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## Article 27

# **Social Cognitive Theory as an Effective Clinical Supervision Approach: The Social Cognitive Theory of Supervision**

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New supervisors often experience difficulty shifting from counseling to supervision. Lack of experience, coupled with confusion pertaining to professional roles stagnate the supervisory relationship. This article applies Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986) to the supervision process. SCT can potentially promote supervisor and supervisee growth and flexibility, as well as offer a pragmatic supervisory model. Backed by research supporting SCT, the purpose of this article is to provide a succinct model that is able to meet the capricious needs of both supervisors and supervisees.

### **Case Scenarios**

Tim is a second year graduate student in a clinical mental health counseling program, at the local university. He has always wanted to work in the mental health field and is anticipating the first time with clients in his practicum class. Professors label Tim as intelligent, hardworking, and possessing a firm dedication to strengthening his counseling ability. Two weeks into practicum, however, his intensity, efficacy and esteem visibly appear much lower. Coupled with decreasing levels of confidence, he is experiencing a decline in his academic productivity. Tim's classmates notice the change, as high academic functioning is something he prides himself on. Tim confides to peers that his practicum supervisor makes subtle derogatory remarks in both group and individual supervision to him. The supervisor initially had problems with Tim's counseling approach. After taking steps to resolve the counseling issue, the supervisor had concerns with techniques Tim used. Before resolving the techniques problem, his supervisor now believes perhaps due to culture, Tim cannot understand the client's worldview. More recently, the latest concern deals with Tim's professional attire. Tim states the problems are mounting, and seem overwhelming. He expresses to peers in supervision that he feels degraded, worthless, depressed, and incompetent. Tim is contemplating either approaching the chair of the department to resolve the issue, or dropping out of practicum to avoid the supervisor. Each option has a heavy toll on his

academic career. This indecision is having a dramatic impact on his overall well-being, both on an academic and social level.

Essence has overcome many obstacles in her academic career. Her biggest impediment is that she has a learning disorder, dyslexia. She is currently in a graduate counseling program entering into her second practicum. In her first practicum experience, she struggled. But with support from her supervisor, friends, and family, she completed the practicum class successfully. Initially Essence had problems with her practicum instructor; however, she grew to appreciate his feedback, and now feels comfortable with her supervisor. Essence thought she would have the same supervisor for her second practicum, but, unexpectedly, her supervisor retired. A new instructor stepped in to teach the course, someone Essence has never met. Essence is apprehensive about having an unfamiliar supervisor as she begins her second practicum. As such, she has numerous trepidations approaching practicum, a common feeling for her. Essence battles with insecurity dating back to her high school years. When she was younger, peers nicknamed her “D-Girl” for “Dyslexia Girl.” Due to these experiences, Essence has some feelings of inadequacy about her intellectual capability. On the first day of class, she confides with her new supervisor and states she is “kind of slow sometimes” and may need “lots of help.” The supervisor eases Essence by stating that it is good to be “slow” at times. Being slow allows a person to “think before speaking.” In addition, being slow can allow for understanding a client so as not to “jump to conclusions, or inaccurate assumptions.” As for needing “lots of help,” the supervisor asserts that if people did not need help, he would not have his position. That is why he is here, as we “all need help sometimes.” Upon receiving this feedback, Essence’s fears begin to dissipate as she has a sense of vigor and confidence, for the first time in her academic career. Three months later, she continues to excel in the class and genuinely feels as if she is competent in her ability.

The preceding cases illustrate two separate instances in which a supervisor had a positive or negative influence on the well-being of a student under his or her professional care. Supervisors in counseling have multifaceted roles, as their actions affect supervisees’ professional competence and counseling self-efficacy (Paladino, Barrio-Minton, & Kern, 2011). Novice professionals emulate behaviors modeled by senior practitioners, based on what they experience and see (Borders et al., 2011). The preceding two ideals parallel Bandura’s (2011) notions that learning occurs in two ways: (1) through direct experience and (2) social modeling. Learning, however, does not occur in a social vacuum, as other factors are important (Bandura, 2008). For example, Ratts and Wood (2011) add that personal and environmental factors play an integral part in counselor development. Personality factors, such as temperament and need for structure dictate if a supervisee perceives supervisors’ actions as oppressive or challenging (Bernard, Clingerman, & Gilbride, 2011). Supervisor comments about counseling style, methods, or professional attire may affect supervisees and serve as environmental factors (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011). Thus, a strong relationship exists between development, learning, personal, and environmental factors. Recent research notwithstanding, environmental factors affecting supervision seem largely ignored in the literature (Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011).

In the preceding fictional case scenarios, the positive or negative environment played a critical role in the intrapersonal and professional development of supervisees. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986) labeled this interactional phenomenon

reciprocal determinism. SCT affirms there is a triadic interaction effect between personal factors (intrapersonal), behavior (professional development), and environment. Stated succinctly, a bi-directional influence exists between the three, as each affects the other in varying magnitudes. Bandura (1997) postulated that

Efficacious people are quick to take advantage of opportunity structures and figure out ways to circumvent institutional constraints or change them by collective action. Conversely, inefficacious people are less apt to exploit the enabling opportunities provided by the social system and are easily discouraged by institutional impediments. (p. 6)

Relating SCT to the fictional supervision scenario, Tim, while intelligent, proved to be, in Bandura's assertion, inefficacious. He was unable to take opportunities from the triadic interactions and utilize them to his benefit. Although Essence had previous academic barriers, she instead took advantage of her environment and prevented her disability from stopping her. Bandura (1997) would state both supervisors provided an environment that either assisted in stifling or encouraging the student's self-efficacy. In the first case, the supervisor had a social system that helped in promoting Tim's negative thoughts about his ability. These thoughts then influenced his behavior resulting in poor performance with clients. This, in turn, made the environment react more harshly to him. For example, continuing poor performance by Tim lent credence to the supervisor's reasoning for questioning his counseling ability and skill.

In her substantial work in supervision, Bernard (1997) stated supervisors must correspond to what supervisees need at an exact time and juncture. An example of this is a supervisor modifying the supervision environment to fit a supervisee's needs. In the preceding case scenario, Tim's needs may necessitate the supervisor take one of a number of roles. For example, Tim may need the supervisor to be a teacher, counselor, or consultant. The supervisor corresponds accordingly, assumes that responsibility, and in doing so, modifies the environment (Bernard, 1997). In the previous example, the supervisor could have chosen a role that was opposite of a hardened, over-critical teacher. For instance, Tim's needs may have required the supervisor to assume the role of an empathetic counselor. Lambie and Vaccaro (2011) state supervisors' thoughts and behaviors affect their supervisees and the supervisory environment. The supervisory environment and supervisee, in turn, reciprocate and influence the supervisor, dictating what role the supervisor should employ. Stated succinctly, the supervisor and supervisee have a reciprocal influence upon one another, affecting one another significantly.

Clinical supervision is paramount in guiding supervisees through the complex field of professional counseling (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Furthermore, research indicates new supervisors require structure when beginning the paradigm shift from counseling to supervision. Challenging clients and unclear protocols amalgamate, which may result in confused supervisors and supervisees. To remedy this potential problem, supervisors need a clear, concrete, and logical supervisory model of supervision. This article provides a practical model of supervision grounded in SCT that offers supervisors a template to use with supervisees. Social Cognitive Theory of Supervision (SCTS) may serve as this pragmatic supervisory model, supporting both supervisors and supervisees. More specifically, SCTS can assist new supervisors in a number of ways. First, it assists in clarifying issues such as transference/counter transference, in acknowledging there will always be some sort of influence between the supervisor, supervisee, and environment.

Second, it allows supervisors to understand their role is constantly in flux and ever changing. Third, it can proffer supervisory strategies that match the diverse needs of supervisees (e.g., various levels of motivations, ability, and maturation). The remainder of this article includes three sections. In the first section, presentation of the validity, effectiveness, and conceptual framework begins. This includes applying the model to the case of Tim to show SCTS in a practical supervision situation. The second section illustrates how SCTS deals with pragmatic issues such as dual relationships and multiculturalism. Lastly, the third section discusses implications and limitations for supervisors who may want to use SCTS.

### **Validity and Effectiveness of SCTS**

Professional counselors use SCT in a number of settings, from schools to anger management groups (Burt, Lewis, & Patel, 2010). However, there is little literature discussing SCT as a counseling or supervision model. Nevertheless, recently SCT received support as a tool for working with aggressive adolescents in a counseling martial arts program (Burt & Butler, 2011). This breakthrough may have provided the impetus for using SCT in other counseling and supervision situations. According to Rice and Dolgin (2005), SCT has a number of elements that assist in counseling and other therapeutic settings like supervision. Take for example, the concepts of modeling, reinforcement, and self-efficacy. All three concepts are instrumental in comprehending behavior and development of people (Bandura, 2008). Supervision parallels the growth and developmental process people progress through in life (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982). For instance, new supervisors and supervisees require experiences that stimulate growth and development (Ratts & Wood, 2011). Other similarities exist between supervision and developmental concepts such as autonomy, dependence, and rebellion (Gladding, 2012). Research also supports the notion in both supervision and human development that people are constantly in motion and fluctuate between developing stages (Borders et al., 2011). Additionally, individuals in these developmental domains normally receive guidance or instruction from someone with more experience (Luke & Gordon, 2011). Thus, SCT can be a viable method to address supervision concerns with supervisees.

Studies indicate increased self-efficacy is a primary goal supervisees should obtain from the supervision process (Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011). Self-efficacy, a fundamental component of SCT, has shown to be instrumental in a myriad of counseling situations (Burt, Lewis, Beverly, & Patel, 2010). The use of SCT across multiple counseling and supervisory-like situations lends further credence to its use as a supervision tool (Duffy & Lent, 2008; Hennessy & Lent, 2008). For example, both supervision and developmental theorists posit a person's interaction with their environment is a critical component of growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Loganbill et al., 1982). Coinciding with this assertion, SCT emphasizes the importance of environment, personal factors, and the interaction of these concepts on behavior (Bandura, 1986). Therefore, it is logical to infer the principles of SCT would contribute to an effective supervision approach, which supports the development of supervisees.

## **Application of SCTS**

In order to articulate how SCTS would work in a practical supervision setting, the case of Tim serves as an example. The concepts of SCT will illustrate how this model (SCTS) can function as a cohesive model of supervision. Elements such as transference/counter transference, evaluation, ethics, and multicultural sensitivity are focal points in this section. In the scenario, Tim's supervisor appeared harsh, condemnatory, and insensitive to his needs, culture, and development. Hypothetically, a number of reasons possibly exist underlying the problems between the supervisor and Tim. For the purposes of this article, transference is the primary cause. The supervisor reminded Tim of a previous instructor whom he had difficulties with in the past. After transference occurred, a snowball effect arose which caused the relationship between the two to deteriorate rapidly. To remedy a poor supervisory relationship, a supervisor using SCTS acknowledges transference is a product of the environment.

As Bandura (1986) theorized, a triadic interaction always exists between environment, personal factors, and behavior. In the scenario, the supervisor is the environment, personal factors are lowered thoughts of capability, and behaviors are declining performance. Realizing this, a supervisor using SCTS includes this reciprocal influence into the plan of supervision. A supervisor anticipates the environment (supervisor) will have an effect on the supervisee. This influence occurs by someone merely being present, regardless of how the supervisor responds. As Myers (1992) noted, different people choose different environments such as music, friends, or choice of doctoral program. They are all environments chosen, based partially on dispositions. A supervisor will be aware that some supervisees, for the most part, have their choices taken from them. Licensure laws change, schedules receive modification, and people leave without notice. In graduate school, sometimes students are not aware of who will be their supervisor before the class begins (Luke & Gordon, 2011). Lack of control may cause a sense of learned helplessness on behalf of the supervisee. The supervisee may express disappointment or frustration because critical decisions affecting them occurred without their consent. In Tim's case, his thoughts and behaviors may have caused him to re-experience a time when he had no control. With constraints placed on him in a critical class, it is normal Tim may respond negatively. It is a learned characteristic, and he reacts with despair and a lack of hope (Seligman, 1991).

By using SCTS, however, a supervisor can avoid the preceding problematic situation. Supervisors can tailor their responses, and adapt the environment to what would be most beneficial for the supervisee (Bernard, 1997). In Tim's case, a teacher environment may just remind him of his previous negative experience. The supervisor would need to determine what environment is the best fit. For instance, Tim may need the supervisor to make the environment similar to that of counseling. Doing this may assist in bringing the feelings of transference to the forefront and allow Tim and the supervisor to overcome the phenomenon together. Reciprocal determinism takes into account transference because the supervisor is aware the environment (supervisor) has an effect on the supervisee.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation with SCTS is similar to what Bernard and Goodyear (2009) noted were the core elements in evaluating supervision. In their methodology, Bernard and

Goodyear suggested the following: (1) developing a supervision evaluation contract, (2) implementing videotapes, and (3) utilizing technology. Supervisors using SCTS address the contract by creating a supervision-evaluation agreement explaining to the supervisee parameters involved. After explaining, both parties sign the supervision document. Furthermore, supervisors speak to evaluation measures by using videotapes of sessions, process notes, and live supervision, if able. Additionally, research indicate early counselor experiences rely more on technology, and technological capabilities (Burt, Gonzalez, Swank, Asher, & Cunningham, 2011). Once supervisees are in the field, however, technology dissipates, with process notes and reflections emphasized (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). In order to prepare the supervisee for this eventuality, various methods of evaluation using technology are available to the supervisee. For instance, supervisors utilize multimedia technology, virtual environments, and computer supported learning to assist supervisee's growth and development.

Evaluative instruments developed by the supervisor, or from the organization housing the supervisee will also serve as an evaluation tool. These instruments could be in the form of open-ended inquires, or in a Likert scale form. Stemming from the flexibility of SCT, either mode of communication will suffice. Methods of communicating formative feedback, including self-assessment, peer evaluation, and group/individual supervision are primary methods used. According to Lehrman-Waterman and Ladany (as cited in Bernard and Goodyear, 2004), feedback needs to "be consistent and objective, ideally based on behaviorally defined standards, free from bias, timely and clearly understood and specific" (p. 30). SCTS incorporates these factors into its methodology and uses them to assist the supervisee.

Supervisee self-assessment commences by utilizing components of SCTS. For example, Bandura (1986) postulated thoughts shape how people interpret and react to events. The case scenario of Tim serves as an example. Tim appears depressed, and full of anxiety. A depressed, anxious person is more in tune to depressing and stress provoking events. As such, that type of person sees the world as more threatening, and reacts based on this schema of the environment (Myers, 1992). Supervisors explain this negative outlook to the supervisee so they are aware of reciprocal determinism. Therefore, if a supervisee's self-assessment is overly negative, it could be due to feelings about being new, and focusing on negative events. These events then serve to verify their feeling of uneasiness and anxiety. In SCTS, the supervisor brings this occurrence into the forefront, in order for it to gain the attention of the supervisee. Similar to counseling, identifying issues potentially remedies problems, as the supervisee has a more accurate perception of their abilities.

Lastly, there needs to be a method in order to conduct a formal summative evaluation session. SCTS applies a method akin to a midterm and final, with the supervisee's strengths, skills, weaknesses, and domains for improvement highlighted and discussed. Discussion takes place from 1 to 4 months (midterm), then 4 to 7 months (final). Similar to other instances of supervision in the field, an appropriate time ranges from 6 months to a year (Sias, Lambie & Foster, 2006). Thus, formal evaluation in SCTS corresponds with supervision protocols already implemented in the field.

## **Practical Considerations**

### **Dual Relationships**

Dual (or multiple) relationships have been described as potentially the most arduous and precarious professional situation a therapist can find oneself in (Mills, 2005). In some instances, such as in rural communities or in graduate programs, it may be unreasonable or impossible to avoid dual relationships. In these instances, a supervisor needs to be forthright about this phenomenon with the supervisee and discuss it. With SCTS, the assumption is from the beginning, there will be multiple relationships. The supervisor will juxtapose various roles, such as teacher, counselor, and consultant. Literature shows that not all multiple relationships are harmful, and in some cases, are helpful (Clipson, 2005). Dual relationships and the potential impact in counseling is a phenomenon the supervisor explains to the supervisee in detail. This discussion has to take place, as in this model multiple relationships cannot be avoided. Furthermore, multiple relationships prove to be beneficial in this modality, so supervisees can see different perspectives to their counseling skills (American Counseling Association, 2005).

### **Multiculturalism**

Many professionals give the impression of being insecure or apprehensive when dealing with multiculturalism (Butler, 2003). There are, however, similarities between multicultural education and supervision. First, both are areas in which practitioners sometimes have an ambiguous ideal of the processes involved. Second, counselors have apprehension when utilizing interventions, with novices affected the most (Borders & Brown, 2005). Third, seasoned and new counselors alike have trepidation in understanding multiculturalism and supervision effectively (Butler, 2003). Instead of being frightened, Butler (2003) suggests multiculturalism as another apparatus for use in the supervisor/counselor's toolkit. Furthermore, culturally competent supervisors (CCS) have a number of traits commonplace in both supervision and counseling. According to Butler, CCSs are flexible (i.e., meaning they can work with a variety of supervisees). Next, they are critical thinkers and can work across cultures. Lastly, CCSs have the ability to manage anxiety, a strong sense of identity, and are effective in their use of wit, humbleness, and patience with supervisees. According to Butler, the preceding characteristics are not anything to shy away from, they are fundamental in counseling, supervision, and life. As such, SCTS encompasses these features as necessary for positive functioning with others.

## **Discussion**

### **Potential Limitations of SCT**

As with any theoretical concept, there are limitations and drawbacks to SCTS. This model is no exception to that rule. In utilizing this methodology, the supervisor has to be aware and cognizant of subtle cues from the supervisee. In addition, the supervisor needs to be flexible and adaptable to a number of situations that may arise. The supervisor needs an ability to be open, concrete, engaging and understandable in examples given. Coupled with this, supervisees need to have a certain level of cognitive

ability and maturity. This is required in order to be able to appreciate what is the underlying meaning of the examples given in supervision. In addition, supervisees need to understand how their own personal thoughts, behaviors, and the influence of the environment affect them.

### **Conclusion**

In order to insure proper supervision and competent counselors, a rational, logical model for supervision must exist. As stated beforehand, literature demands supervision models be researchable and aid in concrete, measurable ways. SCTS wishes to provide guidelines to novel supervisors so discussion can move beyond simple concepts in supervision. An example of these guidelines is the idea of parallel processing. Instead of struggling with the term and attempting to explain it to the supervisee, the supervisor will utilize concrete viewpoints of SCTS. The supervisor asserts a person's thoughts create situations they react to positively or negatively. Similar to Socratic methodology, a dialogue begins involving supervisor and supervisee in an intellectual, thought provoking debate that challenges each other's viewpoint.

Using Socratic methods allows the supervisor to emphasize that although environment has an effect on people, it does not necessarily dictate people have to be a product of the environment. In relation to parallel processing, the supervisor informs the supervisee there are certain dynamics occurring in the counseling session. However, these forces do not need replication, or mirroring, in supervision. For example, if the counseling environment is confusing, arduous, and stressful, the supervision environment does not have to emulate what transpires in those sessions. The counselor-in-training does not have to be a product of the environment and bring these problematic factors into supervision. Thus, SCTS brings parallel processes to the awareness of the supervisee on a concrete, pragmatic level, one they can relate to and comprehend.

The literature supports the need for supervision models that are clear, concise, and backed by research. With new supervisors, some are unclear about the specific dynamics supervision entails, with several not having formal classes in the area (Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011). Coupled with not having a formulated, systematic plan to guide supervisees is a recipe for breeding inadequate supervisors and executing hodgepodge supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). SCTS potentially remedies this problematic situation by giving new supervisors a concrete model to draw upon, backed by theory and research.

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