

<div align="center">DISCUSSION</div>

We interviewed 10 novice counsellors who recently completed their master's degrees in counselling and asked them about their experiences of broadening and narrowing during their internship supervision with the aim of understanding relational processes from the supervisee's perspective. Three relational themes emerged, each with the potential for broadening and narrowing: (a) the perception of how power is distributed, (b) the balance between being challenged and feeling supported, and (c) the structuring of the process of supervision. For each of these themes, both the supervisor and the supervisee contributed to the overall experience of broadening or narrowing.

The supervisory relationship was perceived by the supervisee as narrowing when the supervisor was seen as using a cookie-cutter approach. Supervisees experienced narrowing when they perceived that (a) the feedback was overly critical without being contextualized, (b) the theoretical stance of the supervisor was inflexible, and (c) they were indiscriminately treated as apprentices. More often than not, when supervisors wielded their power to communicate the message that "it's my way or the highway" and treated their supervisees as blank slates, the result was potentially harmful to the counsellors-in-training. In these circumstances, supervisees reported feeling anxious about supervision, felt disingenuous, withheld information from their supervisors, and sought outside supervision, either from other supervisors or from their peers. This supervisor style was similar to Bradley and Kottler's (2001) concept of the traditional *active trainer-supervisor* where the information and direction flows principally from the supervisor to the counsellor while the counsellor's input remains at a minimum. Clearly, our participants preferred when their supervisors paid particular attention to their needs for validation and self-efficacy, similar to Bradley and Kottler's concept of the *consultant-supervisor*. This supervisory stance seems to allow for synergistic input by both parties and seems to be perceived more positively by supervisees.

When supervisors promoted an egalitarian supervisory experience, challenged the supervisees but validated their contributions, and adopted flexible, process-focused approaches supervisees felt excited and enthusiastic about supervision, experiencing broadening. Supervisees reported that during these moments of broadening they felt more engaged in the process, felt like they could contribute to client change, and felt a genuine sense of mutual respect in supervision. Indeed, this style seems to be more respectful of the relational dynamics specific to the supervisory relationship as well as the needs unique to each supervisee.

Implications for Counsellor Supervisors

Broadening and narrowing may be perceived as dichotomous but they exist on a continuum, and the results suggest that supervisors need to be attentive to

balancing these processes. The anxiety that counsellors-in-training experience can be harnessed and experienced as excitement insofar as the supervisor is in tune with the relational implications. When counsellors feel supported rather than overprotected, the anxiety becomes a motivator, a precursor to learning and growth. It leads to a greater commitment to counselling and supervision, an accrued interest in developing skills, and a profound engagement in the learning process (i.e., they experience broadening). When they experience broadening, they are more likely to express their needs and believe that their contributions are meaningful. This same anxiety may be unproductive when the supervisor is not attentive to individual supervisee needs. In a top-down approach, where the feedback is not perceived as constructive, supervisee anxiety may lead to resignation and a rejection of the supervision process as a whole. Tailoring the supervision process and explicitly engaging in co-structuring may help to individualize the experience of supervision so that it meets the unique learning needs of each supervisee.

Research has shown that even experienced therapists can have profound feelings of incompetence and self-doubt (Theriault & Gazzola, 2006). It is important for supervisors to openly acknowledge feelings of insecurity and self-doubt and to normalize these feelings. The interns' anxieties need to be assuaged, which enables them to rise to challenges. The process of supervision is not inherently neutral; supervisees reported bringing fears about their effectiveness to supervision. When criticisms were not contextualized, these feelings of insecurity were exacerbated to the point of crippling the exchange. While a few supervisees were able to express their needs for validation and praise, most of them remained passive and resigned in the face of criticism. It cannot be emphasized enough that supervisors must give positive feedback to supervisees. In our study, words of encouragement were appreciated by counsellors-in-training, and they were more receptive to criticism when they felt nurtured.

LIMITATIONS

Our findings ought to be viewed in light of supervision with counsellors-in-training. It is possible that after gaining experience, the supervisees would alter their perception of power, vulnerability to criticism, and passivity in structuring the exchange process. In other words, the supervision experience itself may be a silent moderator in the supervisee role induction, thus modifying the objective and subjective experiences of supervision. Also, in some jurisdictions like the United Kingdom, supervision is conceptualized as a life-long process and the respective roles of participants would be perceived differently (see Milne & James, 2000; Milne & Oliver, 2000).

Our study included nine women and one man and, although this is reflective of the sex ratio in the counselling program sampled, a more balanced sample may yield more nuanced themes. We caution against generalizing these findings beyond this group of counsellors-in-training; the themes generated may be of use in guiding future research on supervision. Further, most of the participants

in this study were former students of the first author, and, although he was never their counselling supervisor, this may have had an influence on the responses. We did not perceive the participants as being guarded in any way, but this does not preclude them experiencing an internal urge to provide socially acceptable responses. Finally, we selected the concepts of broadening and narrowing because they appeared to be useful heuristics in describing supervision processes. While we did not present broadening as a "good" process and narrowing as a "bad" one, there may have been a connotative pull toward thinking of them in such a dichotomous way. We agree with Rathunde (2000), who cautions that it may be misleading to place broadening and narrowing along a good and bad continuum and who recognizes the positive effects of narrowing.

CONCLUSION

The concepts of broadening and narrowing were useful heuristics to explore relational processes in counselling supervision. The participants easily grasped these concepts and were enthusiastic in describing how they unfolded in their supervisory experiences. For this group of novice counsellors, three general themes that promoted broadening emerged: (a) having supervisors who negotiated the power differential openly in supervision, (b) having supervisors who provided them with a challenging but safe supervision environment, and (c) having supervisors who invited them to co-structure the supervision process. While these supervisees did experience anxiety in their supervision, being invited to share their views of their clients' change processes helped to foster an exciting and engaging supervisory experience. Our findings are consistent with those of Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003), who describe the dependency and vulnerability experienced by counsellors in early phases of their professional development. Similar to the processes described by Rønnestad and Skovholt, participants in our study reported that the *manner* in which supervisors engaged them was critical. Being provided with positive feedback, having their experiences validated, and engaging in egalitarian relationships helped participants to manage their anxieties and to feel excited about their work as counsellors. Counsellors-in-training in our study wanted to have their voices heard in supervision rather than have direct guidance and advice about how to handle their clients. In order to avoid a cookie-cutter approach by treating all of their supervisees the same, supervisors need to be attuned to their supervisees' needs in supervision in order to find a balance that promotes broadening and uses narrowing effectively.

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