



## **A Phenomenological Study: The Experience of Live Supervision during a Pre-practicum Counseling Techniques Course**

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*The experiences of live supervision for three, master's level, pre-practicum counseling students were explored using a phenomenological methodology. Using semi-structured interviews, this study resulted in a thick description of the experience of live supervision capturing participants' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Data revealed that live supervision during pre-practicum is a multifaceted experience comprised of numerous roles that not only contribute to counselor skill development, but counselor identity development. Participants' stories reflected the benefit and impact that live supervision provides in the educational context. Keywords: Phenomenological Research, Live Supervision, Pre-practicum, Counseling Students*

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A primary task when obtaining a master's degree in counselor education is learning the basic skills of counseling; yet, research is lacking that could potentially inform the work of counselor educators with regard to the best educational format in which to teach these skills. Woodard and Lin (1999) described the pre-practicum class as integral to bridging the gap between course work and clinical work (practicum and internship), so it seems important to explore the various venues through which the skills are taught. They also contended that pre-practicum introduces students to counselor identity as well as aids in the successful transition between course work and clinical work given the focus on basic counseling skills (Woodard & Lin, 1999). These skills are often known as the micro-skills and include: attending behaviors, reflection of feeling, paraphrasing, summarizing, questions for clarification, open questions, focusing, theme development, immediacy, and confrontation (Brammer & MacDonald, 1999; Egan, 1998; Ivey, 1994). Given that these skills are considered the foundation of counseling (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004; Egan, 1998; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Ivey, 1994; Woodard & Lin, 1999), one would assume that research would exist regarding the instruction of these skills; however, there is dearth of counselor education research regarding the instruction of these skills, particularly in live supervision formats (Hoffman & Hill, 1996; Woodard & Lin, 1999; Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007).

It has been more than ten years since published studies exploring live supervision use and delivery methods in the field of counselor education has been conducted. The research at that time revealed that live supervision was being used at an increasing rate by counselor training programs (Bubbenzer, West, & Gold, 1991; Freeman & McHenry, 1996; Hoffman & Hill, 1996). For example, Bubbenzer et al. reported that at least 51% of master's programs and 57% of doctoral programs in counselor education programs used live supervision practices in training. Seventy-five percent of these programs indicated that live supervision was used on a weekly basis. Freeman and McHenry utilized a survey

to identify what counselor educators from CACREP (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs) accredited programs perspectives were regarding ideal functions, methods, goals, supervisor roles, as well as influences of theory and research in clinical supervision. The survey, which included two open-ended questions, was mailed to 554 counselor educators. Three hundred and twenty surveys were returned. Two hundred and fifty seven respondents (78%) indicated that live supervision was a very important function of clinical supervision. This finding, in conjunction with the fact that 78% of counselor educators use live supervision as preferred method of supervision, suggests the importance of using live supervision as a training method for teaching clinical skills in classes such as pre-practicum.

Research has also explored students' experience of live supervision, but very little has been written that is specific to live supervision during pre-practicum. Studies have explored live supervision, but covered a range of contexts such as pre-practicum, group counseling, and practicum (Champe, 2004, Woodside, et al., 2007); however, these studies did not specifically address the context of pre-practicum. In an effort to increase understanding of the experience of live supervision during pre-practicum, a phenomenological case study of three pre-practicum students was selected as a means of inquiry. This study was designed to answer the question, "What are the experiences of live supervision during pre-practicum class?" For the purpose of this article, live supervision is defined as directly observing the counseling session and interacting with the session through a live supervision method (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). It is a combination of direct observation and communication with the counselor in training through a variety of methods which include: bug-in-the-ear, monitoring, in-vivo, the walk-in, phone-in, consultation break and use of a computer and interactive television (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004).

The bug-in-the ear method of live supervision involves using a two-way radio to communicate with the supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). The supervisee places an ear bud in their ear and the supervisor, from behind a two way mirror, is able to give direction to the supervisee using the radio. Phone-in, computer and interactive television are similar in that the supervisor is able to interrupt the session and give feedback or direction immediately to the supervisee. In-vivo is when the supervisor is in the room with the supervisee. He or she does not do therapy, but rather is there for immediate consultation. When using walk-in methods, the supervisee is watching from behind the mirror, but enters the room to intervene in the session. Consultation break is a planned break during the session where the supervisor stops counseling and talks with the supervisee behind the mirror to give some direction.

## **Method**

Supervision research has little to say with regard to live supervision and even less to say in the context of pre-practicum; therefore, a phenomenological study was utilized to explore, in-depth, the experience. The primary interest for a phenomenological researcher is meaning, and that meaning can be found within a person's private experience (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological research captures the lived experience of several individuals experiencing the same phenomenon transforming that lived experience into textual expression of the essence (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1990).

This phenomenological study was guided by the epistemological principles of Max Van Manen (1990). Van Manen's (1990) approach to phenomenology is hermeneutical, which attends to description of the phenomenon, but also the interpretation of the phenomenon or lived experience. Van Manen maintains that phenomenology without hermeneutics or interpretation is one-dimensional and does not adequately capture the phenomenon. Phenomenological thought from Husserl's perspective believes that phenomenology should be strictly descriptive and that adding an interpretative element extends beyond the boundary of phenomenological research. However, the interpretation that Van Manen speaks of occurs through the process of writing. Van Manen contends that the act of using language to describe the phenomenon is an interpretive course of action. He further contends that the act of using language to describe the phenomenon is an interpretive course of action in itself; therefore, the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of a lived experience through textual description. Hermeneutic phenomenology gives meaning to lived experiences through the use of language.

### **The Context**

Because this is a phenomenological case study, it is imperative to adequately describe the context within which the research takes place. One western university was chosen as the location to maintain continuity with regard to how basic counseling skills were taught. This university utilized eight doctoral level supervisors who rotated in pairs among four groups of students (4-5 master's students per group) during the basic counseling skills pre-practicum class. The students were asked to counsel each other, as well as be the client. This university did not use role plays, but asked each student in the client role to talk about real issues. The one or two students that were not being a counselor or a client were asked to observe the session from behind a two-way mirror with two doctoral level supervisors. From this position they were witness to the counseling session taking place between the other two students. As such they were active participants in the feedback process with the doctoral supervisors.

The feedback process took place in two ways: in the moment feedback using two-way radios, as well as walk-ins during a session. In addition, there was a formal feedback processing at the conclusion of each counseling session. The student in the observer role was expected to be an active participant, rather than a passive observer.

### **Researcher Statement**

For this study the first author was the primary researcher. The second author was the primary researcher's dissertation chair and he acted as a peer reviewer during the process of the research. The topic of this study was of great interest to both authors as live supervision and the counseling skills class (or pre-practicum) is taught by both. We each had a unique interest in the topic to further improve upon how we teach the class. It is for this reason that Van Manen (1990) was used as an underlying phenomenological philosophy for this study, given the focus on research topics that are of unique interest to the reader.

As researchers we suspected that students would find live supervision during the counseling techniques class useful; however, the responses that were ascertained during the course of this study have significantly influenced the primary researcher, as I have used this information to inform the design of my course. In the role of teacher and supervisor I had not thought about how I could slightly change how I explain things or conduct live supervision to mitigate anxiety in the way that was described to me throughout the course of this study.

## **Participants**

Phenomenological research challenges the traditional research rationale that the number of participants is directly correlated to value of research (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Rather a phenomenological case study operates from a premise that suggests that it is only possible to attain an accurate account of “lived experience” through a small sample (Smith, 2004). Therefore, three participants were identified to participate in the study. The participants of this study were three master’s of counseling students enrolled in Pre-practicum Counseling Techniques at one western university.

Upon approval from the Human Subjects Committee at the researchers’ university, students were asked to participate in the study through classroom invite, and subsequent email contact. Included in the invitation was a statement addressing that participation in the study would not be connected to grades and evaluations in the course or in any other capacity in the department. In addition to being enrolled in a pre-practicum skills class, participants were recruited on the basis that they could articulate their experience well and engage with the researcher (Reid, et al., 2005). Names for the participants were changed in the course of the research. For the results section, the participants are identified as Andrea, James, and Dana. Andrea, James and Dana identified as European American. Two of them were in their thirties, married, and had children (Andrea and James). Dana identified as single and in her early twenties with no children.

## **Data Collection**

The first author conducted two individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with participants during the sixth and twelfth week of the pre-practicum course; in addition, a member check interview was conducted at the conclusion of the semester. Each interview was approximately 60-90 minutes. The first round interview questions were as follows: “What has been your experience of live supervision in pre-practicum?” and “How are you affected by this experience?”

After completion of the first round of interviews, a professional transcriptionist transcribed the audio tapes into transcribed data. For the second round interview, according to Van Manen’s (1990) phenomenological method, he maintains that the researcher and the participant collaborate together regarding emerging themes from the previous interview. The researcher and participant reflected upon each of the emerging themes by asking: “Is this what the experience is really like?” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 99). In addition, reviewing the emergent themes with the participants served as a beginning point for further reflection regarding the lived experience. After data from the second

round of interviews was coded, an individual member check interview was conducted. Therefore, a total of 9 interviews were conducted for this research study. Data saturation was achieved when participants no longer described their experiences with the pre-practicum class and were describing thoughts and experiences about the practicum which was to begin the following semester.

## **Data Analysis**

Data in phenomenological studies consist of human experiences; analysis of these experiences does not occur as a disinterested observer of the experience, but rather understanding takes place through conversation and dialogue with participants (Van Manen, 1990). In a sense, understanding is not reproduced in dialogue; it is produced. Analysis of the data and the lived experience of participants is a process which involves looking for meanings in participants' stories that connect them but also differentiates the stories.

Data gathered from both the interviews and member check were coded for themes. According to Van Manen (1990), the researcher attempts to describe the lived experience through textual description. Meaning is critical and must be constructed under the influence of the original phenomenological question. Three approaches were used to analyze data for this study based on the phenomenological perspective of Van Manen: the holistic approach, the selective approach and the detailed approach.

The holistic approach focuses on the transcript in its entirety, looking for a phrase or a sentence to encapsulate the essential meaning of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). The selective approach attends to phrases or sentences that seem to be prominent representations of the experience. Using this type of analysis, Van Manen suggests asking the question, "What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?" (p. 93). The detailed approach concentrates on each sentence or sentence cluster asking, "What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?" (p. 93).

When exploring an experience or phenomenon, it is important to determine if emergent themes are essential to the experience. Van Manen (1990) suggested when determining essential themes to ask if the phenomenon would change if the theme was taken away. Without the theme would the phenomenon lose its essential meaning? This line of thinking was used during the data analysis of this study. Following the first round of interviews, the transcribed data from this study was analyzed for themes using the three detailed approaches above. In addition, from this data additional questions were generated for the second round of interviews. Once themes from the first round were identified, those three themes became the subject of hermeneutic dialogue in the second interview (Van Manen, 1990). During hermeneutic dialogues, the researcher and participants become co-investigators of the experience. The researcher and the participants reflected upon each of the emerging themes by asking: "Is this what the experience is really like?" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 99). After the second round, the transcribed data was coded again for new emergent themes and hermeneutic dialogue commenced again. The data analysis procedure was a collaborative process between the researcher and participants to ensure that the described phenomenon accurately portrayed their lived experience.

## Trustworthiness

While qualitative research from Van Manen's (1990) perspective values the role of the researcher as an individual interpreting the data, research rigor requires integrity be evident on the part of the researcher to ensure that the interpretations are grounded in the data. To ensure integrity validation techniques or methods were used to reduce the threat to validity, Creswell (2007) suggests that qualitative researchers select at least two validation techniques or methods. Three validation strategies were used in this study: thick, rich description of the experience of pre-practicum students and live supervision, peer review or debriefing (the second author conducted peer review and debriefing with the first author), and a member check interview with participants (Creswell, 2007).

## Results

The goal of phenomenological research is to give voice to the participant with the understanding that they have a narrative to tell (Van Manen, 1990); therefore, the themes in this study were developed from the participants' actual lived experience described to me, the researcher.

## Being

The primary theme emergent in this study was the phenomenon of *being* with five sub-themes further clarifying this concept (see Figure 1). The word *being* can be defined in multiple ways, but one that seems appropriate is *the quality or state of having existence* (Merriam-Webster). Usually, this term is used in conjunction with a noun that gives meaning to the word; however, in this study *being* emerged as a term that encapsulated all the experiences participants identified as important with regard to becoming a counselor. Literature and research in the field of counseling often solely identified being the counselor or practicing being the counselor as of primary importance to counselor development (citations); however, in this study participants identified multiple ways of being as important. Therefore, it seemed important to identify *being* as a word that represents the multiple experiences that represent becoming a counselor. *Being* can be defined as the action-oriented moments and experiences of the participants during live supervision that contributed to their knowledge and identity development as a counselor.

All of the experiences of *being* identified during live supervision contributed to greater understanding of not only counseling skills for participants, but the essence of what it means to be a counselor. In this sense, practicing being a counselor and the experience of becoming one encompassed multiple roles. One participant initially described the experiences of being as "pulses." She stated, "Three separate pulses, separate experiences, but like one." The word "being" is an important theme in this study as it encapsulates the different dimensions of the live supervision experience. It wasn't just about each individual experience of being (being the counselor, being the observer, etc.), it was about the entire experience. The term "being" encapsulated the experiential nature of live supervision. Live supervision afforded the participants an opportunity to ascertain how the profession of counseling may impact their relationship with self as well as relationships outside the program. The participants spoke to the experiential aspect of

live supervision that afforded them the opportunity to, in a sense, try on the profession with the safety net of live supervision in place.

Figure 1. A diagram of the emergent themes from the study.



To capture this experience in textual description the word *being* was selected. In listening and reviewing transcripts it seemed as if participants experienced live supervision in a way that contributed to greater understanding of the roles of counseling (client, counselor, observer), but also contributed to greater understanding of how counseling would have a profound impact upon their personhood and subsequent relationships. Participants stories were saturated with the notion of *being* immersed in the role and experience of the counselor whether they were doing the counseling, acting as client, or observing.

After the first round of interviews the lived experience of live supervision during pre-practicum emerged as the experience of *being* with three distinct experiences of “being” after round one interviews: *being the counselor*, *being the observer*, and *being the client*. These themes, while connected to the roles that each student assumed in the class, emerged as very integral to each participants’ experiences of the phenomenon. These themes captured the emotions, the questions, and behaviors that participants experienced while engaged in live supervision.

When asked the broad question, “What are your experiences of live supervision during pre-practicum?” each participant, initially, described their experience within the roles that were utilized in the structure of the live supervision course. Participant one, Andrea, described it as the “three pulses” of live supervision. She states,

It is surprising what comes out and what separation there is for me between each role. I can just shut off and shift to observer mode or vice versa, but it is surprising how different my experience is in each one of

those (the roles of the class). Like three separate pulses, separate experience, but like one.

Participant descriptions during round two interviews clarified emergent themes from the first round, and produced two new themes connected to the notion of “being”: *being in relationship with self* and *being in relationship with others*. The participants described the new experiences of “being” as contributing to greater connection with self as well as others (supervisors, peers, family). While the first three of these experiences of “being” are indicative of the three roles described in the contextual description (see above), participants indicated that the experience of being extended beyond those roles and incorporated both an intrapersonal aspect (being in relationship with self), as well as an interpersonal aspect (being in relationship with others).

### **Being the Counselor**

For participants, *being the counselor* encompassed moments during live supervision when they were practicing skills, while the doctoral level supervisors and their peers were observing behind the mirror. *Being the counselor* described practice as the counselor with the purpose of “trying on” the profession of counseling, as well as ways in which the practice during live supervision influenced subsequent thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The following statements are illustrative of participants’ experience of trying on the profession while in the role of *being the counselor*.

Andrea: I can read about it, talk about it, intellectualize it, but when am I going to actually do it in this seat (the counselor)? That is the most valuable learning tool for me, and then getting feedback on that just makes it more impactful. It is so useful on so many different levels to be figuring this out here, knowing myself in that experiential way before I am working with clients.

James: The main feeling that resonates with me is just excitement. Just to be able to put into practice the things that I am taught, to hone my skills, and be able to actually start the process to become a counselor.

Dana: I am so excited to finally go in here and do what I keep thinking about. I am really excited each time I go to pre-practicum. Just getting that learning experience, getting the opportunity to learn and blunder through things (as the counselor).

Participants described *being the counselor* during live supervision as a powerful avenue to learn as it connected the objective information like the lecture about basic skills of counseling with real life experience. In addition to the excitement of *being the counselor*, participants also described a variety of emotions in reaction to *being the counselor*, such as frustration with self, anxiety about being observed, loneliness, and excitement about *being the counselor*. Participants stated:

Andrea: My frustration is about practice, not that I am holding myself to a perfect standard, but in practice there are times when my skill reflects my learning curve.

Dana: When I am in there that is where the anxiety is. I am trying to do one on one with the client, but there is that aspect of being watched that produces anxiety. I will catch myself saying “that makes you feel sad” when I know I should not use makes you feel and I will remember all the other people in the room behind the mirror.

Anxiety seemed to be a primary emotion that emerged for participants. With the emergence of anxiety, participants found that they had a variety of questions come to their mind regarding live supervision. For example, questions included: “What is live supervision?”, “What makes it different from regular supervision?”, and ‘How am going to do this when I don’t have people watching me anymore?’ Many of the questions stemmed from unfamiliarity with the idea of live supervision, as well as the changes that they were feeling as a person. However, participants found that their self-talk was extremely instrumental when “being the counselor” to manage their anxiety. Participants found that their anxiety was particularly high during feedback (both feedback during the session, as well as the feedback session at the end).

Participants used self-talk to reframe feedback, which each described as helpful. For example, one participant described telling herself that her next session would be better and the feedback was important. Participants found that they had to choose to use the feedback and interventions to impact their development positively (rather than let the anxiety take over) and they did this using self-talk.

### **Being the Observer**

For participants the second sub-theme, *being the observer* encompassed moments during live supervision when they were observing their peers as the counselor and the client behind the mirror with the doctoral supervisors. This role included interrupting the session, as well as participating in the feedback for the counselor at the conclusion of the counseling session. For participants, their experience of *being the observer* seemed to be somewhat distant and removed from the emotional connection of being the counselor. In fact, they described the glass as a welcome barrier that provided a space to focus solely on the cognitive portion of learning the skills of counseling. The following statements are illustrative of this theme:

Andrea: There is a disconnect between being behind the glass, observing another student counseling, and being able to process vicariously.

Dana: It is different from being in the client role because you are not so in that moment, you can really take that step back and kind of analyze what is going on. I like watching someone else conceptualize. I think it is interesting to see where the other students conceptualize things going or where things are going. So, I think that is an important aspect of it. Also,

being behind the glass I think that I can attend more to their attending behaviors or lack of, so I think that is more of an objective learning being behind the glass.

The experience of being the observer provided a new experience that did not require students to attend to the emotional aspects of the counseling relationship with such intensity. In addition, live supervision provided an avenue for the participants to simultaneously experience experiential learning, as well as what they described as cognitive learning. Participants also spoke to the critical importance of being able to witness the “process” of counseling happening in real time. Finally, participants appreciated the separation that the observation mirror provided. The separation provided a space for participants to do what felt comfortable. Participants described feeling surprised at the amount of learning that occurred behind the mirror, and as a result appreciated and enjoyed the experience of being the observer as it provided significant learning tools that solidified the emotional and technical aspects of their learning. However, participants also described feeling apprehensive at times, as they observed their peer as counselor. For example Dana stated, “Oh my gosh....I just watched him do this and now..... I need to know how to mimic that behavior, or to not use that behavior.” Participants also described the experience of choosing to be an active participant behind mirror.

James: It is pretty easy to go into the room and kind of say, well I am not on tap today, so I will be here to fill my seat. I am not here to necessarily participate. For me at least the most growth comes, when I take the opportunity to learn no matter what my role is.

Participants described “paying attention” and “attending” to what was happening in the other room. These statements implied that part of the experience of being the observer, included making an active choice to participate in the learning that had the potential to take place behind the mirror. Learning had the potential to take place as it was up to the student to take advantage of that opportunity.

### **Being the Client**

*Being the client* encompassed moments during live supervision when participants were the client for the peer counselor. In addition, *being the client* included limited participation in the feedback process for the counselor during walk-ins, as well as the feedback at the conclusion of the session. Participants described having a difficult time with this experience when the time came to conduct feedback for the counselor. The feedback felt invasive and not safe at times. While the space in the room felt safe when the actual counseling session was occurring, the space felt unsafe when the session broke and the feedback began. The following statement by James describes this theme:

The experience as the client that is a little more interesting and difficult, but not bad. It is one thing to be analyzed as a counselor and what you are doing and then to see what you just said, but as the client some of the

things I am still feeling. The places you have gone in the session and then have it dissected right away. It is not something that has been so uncomfortable that I have been like you guys do this I have to leave, nor has anyone else I have seen. It is different to kind of take a step back and not only a figurative step back, but a literal step back... we usually scoot the chairs back and break the session. So, you are sitting there as the client thinking I guess this is how I did through everybody's eyes and how the session went through everybody else's eyes. So, it is different. Not bad, not as fun.

While participants understood that the feedback was necessary to the learning process, as the client, the experience did not always feel very safe; in fact, participants indicated that they often felt vulnerable and exposed. For example Andrea and James stated:

Andrea: When I am the counselor I feel more in control because I have more power, but when I am the client I feel very powerless. It is a really vulnerable situation, and processing right after, in the same room is difficult. The only separation is that you scoot yourself back.

James: It is just uncomfortable, so you just have to get used to it (being the client). In the beginning I was a lot more uncomfortable and now it is not so much. Generally speaking the supervision and the live nature of it being right there, right then they (the supervisor) direct the feedback and they will turn to the client and say, "So, when you did this, or when you said this..." And then I think, "Oh yeah I remember that," and so at the same it helps though because there have been times when I have been able to give feedback as the client to the counselor and I been given feedback by the client. So, as hard as it is, it really is beneficial.

Participants recognized that aside from a live supervision situation, one might not get to obtain feedback from the client regarding their skill as the counselor. So, while being the client was uncomfortable, participants also appreciated being able to help the counselor by giving feedback. In many ways, it seemed to lessen the intensity of emotion felt in that role. However, participants had questions about what and how much to share as the client, and wondered about the "analyzing" that was happening behind the mirror. One participant wondered if moving to a different room, even, to process feedback would be helpful. Again, as with *being the counselor*, participants indicated that self talk was helpful to mitigate the intensity of emotion.

Self-talk provided a means to offset the intense emotional reaction to being the client, particularly during the feedback process during live supervision. Intellectually, participants understood the purpose of feedback; yet, emotionally they experienced numerous feelings. For example, Andrea stated:

I don't particularly want to be that open, so that is tough for me. I am not totally comfortable. I feel exposed and much more vulnerable. At the same

time I understand the structure (of the class) and the necessity for the feedback and there is no fault to find.

### **Being in Relationship with Self**

Second round data analysis resulted in the formation of an additional theme, *being in relationship with self*. This theme characterized participants' perspectives and reflections upon their emerging identity as counselors and their changing perspectives as individuals as a result of live supervision. The experience of live supervision resulted in a profound impact upon participants' personal and professional growth. Andrea described it as a face lift. She knew that she would "look" better, but the bandages were still on. She was excited for the new her; yet, she was also incredibly scared regarding the implication of that change for her relationships outside the program. The experience of being the counselor, being the client, and being the observer during live supervision increased participants' awareness of self with regard to personal and professional issues. Participants described that live supervision was different than they thought it would be, in that they were not prepared for so much personal change. The following statements describe this theme:

James: In order to become a good counselor I need to have the skills down and that is where I was during the first interview. Now during the second interview is more about...okay I have those skills. I have been using them for about 10 weeks. How has that impacted me? And how am I changing? That is where it is at for me, the self awareness piece.

Dana: I think this is a growing game, the waiting game. I can't find out what I have grown into until I am there, until I start working with my own clients. I know then I will have the knowledge with the experience piece.

This theme captured the change that participants so strongly felt within themselves. Often this emerged as less clarity or grayness, as James described it:

It seems funny to think those little things we...those stage one skills where we are focusing on that same issue. I recognize that things don't make me feel a certain way, they don't make me do a certain thing, and at the same time I have gained an awareness of, a better understanding, that it is not so much black versus white, but so many gray areas out there. How we are unique and different, but how we are still all people. When I think about it (the gray) in a different nature, and I am exposed to some of these things I realized I need to change the way I view things.

The experience of live supervision raised participants' awareness of internal changes and dichotomous thinking patterns that were no longer useful to participants as they engaged in being the client, counselor, or observer. There was an emerging recognition that a change was needed with regard to how they viewed the world. With this growing recognition, participants also described the variety of emotional reactions

they experienced coupled with the increased awareness of both personal and professional change. Andrea described grieving for the parts of herself “that needed to go away, so that I can be more fully that new person.” Participants also described feeling simultaneously excited and scared about the awareness that they were changing, as well as proud about the changes that they had accomplished. For example,

James: I am going to have to go and do this without any help, without people watching me, without a bug in the ear. I am going to have to do this. I am anxious, but at the same time I don't need to be that anxious because I have been given tools. I know that if I trust my abilities I will be able to do it. There is an unknown piece and there is still reservation there, as well as a sense of urgency to do all I can to be the best counselor that I can in the next couple of weeks. Yeah I am feeling a sense of urgency, but I know I can do it.

For all participants, there seemed to be an overall excitement regarding an emerging identity as a counselor; yet with the excitement, participants also wondered when the change they could live with, as well as how much of the “old person” would still be left, as well as wondered if the change would be lasting. These statements are illustrative of this aspect of the theme *being in relationship with self*,

Andrea: In the changing...how much change can I live with? How much new person is still within the parameters of the structure of the old person? How much will be too much? It is a hard thing for me...

James: I don't know...the self-awareness piece. Can I do this? Where am I as a counselor? When live supervision goes away, can I rely on what I have and the tools that I have been given to really become that counselor that I hope I can be?

### **Being in Relationship with Others**

Second round data analysis resulted in the formation of a second additional theme, *being in relationship with others*. Data analysis illuminated a connection between participants' growing identity as a counselor and their relationship with others. The term, others, included family, peers and supervisors. Participants described the impact that others (supervisors and peers) had upon them, as well as the impact of live supervision on their relationships with others (family and friends, and peers). The following statements highlight this theme:

Andrea: It puts pressure on us (family) right now. I feel like I need to find a way to either cordon things off more completely, to break that pattern of integration that I have had. Or, I need to find a way to...find a role that I can take home that will be beneficial and I have not found balance on that yet.

James: I am changing and my family sees that, but most importantly I see how I am changing. My wife and I had a discussion on the way to the grocery store the other night that I think even six months ago we would never have had. We would have both said this side is right, this side is wrong. Instead, there was a shift to say, well I can see how I value others decisions, values, beliefs...

Andrea: I need that relationship (supervisors) right now because I would be all alone and it would be a horrible place. I don't poke through the cocoon in only a day. Yeah, it is that component of having that shell, until I can get my feet underneath, until I am ready. It keeps me from taking it home, or to all my friends.

Participants described how the rules of relationship building changed during live supervision. In fact, the rules for building relationships with others seem to be absent during live supervision; the normal social rules used to build relationships did not apply. For example, the nature of the supervisory relationship was unidirectional. The supervisors knew a lot about the participants, but the participants did not know a lot about them. Also, the amount of self-disclosure that occurs in counseling relationship and supervisory relationship during live supervision occurs very quickly. For example, Andrea described it like this:

Andrea: That (the relationships with peers and supervisors) has been real important to me. The whole relationship piece has been probably the most difficult thing for me because the rules that I am use to for building relationships have completely turned on their heads here....completely! So, with the relationship with supervisors, I had to stop and think, do have a relationship with the supervisors? It hasn't been consciously built on my part which is weird to have that kind of support without the conscious intention of creating a relationship there to provide support.

In addition, regarding relationships with supervisors, participants also discussed the impact that their experiences during live supervision were having upon relationships with family and friends. For example, Andrea described it like this:

I feel sad. I get a lot of intellectual needs met at my job. I get social support and in the past I got like a double bonus gratification of doing a good job at work and then coming home and feeling like it is really benefiting my family. As a counselor, I feel like it is just benefitting me. I know there is some hurt there (with my husband) because neither one of us have had the experience of not being able to bring work home. I mean we are dealing with that, but it is ...has been difficult for both of us.

Important to participants' experiences were the relationships experienced with supervisors and peers, as well as their families. Participants questioned how they would handle practicum without live supervision and the support of peers and supervisors. Also,

participants questioned how much change to their personhood their family and friends could handle. Finally, participants described that the live supervision experience provided an opportunity to be close to their peers yet described being hesitant as both the counselor and the client with peers because she knew so much about her peers' personal experiences. So, while participants enjoyed the closeness that live supervision provided, questions emerged regarding how much to share as the client given that the client knew so much about the counselor, as well as how much to push as the counselor when giving feedback. Participants enjoyed the new changes they were experiencing as a result of being in live supervision and the three experiences of "being" described in the first round; however, they also were beginning to grasp how much live supervision was beginning to change how they thought about themselves and ultimately wondered how it was going to impact their relationship with others, particularly family.

### **Member Check Interview**

The member check interview was conducted upon data analysis of the second round interview data. The member check provided an opportunity for participants to respond to the data, to adjust or alter the data analysis, and provide additional feedback. It also seemed to provide closure for the participants and provide new perspective on the experience of live supervision and their subsequent development as a counselor. Participants indicated that the five themes that emerged provided a frame for their experience. Essentially, the research put words to their experience. It provided a way to tell their story, and they indicated it provided a therapeutic benefit they would not have otherwise had.

### **Implications within the Conceptual Context**

To date, there is a dearth of literature that specifically addresses the use and experience of live supervision during pre-practicum, which is one of the reasons for conducting this study. However, the research found in the areas of live supervision, marriage and family therapy, pre-practicum, and counselor development will be discussed and explored in connection to the findings of this study.

### **Live Supervision**

Research supports the notion that live supervision aids in both personal and professional development. Champe (2004) found that supervisees' experiences of live supervision were continually shaped by supervisees' perceptions and experiences of personal and professional development. These findings also connect with the personal changes and growth identified by participants in this study. For example, the theme *being in relationship with self* described the changes that participants experienced during live supervision. The experience of live supervision highlighted areas that participants needed to attend with regard to personal issues that might impede their ability to be an effective counselor. This finding supports the notion that training methods such as live supervision are instrumental to the growth and development of counselors.

Also, participants indicated that the opportunity to “try on” the role of counselor illuminated areas where they needed to expand their worldview. Participants had difficulty fully describing the changes that they were feeling, but indicated that an emerging recognition that change was occurring even if it could not yet be completely articulated.

In addition to personal change, Champe (2004) indicated that students described live supervision experience as being permeated with relationships. It would seem that this description also supports the findings of this study. Participants described the profound impact the experience of live supervision had upon their personal and professional growth, and subsequently described the growing recognition that all the personal change would influence their relationships outside the program. For example, some participants described the impact that the experience of live supervision was already having within their families due to all the personal change. All the participants described the impact that the experience of live supervision had upon relationships with peers and supervisors. In addition, the findings connected with Champe’s study suggest that preparing students for the significant personal and relational changes that result from the learning environment indicative of live supervision might mitigate emotional distress that impedes success in the class.

Results of Champe (2004) also indicated that developmental differences existed between first- and second-year students with regard to their perceptions of live supervision. Champe found that first year trainees experienced anxiety and are highly self-conscious while counseling during live supervision. Consequently, they repeatedly used a “moderating mantra” to remind themselves of the benefits of receiving feedback. This is similar to the self-talk described by participants of this study. Champe (2004) also found that first year trainees have a heightened awareness of their body, mannerisms, and physical behaviors. The anxiety reportedly stemmed from an awareness of being observed by supervisors and peers, and when supervisors interrupted the session they felt a mixture of relief, fear, and defensiveness. Feedback received during interruptions was viewed as either positive or negative. This also seems to support certain aspects of my study. In my study the participants did not seem to focus on their body and mannerism, but attended more to the anxiety connected to receiving feedback. In addition, my study provides new insight into students’ experiences of live supervision during pre-practicum in that students experienced anxiety both as the counselor and the client.

Champe’s (2004) study indicated the anxiety reported by participants was when they were experiencing the role of counselor. It would seem that during live supervision, educators and supervisors might attend primarily to the anxiety and self-consciousness felt by the counselor, yet the findings of this study indicate that the anxiety and self-consciousness was equally, if not more, present when experiencing being the client and being the observer. This might suggest that educators who use live supervision must prepare students for all of the roles that live supervision during pre-practicum encompasses. Live supervision during pre-practicum focuses on the training and attainment of basic counseling skills; yet results of my study would suggest that the experience of being the client and being the observer during live supervision is just as impactful to the development of a counseling identity.

## **Marriage and Family Training Clinics**

Marriage and family training clinic literature has been a source of information to inform this study, given that there is very little literature in the field of counselor education that addresses live supervision. Addressing the experiences of supervisors and supervisees, Wark (1995) qualitatively examined the experiences of five pairs of family therapy supervisors and supervisees using live supervision. Three domains deemed to be impactful with regard to supervisees' experiences of live supervision emerged from the transcribed data: supporting, collaborating, and teaching/directing. These findings potentially support the findings of my study in that my participants indicated that relationships with supervisors were impactful to their development as counselors. My participants indicated that they perceived live supervision interventions and feedback as supportive. Live supervision impacted personal development and awareness; however, it would seem natural that this would impact other relationships, as well. Much of the literature does not address the experience of live supervision and the impact of peer relationships on counselor development. Champe (2004) indicated that peer relationships were impactful to counselor development, which also fits with the findings of my study. Yet, Wark (1995) only explored the relationship between supervisors and supervisees during live supervision. Again, implications from my study would indicate that the experience of live supervision impacts relationships with supervisors and also with peers.

Other literature in the area of marriage and family training clinics focused on live supervision methods and interventions (Mauzey & Erdman, 1997; Moorhouse & Carr, 1999; Scherl & Haley, 2000); however, the participants of the current study did not focus on interventions when relating their stories. While they briefly mentioned them, the participants of my study were more focused on the opportunities that live supervision provided in learning to become a counselor. The participants were anxious, yet grateful when supervisors intervened or gave feedback. This might suggest that at this developmental level, supervision is so new that supervisees are more focused on skill attainment and learning to become a counselor than how those methods are utilized. It might also suggest that development of a relationship with supervisors is important, yet how this relationship develops and the closeness experienced between supervisors and supervisees may vary dependent upon the context.

While studies from the field of marriage and family therapy contribute to the conceptual framework of the experience of pre-practicum students in live supervision, these studies do not specifically speak to the experiences of the participants of my study. However, the differences may speak not only to issues of professional identity, but also issues connected to developmental level. It could be that pre-practicum counseling students in live supervision perceive the experience differently than students who are further along in their counseling programs.

## **Pre-practicum**

For students just beginning their training, an introduction to the basic skills of counseling is an important aspect of their education (Furr & Carroll, 2003). There are limited research studies that specifically address the experience of live supervision during pre-practicum.

For example, Woodside et al. (2007) conducted a phenomenological study with eight pre-practicum counseling students, examining students' experiences of learning to become a counselor. Students described the experience of self-doubt while learning to become a counselor, as well as questioning their decision to be in the field of counselor education. Woodside et al. (2007) potentially support the findings of my study in that participants spoke to the emotions and questions that developed while experiencing live supervision during pre-practicum. Participants described learning more about themselves during live supervision while being the counselor, client, and observer. Woodside et al. (2007) spoke of a shift in settings boundaries in personal and professional sense. This finding can also be supported by my study in that participants described an emerging recognition during live supervision that becoming a counselor was going to have an impact upon their personal and professional relationships. Participants had a difficult time at this point articulating what those boundary shifts were; yet recognized that it was going to occur and in many instances was needed.

Elam's (2001) study is perhaps most similar to my research study with regard to the definition of pre-practicum. Elam explored the changes in master's students enrolled in pre-practicum within the same university using grounded theory methodology. Results from his study indicated that students experienced anxiety before the class even began with regard to rumors of the course's difficulty, fear of inappropriate self-disclosure as the client, and the experiential learning process of the class. While Elam did not focus solely on the experience of live supervision, it fit with the themes and situations described by the participants of my study.

For example, participants of my study described anxiety connected to self-disclosure as a client. Elam (2001) also spoke of the experiential learning that takes place during pre-practicum which is connected to live supervision. This supports the findings of my study in that participants spoke of not only being the counselor, but being the client and being the observer. This supports and expands upon the results of Elam's study. However, what makes my study different is that the various experiences of being are described in more detail in my study. Participants did not describe one role being more important than another, but considered all experiences of being as equally important to their development as a counselor.

My study revealed that all roles students utilize in live supervision during pre-practicum were impactful; yet, much of the remaining literature regarding live supervision and pre-practicum focused on the role of counselor, or the relationship of the supervisor (Heppner et al., 1994; Hoffman & Hill, 1996; Larson, et al., 1999; Williams, Judge, Hill, & Hoffman, 1997). These studies did not specifically speak to the experience of live supervision for the students in pre-practicum, nor did the studies speak to the results of my study that suggest that students learn and grow from each of the roles that they experienced during live supervision. It would seem that much of the literature focused solely the role of the counselor, yet there is a richness of experience that the participants of my study spoke to regarding the roles of client and observer.

## **Counselor Development**

Beginning supervisees can be characterized as lacking self awareness and often engage in dichotomous thinking (Borders, 1989). In addition, supervisees are critical of

their work and progress and rely upon supervisors telling them the correct way to do counseling. However, it is the counselors' perception of their "self conceptualization" that gives structure to professional responsibilities (Brott & Myers, 1999, p. 443). Self conceptualizations can be described as "personal guidelines" that provide a "meaning-making framework" used when acting in the role of counselor (Brott & Myers, 1999, p. 443).

This description seems to fit well with the results of my study. Participants described that being the counselor and trying on that role provided a framework in which to understand what being a counselor encompassed. In addition, understanding the role of counselor in live supervision during pre-practicum also enlightened participants' understanding of the impact this new role would have with regard to perception of self and perception of others. However, my study also provided new insight with regard to how supervisees develop personal guidelines with regard to being a counselor. In addition to experiencing the role of counselor, participants indicated that being the client and being the observer were influential in their developing identity as a counselor. These two additional roles in the framework of an experiential learning environment like live supervision also provide meaning and information with which to understand the role of the counselor.

Studies by Auxier, Hughes, and Kline (2003) and Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) speak to the saliency of using experiential activities during counselor training programs. This finding connects with my study given that the participants spoke to the significance of being not only the counselor, but the client and observer. Participants valued the opportunity to not only try on being a counselor, but also indicated that all three roles impacted their development. Experiential learning is a common theme found in studies regarding counselor identity development. In research on counselor development, students repeatedly mentioned the importance of gaining experience in being both the counselor and client during basic skills courses (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Nelson & Jackson, 2003). Students who participate in experiential learning report an increase in confidence connected to their skills and ability (Nelson & Jackson, 2003). Again, this finding connects with the findings of my study. Participants stated that they were grateful for the opportunity to have live supervision as they practiced with peers.

Nelson and Jackson (2003) also indicated that during counseling training programs, students experience positive incidents connected to their interpersonal relationships outside the counseling program relationships. This also connects to the findings of the current study in that participants spoke of their relationships with others, including family and friends. There were positive aspects that resulted in those relationships as a result of being in live supervision; however, participants also indicated that there was a growing recognition during live supervision that as they were changing, their relationships might change as well. One participant wondered how much change her relationship could sustain. Live supervision not only provided an opportunity to "try on" the role of counselor, but also "try on" what that role might mean for their relationships outside of the program.

### **Implications for Pre-practicum Students and Counselor Educators**

The results of this study suggest that students' experiences during live supervision incorporate more roles than that of counselor. The findings also suggest that live supervision potentially opens the door for student growth and change, as well as the development of a counselor identity in dynamic ways due to the learning that occurred in all three roles: counselor, client, and observer. Live supervision during pre-practicum served as a catalyst to promote counselor growth which fits well with the numerous benefits of experiential activities spoken about in the literature (Auxier et al., 2003; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Nelson & Jackson, 2003).

The detailed description of the experiences of the three students in this study may provide invaluable information to utilize during class, as they normalize student reactions. In addition, students in pre-practicum may benefit from mentoring by faculty or students further along in the process. During member check interviews, the participants of this study indicated that being a part of the study and talking about their experience during pre-practicum was very therapeutic.

For counselor educators and supervisors who use live supervision during pre-practicum, the results of this study suggest that students may appreciate a structured format to the class which incorporates the first three sub-themes (being the counselor, being the client, and being the observer). There are various methods in which to teach a counseling techniques course; however, given the positive reaction it might be useful to explore using the method outlined in the context portion of this article. In addition, if educators use live supervision methods, they may want to be sure to thoroughly explain what it is. The participants in this study indicated that they were often unsure of what live supervision and feedback were and this contributed to their initial anxiety. Given this, supervisors might want to take more time initially to discuss what live supervision is, in what roles students can be expected to participate, and what they can expect to potentially experience. The same holds true for feedback. Participants indicated that discussing feedback, potential reactions to feedback, and possible sources of those reactions may have been helpful. In addition, participants described feeling surprised by the amount of personal growth and awareness that occurred during live supervision. They were expecting to learn the basic skills of counseling, but they were not expecting to change so much as a person. It would most likely be helpful to include discussion in the first couple of weeks of class on what students might expect with regard to personal growth.

### **Future Research**

Future research might further explore the experience of "trying on" the counselor role, and what meaning that holds for students. The results of my study indicate that "trying on" appeared to be quite impactful. Participants appreciated being able to practice being a counselor with live supervision and appreciated the immediate feedback. So, future research might also incorporate quantitative methods by examining self-efficacy scores of students entering their first practicum who experienced live supervision during pre-practicum compared with those who did not. Also, participants indicated the presence of numerous unanswered questions with regard to their identity development as a counselor going into their first practicum. Given this phenomenon, it would seem that

exploring the transition from a live supervision experience during pre-practicum to practicum (which does not use live supervision) would warrant further study, as well.

### Conclusion

Live supervision is a complex experience that involves the blending of numerous roles and activities. Master's students in a Pre-practicum Counseling Techniques class shared their perceptions and experiences of live supervision. A narrative of their experience negotiating the numerous emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that emerged during this study addressed gaps in the literature. Their descriptions formed the data from which this beginning narrative emerged. There is the hope that my study will inform both students and educators in counselor education programs, and subsequently, inform future students of the experience and improve the process of counselor education. In the words of Van Manen (1990), a "phenomenological text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through, that which tends to hide itself" (p. 130). The desire is that this text allows an experience that was once hidden to "shine through."

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This research was funded by a grant from the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision.

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### **Article Citation**

Koltz, R. L., & Feit, S. S. (2012). A phenomenological study: The experience of live supervision during a pre-practicum counseling techniques course. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(Art. 80), 1-24. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/koltz.pdf>

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