

## **The Influence of Internship Site Supervisors on Counseling Interns' Levels of Social-Cognitive Development and Occupational Stress**

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### **Abstract**

Supervision has been described as a vehicle for promoting supervisees' social-cognitive development; however, little is known about how site supervisors' characteristics may influence their supervisees. This study examined the ego development and occupational stress of counseling interns ( $N = 96$ ) and the ego development and engagement in post-degree clinical supervision activity of their site supervisors ( $N = 54$ ). School counseling interns experienced higher levels of occupational role stress and lower levels of personal resources than interns in mental health counseling or marriage, couple, and family tracks; and interns' ego development levels were associated with their occupational stress levels. Implications for counselor educators and supervisors are discussed.

Researchers have identified the importance of supporting the social-cognitive development of graduate counseling students (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Choate & Granello, 2006; Lambie, 2007). Counselors who score at higher levels of social-cognitive functioning (ego development) are (a) more capable of integrating complex and diverse pieces of information, (b) less judgmental and less prone to rely on stereotypes, (c) more capable of advanced empathy and perspective-taking, and (d) more comfortable with unknown and ambiguous situations (Lambie & Sias, 2009). In addition, counselors with higher levels of development are more likely to exhibit characteristics associated with personal wellness (Lambie, Smith, & Ieva, 2009), protecting against the effects of occupational stress, a significant issue for counselors (Maslach, Shaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Counselors at higher levels of ego development thus possess qualities desirable for effective practitioners; therefore, promoting ego development within counselors-in-training remains an overarching goal of graduate-level counselor preparation programs (Borders, 1998). For the purposes of this manuscript, the terms *social-cognitive development* and *ego development* will be used interchangeably, as the construct of ego development encompasses the realms of cognition and self and interpersonal perception (Manners & Durkin, 2000).

During the graduate counseling internship, counselors-in-training have the opportunity to experience the real setting in which counseling takes place, and to apply and adjust what they have learned in theory to assimilate and then accommodate the reality of practice (Akos & Scarborough, 2004). Counseling interns, while working with clients, are supported by their clinical supervisors, who assist supervisees in reflecting upon and integrating newly acquired knowledge (Stoltenberg, McNeil, & Delworth, 1998). It stands to reason that the counseling internship, when compared to other portions of a counselor's preparation program, is the period when the greatest amount of growth occurs within the trainee (Granello, 2002).

However, the extent to which counseling supervisors can facilitate the social-cognitive developmental growth within their supervisees may be limited by the supervisors' own levels of development and their experiences and training in clinical supervision. Supervisors' understanding and practice of supervision is limited to the experiences they themselves received

(Bultsma, 2008). Thus, counselors who received deficient clinical supervision as new professionals, or, as the case may be, none at all, are ill prepared to provide adequate clinical supervision and support to others. In addition, many master's-level counselors who are functioning as clinical supervisors to counseling interns do not have formal training in supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Nelson, Johnson, & Thorngren, 2000). Further, in order to facilitate growth in supervisees, supervisors should be functioning at a developmental level that is at least one stage higher than their supervisees (Cebik, 1985; Manners & Durkin, 2002). Nevertheless, limited research has investigated the levels of social-cognitive functioning of supervisors and their levels of experience and formal training in supervision (Borders, 1998).

No studies were found that investigated descriptive information regarding ego functioning levels of counseling internship site supervisors or the relationship between ego levels and supervisee outcomes (Borders, 1998), such as their developmental growth or occupational stress levels. Furthermore, limited research exists on the extent to which supervisors have participated in clinical supervision or received formal training in supervision. Therefore, this study investigated the relationships between counseling internship site supervisors' engagement in post-degree clinical supervision and supervision training, supervisors' ego development, and their intern-supervisees' levels of ego development and occupational stress.

### **Ego Development**

The theoretical framework of ego development (Loevinger, 1976) has been applied to research involving counselors because "high levels of conceptual and ego development are the desired outcomes of counselor training and supervised clinical experiences" (Borders, 1998, p. 334). Loevinger's model of ego development is based on an amalgamation of earlier models of development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1955), but is more holistic (Manners & Durkin, 2000). Within this theory, the ego is conceptualized as the keystone to personality, or the master trait (Manners & Durkin, 2000). Developmentally, the ego evolves and develops through experience and interaction with other people in a logical, predictable manner, which Loevinger organized into a series of ego levels.

The theory of ego development includes nine ego levels, which are hierarchical and sequential and represent a progression toward greater self and interpersonal awareness, cognitive and conceptual complexity, flexibility, personal autonomy, comfort with ambiguity, and personal responsibility (Lambie, 2007; Manners & Durkin, 2000). The most recent version of the *Washington University Sentence Completion Test* (WUSCT; Hy & Loevinger, 1996), which measures the ego development construct, describes levels which range from Impulsive (E2) to Integrated (E9). Table 1 outlines the stages of ego development and the corresponding features. For further elaboration of the ego development levels, please consult Cook-Greiter and Soulen (2007) and Hy and Loevinger (1996).

Table 1  
*Ego Development Levels and Features*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Main Features</b>
Pre-social/Symbiotic	E1	Preverbal; exclusive gratification of immediate needs
Impulsive	E2	No sense of psychological causation; dependent; dichotomous (i.e., good/bad; nice/mean); demanding; concerned with bodily feelings; sexual and aggressive
Self-Protective	E3	Hedonistic; exploitive; externalizes blame; wary; complaining; concerned with staying out of trouble
Conformist	E4	Conventional; moralistic; stereotyped; conceptually simple; 'black and white' thinking
Self-Aware	E5	Increased appreciations of multiple possibilities, explanations, or alternatives; emerging awareness of inner feelings of self and others; concerned with God, death, relationships, health
Conscientious	E6	Reflective; responsible; empathetic; conceptual complexity; self-critical; self-evaluated standards; able to see broad perspectives; concerned with values achievement
Individualistic	E7	Heightened sense of individuality; tolerant of self and others; appreciation of inner conflicts and personal paradoxes; values relationships over achievement; rich ability to express self
Autonomous	E8	High tolerance for ambiguity; respectful of autonomy of self and others; cherishes individuality; appreciates conflict as an expression of the multifaceted nature of life; relationships are seen as interdependent; concerned with self-actualization
Integrated	E9	Best described as Maslow's self-actualizing person; this level is attained by very few individuals

Taken with adaptation from Hy and Loevinger (1996) and Manners and Durkin (2001)

There is extensive research on the construct of ego development (Manners & Durkin, 2002; Noam, Young, & Jilnina, 2006). Research on ego development in counseling students has focused primarily on students' counseling-related cognitions (e.g., Borders, 1989; Borders, Fong, & Niemeyer, 1986); students' counseling ability and effectiveness (e.g., Borders & Fong, 1989; Lambie et al., 2009; Zinn, 1995); and changes in students' ego levels as a result of training and experience (e.g., Diambra, 1997; Fong, Borders, Ethington, & Pitts, 1997; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010). The psychometric soundness and empirical support of Loevinger's theory's assessment instrument, the WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996), makes her theory and instrument an appropriate foundation for the social-cognitive development of counseling students (Cohn & Westenberg, 2004; Lambie & Sias, 2009).

### **Occupational Stress**

Research indicates that members of certain occupational groups, such as mental health professionals and educators, are particularly vulnerable to burnout (Maslach et al, 2001) and occupational stress, which arises when there is a lack of congruence between an individual's attributes and the characteristics of the work environment (Edwards, 1996). Mental health care providers tend to be deeply invested in the welfare and outcomes of their clients (Maslach et al., 2001), and the ability to be empathic, while it is a skill essential for effective counselors, can also place counselors at higher risk for burnout (Lambie, 2007). In addition, counselors may experience specific client behaviors, such as expressions of anger and suicidal statements, as stressful (Rudolfa, Kraft, & Reiley, 1988). Young and Lambie (2007) described how counselors can experience vicarious trauma, which is a stress reaction as a result of being confronted with clients' traumatic experiences. Further, research has supported the problem of high levels of occupational stress perceived by practicing school counselors (e.g., Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005). Occupational stress in the field of school counseling is described as originating from (a) the dissonance between actual and best practice, (b) role conflict and ambiguity, and (c) overwhelming job demands (Brott & Myers, 1999). Finally, the level of occupational stress perceived by mental health professionals is also a factor of their age and experience; younger members of the profession, including interns, scored at higher levels of stress due to the ambiguity of the helping process (Skovholt, 2001). Moore and Cooper (1996) found that higher levels of burnout were found among younger, less tenured mental health professionals. Therefore, the age and experience of the counselor, in addition to workplace organizational factors, client behaviors, and the inherent nature of the counseling profession, contribute toward the levels of occupational stress perceived by counselors.

### **Developmental, Clinical Supervision**

According to cognitive developmental theory (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981; Loevinger, 1976), for growth to occur, an individual must encounter an event providing sufficient dissonance; however, the individual must also have the resources to adapt effectively to the experience. The counseling internship, which represents the transition from student to professional and involves performance and evaluation, is likely to qualify as a life event that is sufficiently disequilibrating so as to provide for an opportunity for developmental growth (Borders, 1998). Appropriate counseling supervision, which includes the optimal balance of support to challenge, sufficient time for self-reflection, and the deliberate focus on the development and growth of the supervisee, should provide the necessary environment for the supervisee to make the accommodations for the stresses of the new job (Lambie & Sias, 2009). On the other hand, without the intentional focus on supervisee development, time for reflection, and sufficient support, interns exposed to the highly disequilibrating experience of internship may not fare well. Additionally, if the actual job differs greatly from initial expectations, interns may not be able to successfully adapt to their new situations through accommodation and thus may regress. Supervisors who themselves had limited or inadequate experiences as supervisees when they were new to the profession may be ill equipped to deliver appropriate supervision to their supervisees (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). These supervisors may not possess the knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions necessary to facilitate a supervisory environment to promote their supervisees' development.

Supervisors' own levels of ego development, in addition to their personal experiences with supervision, may impact the supervision they provide and thus the ego development of their supervisees (Swensen, 1980). A supervisory environment designed to promote supervisee development needs to be structured at a level higher than their current level of functioning (Manners & Durkin, 2000). Consequentially, a supervisor's level of ego functioning influences his or her ability to provide a growth facilitating supervisory environment. In addition, Swensen (1980) asserted that counselors who are at a "simpler level of ego functioning would not be able to help a client who was at a more complex level" (p. 387). In other words, the counselor functioning at a self-protective level of ego development, for example, would be ill equipped to help a client whose ego functioning is characteristic of a self-aware level. Cebik (1985) added that this assertion should be applied to supervisors and their supervisees as well. Indeed, Cebik (1985) criticized developmental models of counselor growth, arguing that "they pay little attention to either the stage of ego development attained by the supervisor or to the relationship between the supervisee's development and the supervisor's development" (p. 228). Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Crethar (1994) noted "considerably more work is needed in examining the supervision process and outcomes as affected by changes in supervisee and supervisor experience or development" (p. 417). Thus, this study investigated the following three research questions: (a) Does previous participation in post-degree clinical supervision and in formal supervision training predict supervisors' ego development levels? (b) Do supervisors' ego development levels predict the ego development levels of their intern-supervisees? (c) Is there a relationship between counseling interns' ego development levels and their levels of perceived occupational stress?

## Method

### Participants

The sample included 96 counseling internship students enrolled at three different counselor education programs in the southeastern United States that were accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). These programs were chosen for inclusion in the study because of their geographical proximity, allowing for group administration of the research instruments to the internship students by the researcher. The student-interns' counseling internship site supervisors were asked to participate in the study; 57 of the 78 supervisors participated (73% response rate), and 54 completed all of the data collection instruments. The first author personally administered the research instruments to the student-interns during their university internship classes. Site supervisors were contacted multiple times by mail, following Dillman's (2000) multiple contact method for survey research. The supervisors completed the research instruments and returned them to the researcher by mail.

### Instruments

The three constructs investigated and the instruments used to measure these in this study were: (a) supervisor engagement in post-degree clinical supervision and supervision training (*The Supervisor Questionnaire*, researcher designed), (b) ego development (the short-form of the WUSCT [Hy & Loevinger, 1996]), and (c) occupational stress (the *Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised* [Osipow, 1998]). In addition, the student-interns completed a demographics survey designed by the researcher.

**The Supervisor Questionnaire.** The first author designed a 16-item questionnaire which asked internship site supervisors to identify (a) their area of counseling specialty, (b) their highest educational degree, (c) the amount of time they have worked in the field of counseling, (d) the amount of clinical supervision they received after completion of their counseling preparation program, (e) the number of hours in their graduate preparation program, and (f) the amount (if any) of training they have received in clinical supervision. The questionnaire included definitions as necessary to clearly distinguish clinical from administrative supervision. Basic demographic information, such as gender, age, and licensure status, was also requested. Expert counselor education faculty and a panel of counselor education doctoral students from one of the participating institutions reviewed the questionnaire to support the questionnaire's face validity and design quality.

**Intern Demographics Survey.** The first author designed an additional demographics questionnaire which asked the student-interns to identify their counseling track, the number of hours completed in their graduate program and in their internship, their levels of satisfaction with supervision (both in internship and at their universities through their faculty supervisors), and basic demographic information such as gender, age, and ethnicity. As was the case with the additional researcher-designed questionnaire, this demographics survey was reviewed by counselor education faculty and doctoral students prior to administering the final form to participants.

**The Washington University Sentence Completion Test.** The WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) is a semi-projective inventory consisting of 36 sentence stems that measures a respondent's ego development level. The short-form of this instrument, which consists of 18 sentence stems, was used in this study. The short form has been found to produce results nearly as reliable as the full, 36-item form through the split-half method of reliability testing. While the short-form has an internal consistency estimate of reliability of .80 compared to .90 for the 36-item test, this difference is "in the acceptable range for clinical and research purposes" (Novy & Francis, 1992, p. 1038). Respondents complete the sentence stems (e.g. "What gets me in trouble is...", or "The thing I like about myself is...") any way they choose. Each sentence stem response is rated on its own and a total protocol rating (TPR) for the instrument is then calculated using an algorithm reflecting the respondent's assessed place on Loevinger's ego development scheme. The TPR corresponds to a total Ego level. Numerous studies have indicated that the WUSCT is a reliable and valid measure of ego development (Blumentritt, Novy, Gaa, & Liberman, 1996; Cook-Greiter & Soulen, 2007; Manners & Durkin, 2002). Lilienfeld, Wood, and Garb (2000) asserted that the WUSCT has demonstrated "impressive construct validity in numerous studies by independent investigators" (p. 56). Likewise, Manners and Durkin (2000), in their review of research involving Loevinger's theory and the WUSCT, concluded overall that there is substantial construct validity evidence for ego development.

**The Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised.** The OSI-R (Osipow, 1998) is intended to measure three dimensions of occupational stress: (a) *Occupational Roles*, (b) *Personal Strain (PS)*, and (c) *Personal Resources (PR)* for coping with workplace stress. The instrument is comprised of a total of 140 items. Respondents indicate on a 5-point rating scale the frequency of a stress-related event. Each of the three dimensions measured by the OSI-R consists of several subscales. The *Occupational Roles* subscales include the subscales of (a) Role Overload, (b) Role Insufficiency, (c) Role Ambiguity, (d) Role Boundary, and (e) Physical Environment.

*Personal Strain* is measured from a set of four subscales that include (a) Vocational Strain, (b) Psychological Strain, (c) Interpersonal Strain, and (d) Physical Strain. Coping resources are measured by four scales that comprise the *Personal Resources* dimension, including (a) Recreation, (b) Self-Care, (c) Social Support, and (d) Rational/Cognitive Coping. The OSI-R has been used to assess occupational stress in counselors (e.g., Layne, Hohenshull, & Singh, 2004; Sowa & May, 1994) and specifically to assess occupational stress within the context of counselor supervision (Sterner, 2007). Alpha coefficients for the OSI-R total questionnaire scores were .88 for the Occupational Roles Questionnaire (ORQ), .93 for the Personal Strain Questionnaire, and .89 for the Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ) (Osipow, 1998). Spokane and Ferrara (2001) reviewed over 60 studies published since 1981 employing the OSI-R, including validity studies that supported the notion that OSI is a psychometrically sound and practical device for use in a variety of research and practical settings.

### **Data Analysis**

A descriptive, correlational research design was chosen for this study, as descriptive research is intended to obtain information concerning the current status of a phenomenon and to determine the nature of a situation that exists at the time of the study (Ary, Jacobs, & Razevieh, 2006). In addition, the investigation was correlational, examining the relationship between the variables of interest, which were occurring in their natural state, without manipulation. The purpose of correlational research is to gain an understanding of the degree and direction of relationships among variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

After the data collection process, several parametric statistical procedures were implemented and the relationships between the variables were determined. Data for parametric procedures were entered into a database and analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 2006) using linear multiple regression, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Prior to each data analysis procedure, the data were analyzed to ensure that the assumptions of each statistical procedure, such as homogeneity of variance and multicollinearity were met. No assumptions violations were identified.

## **Results**

### **Participant Characteristics**

**Counseling student-interns.** Within the group of student-interns ( $N = 96$ ), 80.6% ( $n = 77$ ) were female and the mean age was 31.93 years (range of 23 to 65 years). The student-intern participants identified as: five African American (4.9%), three Asian (2.9%), 74 as Caucasian (71.8%), 11 as Hispanic (10.7%), and four as multiple ethnic groups (3.9%). The demographic characteristics of the participants were generally reflective of counseling students in other studies (e.g. Borders, 1998; Granello, 2002; Lambie, Smith, & Ieva, 2009). In terms of the counseling internship track in which the students were enrolled, 29 (29.9%) were enrolled in school counseling internship and 68 (70.1%) were enrolled in a mental health counseling internship course (mental health and marriage and family counseling internship interns were enrolled together). The number of credit hours completed by the students in their graduate programs at the point of the survey completion ranged from 36 to 80, with a mean of 56.01 hours ( $SD = 6.63$ ). The number of internship hours (clock hours on site) ranged widely among the participants, from 80 to 1,050, with a mean of 384 hours ( $SD = 207.49$ ), indicating that students were at various points of the internship process.

**Internship site supervisors.** Of the 57 total participating internship site supervisors, 77% ( $n = 44$ ) identified as female and 84.2% ( $n = 48$ ) identified as Caucasian. Site supervisors were asked to identify their area of counseling specialty. Twenty-five (43.9%) identified as school counseling supervisors and 32 (56.1%) identified as mental health counseling supervisors (i.e., mental health and marriage and family counseling supervisors). The supervisors indicated that they had provided clinical supervision to counseling interns or other counseling professionals for an average of 6.21 years ( $SD = 5.50$ ), with a range from .25 to 25 years. Supervisors indicated that they had worked as a practicing counselor (50% time or more) for an average of 12.27 years ( $SD = 7.51$ ), with a range of two to thirty-three years.

### Ego Development

**Counseling student-interns.** Scores from the WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) were obtained from 96 student-intern respondents. The total protocol ratings (TPR) for the interns ranged from 65 to 114, with a mean of 89.29 ( $SD = 9.39$ ). The Ego levels ranged from E2 to E8, with E5 (Self-Aware) being the modal score. The mean Ego level was 5.36 ( $SD = 1.11$ ). The number of internship hours completed by the student-interns did not relate significantly to their ego levels. Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the mean difference in ego development scores between the two counseling internship tracks, but the results identified no statistically significant differences for these data ( $N = 96$ ;  $F[1, 94] = 2.67$ ,  $p = .105$ ).

**Site supervisors.** Fifty-four internship site supervisors completed the WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). The mean TPR for the supervisors was 93.96 ( $SD = 9.20$ ; range = 79 - 125) and the mean Ego level was 5.87 ( $SD = 1.05$ ; range = E4 - E9). The modal score for the supervisors was E6 (Conscientious). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the mean difference between ego development scores (TPR) of the site supervisors based on their specialty areas ( $N = 54$ ;  $F[1, 52] = 3.857$ ;  $p = .056$ ); however the results identified no statistically significant differences for these groups, a result that could be due to the relatively small sample size (results closely approached significance).

### Supervisors' Engagement in Clinical Supervision Activity

Supervisors were asked to indicate whether or not they had participated in post-degree clinical supervision. Eight of the twenty-five school counseling supervisors (32%) reported having participated in post-graduate clinical supervision, while all of the counseling supervisors in the mental health counseling areas indicated participation in post-graduate supervision. A chi-square analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant association between supervisor participation in post-degree clinical supervision as a supervisee and their counseling specialty ( $\chi^2[1, N = 57] = 31.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with supervisors in the mental health counseling specialty area more likely to have participated than school counseling supervisors. According to the contingency coefficient (.594), approximately 36% of the variance in participants' post-degree clinical supervision experience was explained by supervisor specialty. Given that certain counseling specialties require post-graduation supervision for licensure, this is an expected result.

Supervisors also indicated if they had received one or more of three types of formal training in supervision: (a) graduate coursework, (b) professional development workshops, or (c) conference trainings. Only six of the fifty-seven supervisors (10.53%) indicated that they had



never received any type of formal supervision training. Specifically, five supervisors reported having received supervision training in a graduate course, 15 reported having received supervision training through professional development offered through their workplaces, and nine reported having received training at workshops at professional conferences. The remaining 25 supervisors reported having received supervision training through some combination of the different types of training.

### Student-Interns' Occupational Stress

The OSI-R (Osipow, 1998) was used to measure the student-interns' levels of occupational stress. The measures of central tendency for the OSI-R are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

*Measures of Central Tendency for Counseling Student-Interns' OSI-R Scores (N = 96)*

Domain	Scale	M	SD	Range (Min. – Max.)
Occupational Roles Questionnaire (ORQ)	Role Overload (RO)	25.62	7.38	12 - 46
	Role Insufficiency (RI)	21.75	7.07	11 - 41
	Role Ambiguity (RA)	20.34	6.50	10 - 42
	Role Boundary (RB)	22.09	5.63	11 - 43
	Responsibility (R)	23.03	5.89	14 - 47
Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ)	Physical Environment (PE)	15.82	5.25	10 - 37
	Vocational Strain (VS)	18.20	5.00	10 - 31
	Psychological Strain (PSY)	21.20	7.97	11 - 42
	Interpersonal Strain (IS)	22.41	6.37	13 - 44
Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ)	Physical Strain (PHS)	24.39	8.40	11 - 44
	Recreation (RE)	26.69	6.75	11 - 48
	Self-Care (SC)	28.75	6.97	16 - 46
	Social Support (SS)	44.51	4.83	25-50
	Rational/Cognitive Coping (RC)	36.84	5.32	25 - 50

Three MANOVAs (one for each of the three domains of the OSI-R) were used to determine if there was a difference in scores on these three scales between school and mental health counseling student-interns. Overall, scores on the six subscales of the *Occupational Role Questionnaire* (ORQ) of the OSI-R were different between the two groups ( $N = 96$ ; Wilkes' Lambda = .744;  $F [6, 89] = 5.108, p < .01$ ), with school counseling interns reporting higher levels of stress. Differences in tracks accounted for 25.6% of the total variance in the subscales. An additional MANOVA procedure found no statistically significant difference in scores on the four subscales of the *Personal Strain Questionnaire* (PSQ) between school and mental health counseling interns. Finally, scores on the four subscales that comprise the *Personal Resources Questionnaire* (PRQ) were found to be different between the school and mental health counseling interns ( $N = 96$ ; Wilkes' Lambda = .894;  $F [4, 91] = 2.70, p = .035$ ), with school counseling interns scoring at lower levels of personal resources. Differences in tracks accounted for 10.6% of the total variance in the subscales of the PRQ for these data.

### **Supervisors' Engagement in Clinical Supervision Activity and Ego Development**

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether a supervisors' level of ego development (WUSCT; Hy & Loevinger, 1996) was predicted by their previous or current participation in post-graduate supervision. Supervisors' past and current participation in post-graduate clinical supervision were entered into the procedure as predictor variables. Overall, the composite of the two predictor variables predicted 5.5% of the variation in the dependent criterion,  $F(2, 51) = 1.495, p = .235$ . The results were not significant at the alpha = .05 level, suggesting that, for these data, past and current participation in post-graduate clinical supervision did not predict supervisor's ego development.

An additional ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in ego development scores among the participants grouped according to the length of participation in post-graduate supervision. Thirty-eight of the 40 participants who indicated that they had participated in post-graduate clinical supervision also completed the WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). The results were not significant ( $F[1, 4] = .151, p = .961$ ), suggesting that there were no mean differences in ego development scores based on length of supervision for these data.

### **Supervisors' Ego Development Levels and Their Student-interns' Ego Development Levels**

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether a supervisors' level of ego development predicted their student-interns' ego score. Overall, the independent variable (supervisor's ego score) entered into the regression procedure explained 1.3% of the variation in the dependent criterion (intern's ego score) ( $F[1, 67] = 1.872, p = .176$ ). Thus, the results suggested that supervisors' ego development scores did not predict or explain the ego maturity scores of their supervisees for these data.

### **Interns' Ego Development and Occupational Stress**

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether the student-interns' level of ego functioning predicted their levels of occupational stress. Overall, the linear composite of the interns' scores for the OSI-R three domains and subscales were entered into the regression procedure and explained 14.6% of the variation in the interns' ego maturity scores ( $F[14, 80] = 2.144, p = .017$ ). The confidence intervals around the b weights for all of the 14 subscales of the three domain-questionnaires were examined. The confidence intervals around the b weights of scores from the *Role Insufficiency* subscale (a subscale of the Occupational Role Questionnaire) and scores from the *Rational/Cognitive Coping* subscale (a subscale of the Personal Resources Questionnaire) did not include zero as a probable value, so both estimates were statistically significant at the .05 alpha level. However, the confidence intervals around the b weights obtained for the other subscales did include zero as a probable value among other probable values, suggesting that the results for the remaining subscales should not be retained in the specified model. Closer inspection of the b weights suggested that with every unit increase in *Role Insufficiency*, there was a .332 unit decrease observable in the WUSCT scores. Moreover, with every unit increase in *Rational/Cognitive Coping*, there was a .520 unit increase observable in the WUSCT scores. The b weights for the remaining subscales were not examined because the results were not statistically significant for these data. Thus, participants' levels of role insufficiency and their rational and cognitive coping abilities were related to their ego development levels.

While the values of the  $b$  weights were useful in terms of understanding the unit change in ego development scores for every unit change in an OSI-R subscale, they did not reveal the relative effects of the occupational stress subscales on WUSCT scores. Thus, the Beta weights were consulted. The Beta weights revealed that a standardized unit change in ego maturity scores with respect to Rational/Cognitive Coping ( $\beta = .294$ ) was slightly greater than a standardized unit change in WUSCT scores with respect to Role Insufficiency ( $\beta = -.249$ ). Therefore, scores on the Rational/Cognitive Coping subscale explained a greater amount of the variance in the WUSCT scores than scores on the Role Insufficiency subscale for these data.

### Discussion

Supervisors' ego development levels were not found to be related to participation in post-graduate clinical supervision nor to formal training in supervision. Few studies have investigated the effect of participation in supervision on development; however, our results were inconsistent with results obtained by Borders and Usher (1992), who found that a greater amount of post-degree supervision hours reported by National Board Certified Counselors (NCCs;  $N = 357$ ) did have a statistically significant relationship to characteristics associated with higher levels of development described in developmental models of supervision (e.g., Stoltenberg et al., 1998). However, counselor development was indirectly measured (inferred counselor characteristics equated to their level of development) by Borders and Usher (1992). In addition, our sample was smaller and participants were not all NCCs. Furthermore, our investigation did not examine the supervisors' supervisory relationships or the delivery modality of the clinical supervision they had received. Supervisors were simply asked to report if they had participated in post-degree clinical supervision, and if so, for how long. It is possible that supervisors had supervision experiences that were not intentionally structured in a manner conducive to promote social-cognitive growth.

No additional studies were found that investigated the direct connections between supervisor and supervisee developmental levels. whereas the results of our investigation did not support a direct correlation between supervisor and supervisee developmental levels, the data did indicate that the supervisors were functioning at a higher ego level than the interns, which is important because a supervisor at a simpler level of ego functioning would not be able to support and facilitate growth for a supervisee at a more complex level (Cebik, 1985). As a whole, supervisors' mean ego level (5.87) was roughly a half-stage above the mean level of the student-interns (5.36); when examining ego level difference (TPR scores), this difference was statistically significant ( $F [1,132] = 9.70, p = .002$ ). Thus, while supervisors' ego levels did not predict supervisees' ego levels in this sample, these data did support the conjecture that experience, both in terms of life and professional activity, may contribute to ego stage growth.

Occupational stress levels reported by the student-interns fell within one standard deviation of all the scores on the subscales reported for the occupational group of professionals, which comprised 14% of the normative sample of the OSI-R (Osipow, 1998), and were generally comparable to results obtained by researchers (e.g., Sowa et al, 1994) investigating the construct of job stress in counselors when using the OSI-R. The data in our investigation identified a statistically significant negative relationship between student-interns' scores on the *Role Insufficiency* subscale and interns' ego level, as well as a statistically significant positive relationship between interns' scores on the *Rational/Coping* subscale and interns' ego level.

These findings were consistent with Steinwald's (1994) assertion that individual differences in both the perception of some factors as stressful (role insufficiency) and in the responses to these stressors (coping) were affected by the individual's unique frame of meaning-making (ego). Additional research on personality and coping supports that higher developmental functioning allows for better adaptation and for more effective coping when faced with stressors (Lambie et al., 2009; Suls, David, & Harvey, 1996).

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study was a cross-sectional as opposed to a longitudinal investigation; therefore, a number of rival hypotheses may exist which could explain the findings. It is also possible that a change in terms of student-interns' developmental levels occurred that was not measured due to the cross-sectional nature of the study. Further, the supervisors who returned the instruments may have markedly different qualities from those who choose not to participate in the study, increasing the chance that the results obtained from this group may not be fully indicative of the population as a whole (Dillman, 2000). Finally, information was not collected on the nature of the delivery of supervision, both in terms of the student-interns' supervision and the clinical supervision experiences of the supervisors themselves. It is possible that information regarding the quality and structure of the supervision process could contribute to or predict developmental levels in both supervisors and student-interns more accurately than the mere occurrence of supervision or supervision training. Furthermore, other extraneous variables may contribute more to ego development and stress than supervision in counseling interns.

However, given the noted limitations of the study and the inherent limitations in correlational research, the study contributed new information regarding counseling internship site supervisors' post-graduate supervision experiences and developmental levels. The study's findings related to the relationship between ego development and stress were also consistent with findings from previous research with different populations. Future research that investigates the nature and structure of the supervision process and addresses the limitation of the cross-sectional research design may lead to more significant findings.

### **Implications for Counselor Educators and Supervisors**

Our findings support that fostering the social-cognitive development of counselors-in-training should continue to be a primary goal of supervision (Borders, 1998), as student-interns with higher levels of ego functioning exhibited lower levels of perceived occupational stress and a stronger tendency to employ cognitive coping skills in the face of stress. The buffer that higher ego levels seem to afford interns in the face of stress has implications for the structuring of counselor education program curriculum. Counselors-in-training developmental growth should be seen as a programmatic goal of counselor education programs, not just over the course of the internship, but from the time of induction of the student into the program. The finding regarding the connection between ego development and perceived stress lends support for efforts to provide training to internship site supervisors in models of supervision designed specifically to foster ego development in their supervisees (Lambie & Sias, 2009). Given the findings that school counseling interns experience higher levels of occupational stress than interns in mental health counseling tracks and that counseling track accounted for 25.6% of the variance in occupational role stress level scores, it is important for counselor educators to prepare school counseling students for the various demands that are part of implementing a comprehensive

school counseling program (American School Counselor Association, 2012) and of interfacing with the larger system of the school.

Additionally, the majority of counseling supervisors in this study (68.5%) were functioning at the Conscientious (E6) ego development level or higher. At this level, counselors possess a level of cognitive complexity that allows for the discovery of patterns and distinctions in information, a developed capacity for self-reflection, and a greater sense of concern for others. Information regarding supervisor developmental levels is helpful for counselor educators interested in providing training to their internship site supervisors. The data supports that counseling supervisors are developmentally capable of providing a supervisory environment that is appropriate for their supervisees, as they are, as a group, functioning at a higher level than their supervisees. Training can include information on specific techniques to foster supervisee ego developmental growth (e.g. Lambie & Sias, 2009) as well as interventions focused more on supervisor development. In conclusion, the findings from this study regarding supervisee and supervisor development, internship site supervisors' clinical supervision experience and training, and student-interns' levels of occupational stress may be used by counselor educators in enhancing their preparation programs and student internship experiences.

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