

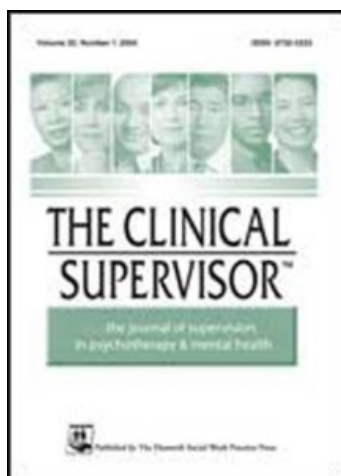
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Field Instructor Perceptions in Group Supervision

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Field Instructor Perceptions in Group Supervision: Establishing Trust Through Managing Group Dynamics

Tamara Sussman
Marion Bogo
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ABSTRACT. Recent studies on group supervision in social work and psychology have begun to build a systematic knowledge base on the benefits and challenges of group supervision from the perspective of students. Missing from the empirical data are supervisor perspectives on group supervision. In an attempt to address this gap, this qualitative exploratory study reports on the experiences of five field instructors who offered group supervision to 20 social work students. Although primarily focused on field instructors' perceptions, students' perspectives are also included especially when the two groups either strikingly paralleled or differed from one another.

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The study findings identified a number of related factors that affect the creation of a productive learning environment including: (1) extra-group factors such as students' previous histories with each other, and varying times for beginning the practicum, (2) managing difficult group member behaviours such as "the non-reflective students," "the consultant, not learner," and those students who cannot take risks, and (3) balancing the intersection of individual supervision and group supervision. From the analysis of the findings, the researchers propose practice principles and future research directions. doi:10.1300/J001v26n01_06 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Field education, group supervision, supervisor perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Group supervision of students in practicum and internships has been used for decades in social work, counseling psychology, psychotherapy, and related human services professions (Boalt Boëthius, Ögren, Sjøvold, & Sundin, 2004; Kadushin, 1985; Pietro, 1996; Riva & Cornish, 1995). Although individual supervision still remains the primary method of field instruction in most clinical education programs, a national American survey on the frequency of use of group supervision in clinical psychology highlighted that 65% of training sites offer group supervision (Riva & Cornish, 1995). A similar Canadian study found that 75% of social work sites offer group supervision (Power, Bogo, & Litvack, 2005). These two national studies suggest that group supervision is currently being used by the majority of practicum sites in psychology and social work. Importantly, these statistics do not distinguish between sites that use group supervision periodically and sites that use group supervision to replace the resource intensive individual supervision model. Therefore, the pervasiveness of group supervision as a primary method of field instruction in clinical programs is less clear.

Despite the fact that group supervision appears prevalent either as a complement or an alternative to individual supervision, the literature on group supervision has been largely conceptual, emphasizing the benefits of this approach particularly in relation to learning from group process.

Although an empirical base is beginning to emerge, most studies are based on the perspectives of students who report both the benefits and challenges of learning in group supervision. Missing from empirical investigations are supervisor perspectives on group supervision, especially in relation to managing group processes. The current study was undertaken to address this gap in the literature through exploring how social work group supervisors identified challenging group dynamics, addressed group process issues, and evaluated the impact of their interventions on group development. These perspectives were examined alongside student perceptions to identify similarities and differences between supervisors and supervisees.

LITERATURE ON GROUP SUPERVISION

Proponents of group supervision promote this approach stating that it can offer students the opportunity to share knowledge, discuss differing perspectives, learn about group dynamics, experiment with new behaviors, recognize the universality of their concerns, and develop more accurate self-appraisals (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Geller, 1994; Gillam, Hayes, & Paisley, 1997; Hayes, Blackman, & Brennan, 2000; Tebb, Manning, & Klaumann, 1996; Wayne & Cohen, 2001).

Despite many benefits described, the empirical literature has also revealed barriers to learning in group supervision. On the one hand, studies have supported some of the benefits articulated in the conceptual literature noted above (Bogo, Globerman, & Sussman 2004a; Christensen & Kline, 2000; Linton, 2003; Linton & Hedstrom, 2006; Riva & Cornish, 1995; Starling & Baker, 2000; Walter & Young, 1999; Werstlein & Borders, 1997). On the other hand, findings have also highlighted obstacles to learning in group supervision. The *content* of group supervision is experienced as an obstacle when supervision is focused on administrative issues rather than clinical issues, when students do not have enough time to review their cases, and when information sharing overshadows reflection and dialogue (Altfeld, 1999; Bogo, Globerman, & Sussman 2004b; Enyedy, Arcinue, Nijhawan, Carter, Goodyear, & Getzelman, 2003; Savickas, Marquart, & Supinski, 1986). The *process* of group supervision inhibits student learning when it is experienced as “individual supervision with an audience,” when supervisors do not help students to process the feedback they receive from other group members, and when students feel overly criticized (Bogo et al., 2004 a,b; Linton & Hedstrom, 2006).

Additionally, some studies comparing students' experiences with individual supervision and group supervision report students' clear preference for individual supervision (Ray & Alterkruse, 2000; Walter & Young, 1999). Specifically, students report greater comfort and less vulnerability in individual supervision than in group supervision, enabling them to address issues of self-awareness in relationships with clients (Walter & Young, 1999). Hence, while study findings support the merits of group supervision, they also highlight that learning may be compromised by group dynamics.

The studies reviewed above report students' perceptions about their group supervision. Missing from the empirical literature are supervisors' perspectives about the benefits and challenges in providing group supervision, especially issues related to managing group process. In fact, while the conceptual and practice literature highlights the importance of paying attention to group process issues, including group development, member interaction, member roles, group communication and "here and now" group issues (e.g., the groups' tendency to focus on superficial issues, the group's tendency to avoid criticizing one another; Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Gillam & Crutchfield, 2001; Gillam et al., 1997), studies exploring supervisors' attempts at utilizing these processes have not been reported to date.

This review of the literature found only three studies on group supervision which included supervisor perspectives (Ögren, Apelman, & Klawitter, 2001; Ögren & Jonsson, 2003; Riva & Cornish, 1995). Only two of these studies explored the content or process of group supervision (Riva & Cornish, 1995; Ögren & Jonsson, 2003). The third asked supervisors and supervisees to rate student skill development after participating in group supervision (Ögren et al., 2001).

In a national survey on group supervision practices in American psychology programs, Riva and Cornish (1995) asked group supervisors to respond to a series of questions about the content, structure, and perceived benefits of group supervision. Supervisors enjoyed offering group supervision and reported similar educational benefits as those articulated in studies of students' perceptions. Respondents reported they spend most of the time in group supervision on case presentations followed by didactic teaching and discussing group process issues.

In a study exploring supervisors' experiences with positive and negative group climates, Örgen et al. (2001) asked ten supervisors to review descriptions of four different group types: the angry group, the disappointed group, the sensible group, and the solidarity group. Supervisors were then asked to identify which group climates they had experienced

and the factors that contributed to the different climates. Of relevance to this review are their findings about the angry and disappointed groups, which included fixed sub-groups and alliances that rivaled one another or group members who did not trust one another. Both climates resulted in group members who presented as guarded or withdrawn in group supervision. Supervisors reported that group composition often contributed to these climates, stating that these groups tended to be heterogeneous with regard to maturity, motivation to learn, and personal qualifications. Further, these groups often included one group member who was insecure, could not trust other group members, had multiple personal problems, or did not see a benefit in group supervision. Another important factor identified by these supervisors was the groups' inability to use supervisors' interventions directed at improving group climate. These findings are paralleled by students' perceptions of obstacles to group supervision. According to student reports, one difficult student can create problems for the group. Further, groups composed of students at very different levels of professional development, who differ in their willingness to engage in critical self-reflection, or who have very divergent styles of giving and receiving feedback can develop distrustful climates which result in students' psychological or actual withdrawal from group supervision (Bogo et al., 2004a; Bogo et al., 2004b; Linton & Hedstrom, 2006; Örgen et al., 2001).

In summary, these few studies suggest that the majority of supervisors offering group supervision value the method and recognize the importance of group climate and group process as primary facilitators or barriers to learning. The studies do not elucidate how supervisors understand and respond to complex group processes. Specifically, studies have not identified how group supervisors recognize and address critical incidents in learning groups, how effective they perceive their strategies to have been, and what factors they perceive contribute to successful supervision groups.

From this review it is apparent that empirical work on group supervision is in an early stage and should include perspectives of both students and supervisors. Hence, following Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research methods are appropriate "to uncover and understand what lies behind phenomena about which little is known" (p. 19). Specifically we aimed in the study reported here to capture the experiences of supervisors and highlight those factors they perceive promote and disrupt student learning. Further, by including student perspectives (fully reported in Bogo et al., 2004a; Bogo et al., 2004b), we can compare similarities and

differences as well as highlight how students experienced the interventions reported by supervisors.

METHOD

This qualitative interview study investigated the experiences of social work field instructors and students in group supervision. The instructors offered group supervision to three or more social work students as the primary method of field instruction. These instructors also provided individual supervision when requested by the student or when deemed necessary by the supervisor, however, individual sessions were not offered on a regular basis.

An exploratory design was chosen to uncover supervisors' perspectives about the benefits and challenges in providing group supervision, especially in relation to managing group process and to explore students' perspectives and experiences in the approach. Following McCracken's (1988) long interview method, a literature review and "cultural review" were conducted prior to the development of an interview guide. The cultural review involved the researchers' reflection and articulation of assumptions and biases about group supervision. The purpose of this process was to prevent inappropriate probes and leading questions when developing the interview guide (McCracken, 1988).

The first author conducted all of the interviews and had no prior relationship with any of the study participants. Her past experience as a field instructor enabled her to "mine the territory" and explore, in depth, the experiences of the study participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McCracken, 1988). The co-authors together had over 15 years of experience as past field practicum coordinators. They were not affiliated with the practicum office when the study took place.

The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2000 after placements were completed for the academic year. The Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto approved this protocol and the timing of sample recruitment to ensure student participants had already successfully completed their placements and could be assured that their comments would not impact upon their practicum grade. Consequently, both students and supervisors in this study were providing retrospective accounts of their supervision groups.

All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using McCracken's (1988) five stage method of analysis. In the first stage, each transcript was examined for ideas or observations that were treated

independent of one another. In the second stage, these initial observations were examined, and the researchers attempted to determine their meaning based upon the literature, their own knowledge of field supervision, and other evidence included in the transcript. At this stage, observations were developed into preliminary descriptive and interpretive categories. In the third stage, the researchers considered these preliminary codes to identify connections and develop pattern codes. In the fourth stage, basic themes were developed by clustering codes together. At this point in the analysis particular attention was given to theme consistency and theme contradiction. For example, trust among students seemed to be an important theme when field instructors spoke about productive learning groups. The concept of trust was explored further at this fourth stage with special attention to how trust was fostered, when it was hindered, how it was seen to enhance learning and when, if at all, it did not play a role in group supervision. Finally, in the fifth stage of analysis, attention was paid to themes that appeared to be group specific and themes that cut across supervision groups. Although divergent opinions and perspectives did emerge between supervisors reporting on different supervision groups, these still revolved around common themes. Thus no “negative cases” were revealed (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

The researchers worked independently and then together at each stage of the data analysis process. Only codes and themes upon which there was 100% agreement were used in the final analysis.

The findings presented in this article are primarily based upon the field instructor data. Extensive analyses of student perspectives are presented elsewhere (Bogo et al., 2004a; Bogo et al., 2004b). However, references to students’ perspectives are included here, especially when the two groups either strikingly paralleled or differed from one another.

SAMPLE

The supervisor sample consisted of five MSW field instructors who offered group supervision as the primary method of field instruction. From a list provided by the practicum office, the researchers first identified groups of three or more students attached to the same field instructor in the academic years 1998-1999 or 1999-2000. Five field instructors were identified as offering group supervision (of 220 field instructors) and all agreed to participate in the research study. Therefore, the five supervisors participating in this study represented the total population

of supervisors offering group supervision as the primary method of field instruction at the time of the study. However, these group supervisors represented a small minority (2.3%) of field instructors affiliated with the university. Without national or international statistics on the prevalence of group supervision as a primary method of field instruction in social work or related disciplines, we cannot compare this prevalence rate to other settings.

All field instructors were Euro-Canadian ranging in age from 38 to 52. These field instructors had an average of 4.4 years of group supervision experience and 10.5 years practice experience. All but one instructor was female. They provided supervision in a range of settings such as an acute care hospital, a mental health clinic, an educational system and a community-based women's advocacy center. These field instructors were supervisors of seven different field instruction groups. Consequently, two of the five supervisors in the study were field instructors to two of the student groups.

The final student sample consisted of 18 MSW students from a total population of 20 students participating in group supervision in the years under study. Most of the students in the sample were Euro-Canadian ($n = 15$) and young adults between ages 23-35 ($n = 17$). There were two Asian-Canadian students, one East Indian Canadian student and one student aged 55. The two students who declined participation did not differ demographically from the majority of student participants. One student felt that she had nothing to contribute, and the other had recently had a child and was unavailable. All of the students in this sample were female.

FINDINGS

Benefits of Group Supervision

The supervisors in this study cited both pragmatic and educational reasons for choosing group supervision as a method of field instruction. Pragmatically, supervisors felt that this method would enable them to take on more students. This seemed important to some who said that having a team of students provided them with "their own little department" in an age of program management. They also felt that the method was a time saver at the orientation stage of placement when they were providing students with a lot of information about the setting. Educationally, all supervisors felt that group supervision enabled students to

learn from each other's cases and different theoretical orientations. Most felt the group environment would encourage students to challenge supervisors more readily and articulate their needs more easily because students acting together would presumably feel more empowered. All supervisors also felt that working as a group would help students develop competency in team work, a skill field instructors are called upon to evaluate.

In contrast, none of the students in this study suggested that they felt more empowered to challenge supervisors in their learning groups. Further, the students who struggled with other group members did not report mastering effective team work skills with their student colleagues as a result. Consequently, two of the educational benefits articulated by the field instructors were not experienced by the students whom they supervised.

The Importance of Trust and Safety in Group Supervision

Most supervisors in this study believed that the educational benefits of group supervision could only be realized when students established the trust and safety they needed to learn from the group experience. As one supervisor said, "setting up this safe place for it, for students not to feel that one is better than the other . . . I think it's challenging to set it up such that sharing in the group is safe. It takes time to build that in." She continued, "the biggest challenge at the beginning is getting the fit to happen and sharing to be safe and people to be comfortable with one another." Strategies supervisors used to encourage safety and trust within the group included allying equally with individual students, providing sensitive feedback in the group forum, highlighting their own clinical errors, and validating different perspectives and approaches. They hoped that these strategies would minimize competition between students and model the appropriate feedback and risk taking necessary for a productive learning group.

The importance of trust and safety also emerged from the student data. Students reported the need for safety within their supervision group to fully engage in group supervision. The techniques they identified as helpful towards this end mirrored those articulated by supervisors. Students seemed particularly reassured when supervisors offered their own practice mistakes and provided strengths based feedback. In these instances, students reported feeling more comfortable talking openly.

Obstacles to Establishing Trust and Safety in Group Supervision

Despite their best efforts, all supervisors in this study reported that some of their learning groups established more trust and safety than others. In fact, two years later, some were still reviewing particular group experiences and wondering how they might have been better handled. Supervisors cited both external and internal obstacles to facilitating successful group trust. The external barriers were factors beyond the field instructors' control and included students entering placements at different times of the academic year, students entering placements with different levels of experience and education, and students entering group supervision from different universities with different approaches to social work practice. When such factors affected the group environment, supervisors worked actively to promote group trust by encouraging discussion of differing perspectives, validating different approaches and stages of learning, and re-working formative stages of group process.

Some supervisors also wondered if students' previous negative histories with one another in university classrooms affected group trust. However, none reported exploring these histories. Further, no supervisor in this study suggested that any of these external barriers were sufficiently damaging to group dynamics to threaten student learning. By contrast, many of the student interviews revealed that past histories and differing competency levels between group members seriously impeded their learning experience. Students who had negative histories with one another, for example, had tremendous difficulty engaging in group supervision. Further, students who found themselves in group supervision with others they viewed as having significantly less professional competence reported feeling frustrated in group supervision and began to feel their commitment to group supervision deteriorate.

The internal factors that supervisors cited as obstacles to the group process reflected group composition and members' behavior. These included, for example, having one student who acted as a "consultant" rather than a "learner" or having one student in the group who could not join the others in risk taking presented complex challenges to supervisors.

Consultant versus Learner

Supervisors described students who could not see themselves as group learners, as always "one upping" other students, never listening, always giving an answer, or always providing a better approach. One

supervisor described her struggle in dealing with this situation by stating that she tried to tell the student within the group that she needed to “listen more” and that she should try not to “fall into her supervisory role from the past.” The supervisor, however, regarded her interventions as largely ineffective and said she saw only minimal shifts with this student.

Another supervisor described a more moderate situation where one student was much more “forceful” and confident than the others in the presentation of her ideas. He said he tried to counterbalance this forcefulness by supporting and reinforcing the other students’ approaches. Eventually this group stopped meeting regularly as students chose assignments in the placement on different days so that they would no longer be available to meet as a group. The supervisor thought that the secession of meetings may have been the best outcome for this group given the nature of the group’s composition and the students’ difficulty changing their interaction patterns despite their supervisor’s interventions.

Effective strategies for managing *consultant* rather than *learner* behaviors were not identified by any supervisors in this study. At best, supervisors felt they saw “minimal shifts.” Even when these “consultants” were somewhat open to learning from others, their forcefulness and confidence in the group setting appeared to scare off more vulnerable students who used avoidance to deal with these student colleagues.

While the supervisors in this study recognized how these dynamics affected learning in the group, they did not recognize the extent to which these dynamics could be damaging to student learning. In students’ interviews, they reported often feeling “angry,” “vulnerable,” and “silenced” by their student colleagues. Particularly damaging were students who gave advice when they should have listened, or who needed to be right all of the time. These students were identified as obstacles to the learning environment and resulted in other students becoming more guarded in group supervision, volunteering less information about their cases and providing less feedback to one another. No students in this study felt that these “consultants” were adequately addressed by their supervisors.

Students Who Were Not Taking Risks

According to the supervisors in this study, students who continued to present their “stellar cases” and who did not reflect upon their own practice in group supervision were not bonding with the group. As one supervisor said “if one doesn’t feel in there [i.e., connected to the group], then one will always in a group context present things that are going

really really well . . . you're not going to have people presenting problems." Some of the strategies supervisors used included modeling risk taking by for example, presenting their own practice mistakes during group discussions. Risk taking activities such as role play were also used because one cannot cover up one's inadequacies as readily in a simulation as one can in a case presentation.

It was clear from the student data that the presence of one student not able to take risks in the group could result in other students "holding back," thereby compromising their own learning. As one student stated,

And so that's why I stopped making myself vulnerable, and I think that, I think ultimately that's how you learn. You make yourself vulnerable and say this is what I'm struggling with and get feedback, but I wasn't able to do that in the placement because I felt like I'm always looking like I'm the student that's struggling, so I'm not going to do that anymore.

Comparing supervisor and student data, both felt that safety and trust were imperative for a cohesive student learning group to develop. Field instructors identified student behaviors that prevented individuals from participating as learners as the most significant obstacle. Students identified the same factors as well as previous negative histories between group members and differing levels of competency. In combination, these factors could create blocks to students taking risks in the group sessions, reflecting upon their own practice in group meetings, or listening empathically to other students. While supervisors recognized these difficulties, they were not privy to the extent to which these dynamics shut down the learning process for some students in these groups.

When Individual and Group Supervision Intersect

All supervisors believed that group supervision could never completely replace individual supervision. Supervisors realized that students were more inclined to reveal vulnerabilities in individual supervision and hence felt it was necessary to offer this opportunity to their students. The vulnerabilities raised ranged from not knowing how to perform an instrumental task to feeling "terrified" about working with clients. All supervisors felt the most appropriate approach to addressing sensitive issues was to offer more intensive individual meetings. They hoped that this additional support would help students continue functioning and learning in group supervision.

However, individual supervision also appeared to be a forum in which students would bring up their struggles related to group supervision. Supervisors in this study differed in their opinions regarding the use of group supervision to facilitate group process. One supervisor tried to discourage any disclosure related to group process in individual supervision while another supervisor welcomed and probed for these issues when offering individual supervision. Inevitably, whether one used individual supervision to “probe for individual satisfactions or dissatisfactions with the group process” or one “stop[s] it very quickly when it starts,” all supervisors faced situations wherein they were provided with information related to group supervision in the context of individual supervision. Some examples of issues were students’ concerns about their colleagues’ practice, students’ frustrations regarding the way other students were communicating in the group, and students’ sense of incompetence in relation to their peers.

Concerns Related to Colleagues’ Practice

One supervisor recounted a time in the past when two students approached her about their concerns regarding the ethical practice of another student. Feeling guilty about their disclosure, they did not want this student to know they had expressed this concern. The supervisor dealt with the situation by addressing the ethical issue as a subject matter for group supervision and mandating all students to bring up their struggles with this issue. She said she now tried to preempt this type of “mini snitching” by telling students at the outset that they should not tell her things about one another that they would not share directly with one another. While the supervisor welcomed the information, to protect the rights of clients serviced by her agency, she did not want to encourage students in a learning group to monitor each other’s work outside of the group meetings. Similarly students involved in these types of situations reported feeling uncomfortable and unsettled because they were “in the know” and their counterparts were not.

Frustrations Regarding Inter-Student Communication

Some students used individual supervision to discuss their negative reactions to other students in the learning group. In these instances, supervisors tried to help students reflect upon how they could continue to work with these individuals or how they could bring these struggles back to the group. Although supervisors reported trying to assist students

to address interpersonal issues in the group, there were no examples of this strategy working successfully.

According to the student interviews, the opportunity to discuss their issues with their supervisors was validating but not sufficient to help them bring issues to the group. Many wished that their supervisors would be more active and initiate this process in the group forum.

Students' Sense of Incompetence in Relation to Peers

In some cases students were defensive and non-reflective in group supervision because they perceived themselves to be less competent than their colleagues. Supervisors identified these issues in individual supervision where students were more inclined to discuss their insecurities. In one case, a student was struggling with her ability to bond with clients. When asked to reflect upon her issues in group supervision, she presented as defensive and non-reflective. However, in individual supervision, she revealed that she was terrified to see clients and felt much less competent than her peers.

Faced with these issues, supervisors spent a great deal of time working with the struggling students individually. However, they did not address the negative group dynamics created by their behavior in group supervision. Students in these learning groups often reported "shutting down," taking fewer risks, and withdrawing from the process altogether because they were experiencing a group member who was defensive, non-reflective, or guarded and whose reactions were not being addressed by their supervisors in group supervision.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this study. First, while representing the total population of field instructors offering group supervision to MSW students in the years under study, the sample size is small. Further, the prevalence of group supervision as a primary method of field instruction represented in this study may significantly differ from other programs. This comparison could not be made because of limitations in the available data. Second, not all supervisors and students in the sample were systematically matched. Because two supervisors in the sample supervised two different student groups, it was not always possible to distinguish when they were referring to one group or another. Further, supervisors who had previous groups not under study would sometimes refer to those groups when discussing critical incidents. Despite this

limitation, many of the incidents reported by supervisors could be linked to incidents recounted by students in this study. Third, in order to ensure that students did not feel threatened to participate in this study, only former MSW students were invited to participate. As a consequence, all student and supervisor comments were retrospective, and direct observations to triangulate the findings could not be made. Finally, the study findings represent supervisor and student perceptions on what helped or hindered student learning. No outcome measures exploring actual learning were utilized. Interesting, a recent study by Ray and Alterkruse (2000) compared student learning in individual supervision, group supervision, and the combination of individual and group supervision and found no differences on a measure of counselor growth despite the clear student preference of individual supervision.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The study findings offer some important insights which can inform principles and processes to enhance learning in group supervision. Both field instructors and students recognized that group composition could pose a threat to the establishment of group trust. However, what seemed rather benign to supervisors was extremely important to students and could negatively impact the development of group trust. Particularly relevant to students were previous histories and divergent competencies. Where possible, it seems important for field instructors to consider different competencies, learning needs, learning styles, and previous histories between students before deciding to offer group supervision to a particular group of students. Without these considerations, a group may not establish the relational base necessary for students to begin to take risks, accept feedback, and openly challenge one another (Schiller, 1995, 1997).

Supervisors in this study appeared to assume that the social work students in their groups came to placement equipped with the skills to function as effective members of a learning group. Consequently, they spent little time actively teaching students how to participate in group supervision.

Although students may have worked in group environments in the past they, “may have never thought carefully about the kinds of skills that best promote group achievement” (Davis, 1999, p. 3). The literature on group process and group supervision emphasizes the importance of discussing the rationale for group supervision and the goals for group supervision so

that students can appreciate what benefits they may expect from the process (Borders, 1991; Gillam, Hayes, & Paisley, 1996; Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Findings from both supervisor and student data suggest that students also require help in learning how to give constructive feedback, take turns, summarize case material, and reflect upon their practice in a group forum. Explicitly teaching these skills at the beginning of the group and then managing their implementation throughout the course of the group could help students improve upon their participation in group supervision and transfer this learning to future team work.

Field instructors often used modeling as a teaching method. However, this indirect strategy was not always sufficient for students. If supervisors had linked their behaviors to the concepts they were hoping to highlight, students may have more clearly understood their intentions. For example, when teaching students how to work with group process, supervisors may follow their questions by an explanation regarding their rationale. A supervisor may first ask members why they are silent and then explain that they are asking the question because they are observing tension in the group. Articulation of underlying theoretical concepts and practice principles has been proposed as a field education strategy (Bogo & Vayda, 1998), and research in field education has demonstrated that students highly value explanations by the field instructor that help them link conceptual knowledge to real situations (Choy, Leung, Tam, & Chu, 1998; Fortune, McCarthy, & Abramson, 2001). Direct teaching regarding supervisor interventions may help students to integrate supervisor actions with social group work theory. This in turn may provide them with a more solid foundation from which to process their experiences in group supervision and apply them to their own practice.

While many supervisors attempted to seek ongoing feedback regarding student experiences in the learning group, most students did not disclose their discomfort in the group itself. Further, many students in these groups suggested that their supervisors had not initiated discussions regarding difficult dynamics and wished these discussions had occurred (see Bogo et al., 2004a). Given the sensitivity surrounding these issues, it may have helped students to have been asked more direct questions regarding their experiences such as "sometimes students can feel overly criticized in group supervision; are any of you having that experience in this group?" This "targeted" feedback may encourage more group level disclosure because it normalizes student concerns. Further, it may make supervisor interventions more transparent to students, thereby reassuring students that their supervisors are aware of and open to discussing these issues.

Perhaps the most complex task supervisors in this study faced was managing the boundaries between individual supervision and group supervision. Similar to findings from studies based on students' perspectives, there was supervisory recognition for the importance of offering individual supervision to students under certain circumstances (Ray & Alterkruse, 2000; Walter & Young, 1999). Although the intention of individual supervision was largely to help students express their more vulnerable issues not appropriate for a group forum, concerns related to group dynamics arose. Despite their best attempts, supervisors rarely succeeded in addressing these challenges with the whole group. Students who disclosed their frustrations with other students' communication, for example, were never able to discuss their feelings in the group. Surprisingly, the literature on group supervision is silent on this issue. Models of group supervision emphasize the management of group dynamics but do not account for the challenges associated with this function when individual supervision is also offered (Gillam et al., 1997; Hayes, Blackman, & Brennan, 2000; Shulman, 1993; Tebb et al., 1996). The empirical literature recognizes that students value individual supervision but does not offer insight into the helpful and harmful aspects associated with balancing these two forms of supervision. From the current study, it is clear that students often feel both relief and frustration when they disclose group-related issues individually but do not process them in the group (see Bogo et al., 2004a). If supervisors are using both methods of supervision in practice, a knowledge base is needed to help identify how to manage complex intersections between these two types of supervision.

In conclusion, while group supervision can be a potent and useful method for educating students it is not without challenges. These challenges can significantly impact whether students learn and develop practice competence or whether they experience the group as inhibiting their professional development. The analysis derived from students' perceptions (Bogo et al., 2004a; Bogo et al., 2004b) and from field instructors' perceptions of group supervision, presented here, illuminates the crucial and powerful role of group composition, group dynamics and process. While the conceptual and practice literature includes prescriptions and principles for group supervision, there is a dearth of empirical studies that describe effective strategies in action. The next step in knowledge development could consist of the collection and analysis of successful strategies used by group supervisors when faced with process difficulties that challenge the development of trust and mutuality necessary for group supervision.

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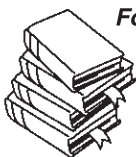
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