

# **A Social Cognitive—and Developmental— Model of Counselor Training**

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The articles that constitute the major contribution to this issue are significant additions to the growing literature on the application of Bandura's (1982, 1986) social cognitive theory (SCT) to the area of counselor supervision. In the first article, Larson and Daniels (1998 [this issue]) carefully review the existing studies, most of which are primarily focused on the self-efficacy construct of Bandura's theory. They note in this review that the data are somewhat equivocal concerning how well the notion of self-efficacy has translated to counselor training, but are promising in what the theory has to offer our understanding of this process.

Although I was struck by a number of aspects of the review article and what these results may mean, I would like to focus my attention on the presentation of the Social Cognitive Model of Counselor Training (SCMCT) presented in the second article. I think this piece forms the basis for subsequent research activity in this area and, in my opinion, some additional considerations may be in order to help guide this research.

## **STRENGTHS OF THE SCMCT**

Larson (1998 [this issue]) is to be commended for her exhaustive translation of the SCT to counselor training. Of particular importance, I believe, is her attempt to present the entire theory rather than simply focusing on self-efficacy, as have most of the empirical investigations to date. In both articles, it was carefully articulated what we have learned, and what is left to learn, regarding the application of the SCT to this new area. The inadequacies of some of the prior studies, always the case when breaking new ground, were addressed, and directions for future research were presented.

Larson also went beyond the boundaries of the SCT in her SCMCT and incorporated constructs from other theoretical influences including social influence, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and other work, specifically addressing issues of counselor supervision. Finally, she states succinct hypotheses coming from the model as a guide for future research on the

SCMCT as well as suggestions for supervisors in applying the model to their work with trainees.

Having recently completed an updated book on the Integrated Developmental Model of Supervision (IDM) with colleagues (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1997), I was intrigued by the similarities in the issues and literatures addressed in Larson's article and our book. A major difference, however, would appear to me to be the perceptual lens through which we view the training and supervision process. Larson notes, "In its simplest form, SCT identifies self-efficacy as the major mediator between knowing what to do and executing the action." (p. 256). This may be true, but "knowing what to do" and "executing the action" are incredibly large and important areas that go way beyond "one's beliefs or judgments about one's capability to effectively counsel a client" (p. 221). Considering the literature, it appears that self-efficacy is only marginally related to counseling efficacy. Indeed, considerable attention was paid in the article to situations in which self-efficacy is either too high or too low in contrast to assessments of counseling effectiveness.

Although the self-efficacy "lens" is an important perspective regarding a trainee's confidence in his or her abilities, other lenses bring into sharper focus additional aspects of the training process that are important. For example, Larson mentions counselor developmental level as an important consideration in addressing stable counselor characteristics as well as "in the dynamic aspects of the counselor's personal agency, the counselor's actions, and the supervision environment" (p. 252). My bias would be to frame the discussion from a developmental perspective and address the contributions of the SCT, and by inference the SCMCT, within this framework for different developmental levels.

For example, in a recent article, we examined how important constructs from social influence and the ELM would be expected to play out in the supervision context for trainees at differing levels of development (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Crethar, 1995). We examined the "differential influences" across levels of development of various counselor and supervisor characteristics. Due to differences in motivation and ability (e.g., knowledge and experience), power bases associated with the supervisor (e.g., expert or referent cues) may serve to elicit peripheral route cognitive processing (less likely to be integrated, less predictive of subsequent behavior) in Level 1 trainees, while the same cues may elicit central route processing (more intensive, more integrated, more predictive of subsequent behavior) in Level 2 trainees. Level 3 trainees may engage in either route depending on other conditions in the situation. Although some of this effect can be examined in

terms of self-efficacy in a descriptive way, self-efficacy does not lead to these predictions.

Thus, many processes and predictions associated with the SCMCT will be affected, I believe, by level of trainee development. As we note in the IDM, this development must be examined in a domain-specific manner. For example, in a recent study (Leach, Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Eichenfield, *in press*), we examined self-efficacy in counselor trainees using the Counselor Self-Estimate Inventory (COSE; Larson et al., 1992) across practica experience levels. Relative levels of counselor development were determined by using the Supervisee Levels Questionnaire-Revised (McNeill, Stoltenberg, & Romans, 1992). We found that higher level trainees scored significantly higher on all five subscales of the COSE (Microskills, Counseling Process, Difficult Client Behaviors, Cultural Competence, and Awareness of Values) than did less developed trainees. In addition, we presented a brief intake description of either a reactively depressed or sexually abused client to the trainees and then had them imagine they were to be assigned this client to be seen for the first session in the near future. They then completed the COSE regarding their reactions to working with this client. In addition to the main effect for level of development, we found that trainees who had reported greater experience in working with sexually abused clients scored higher on self-efficacy as measured by the Difficult Client Behavior Scale than did those with less experience, regardless of overall degree of prior counseling experience. We interpreted this to indicate a tendency for self-efficacy to vary depending on trainee development in the domain of interest, much like we expect counselor development in general to vary from domain to domain. This interpretation is consistent with data from other studies (e.g., Tracey, Ellickson, & Sherry, 1989).

Another area of additional attention for the SCMCT might be the role of affect. Emotional arousal is discussed in terms of setting the stage for motivation to learn and is seen as stimulating the development of self-efficacy and effectiveness. There are, however, other aspects of affect that we address in the IDM and believe may benefit from further empirical examination. We have discussed the theoretical importance and evidence for facilitative versus inadequate or debilitating anxiety in other publications (e.g., Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Stoltenberg et al., 1995, 1997). Again, attention to counselor developmental level suggests differential expectations regarding the role of anxiety. We also discuss the differences between self-consciousness (overconcern for one's own behavior or an evaluation by a supervisor) and self-awareness (understanding one's feelings and their origins). In addition, the affective consequences of true empathy with the client constitutes another

emotional component that can affect the counseling process as well as reflect the development of the trainee. The IDM suggests how trainees at different levels will tend to experience these different forms of affect and how that may affect supervision and counseling. An empirical examination of these effects has yet to be adequately conducted.

Cognitive processing was briefly discussed by Larson in reference to the SCMCT, although space considerations no doubt limited her ability to address this issue. We are directed, however, to an excellent discussion on information processing and personal problem solving by Heppner and Krauskopf (1987). Their article relies, in part, on Anderson's (1985) Adaptive Character of Thought (ACT) model which has been subsequently revised into the ACT-R model (Anderson, 1996). In our recent book on the IDM (Stoltenberg et al., 1997), we examine the implications of this model for counselor supervision. The cognitive, associative, and autonomous stages of cognitive processing leads us through a consideration of initial declarative verbal or image representation of a procedure (a rudimentary understanding) to a streamlining of procedures in response to feedback and correcting errors and results in proficiency in performance that may become automatic. The ability of experts to "reason forward," converting inference rules into mental procedures that can be used even in the absence of specific goals captures, we believe, a process similar to what we see in counselor development. The matching of sets or patterns of characteristics encoded in a meaningful way into memory suggests a more complex process than the focus on learning microskills, which has been the object of much of the self-efficacy in supervision research.

The differences between experts and novices delineated in cognitive research and theory suggests that simply acquiring more facts and skills is not sufficient in explaining how to move from a novice to expert counselor. The strength and number of links among concepts (nodes) determines how any given concept is selected as important to solving a particular problem.

Schema development (Gagne, Yekovich, & Yekovich, 1993) is also an important process in information processing. I will not go into detail on this process due to space limitations, but it is important to note that creation of schemata (a representation that describes an entity across a set of instances) is not automatic. In counseling and supervision, we rely on schemata for understanding the process. Without effective supervision, trainees run the risk of developing overly general and inadequate schemata that emphasize similarities across clients, interventions, and processes, yet ignore important differences. How this process occurs in supervision (and counseling) is, we think, affected by the developmental level of the trainee for any given domain

of practice and, concomitantly, the facilitative (or lack of) nature of the supervision environment.

Finally, the focus of the SCMCT appears to be primarily on early levels of training. Larson largely discusses counseling skills within a practica training format. This is, of course, a very important part of the training process. We are left to infer, however, how the SCMCT can be used for more advanced training with more complex issues. What differences in process or focus, if any, would we expect for interns and postdoctoral supervisees? How does the interplay of domains (e.g., assessment, intervention, ethics) fit within this model? How does mastering a sequence of facilitative cognitions, emotions, and interventions differ (if at all) from learning more specific counseling skills?

## CONCLUSIONS

I applaud the work of Larson and Daniels in moving the examination of the SCT to a higher, more elaborate level. The summary of the research serves as a good launching point for the extrapolation of the SCT to supervision and training via the SCMCT. I am also impressed with the hypotheses generated for future research by the SCMCT.

I would, however, like to add some additional considerations for future investigations into the supervision and training process. In general, these revolve around including an intentional focus on trainee developmental level in examining the interplay of a number of the factors listed by Larson in her model and subsequent hypotheses. These studies may benefit from qualitative and phenomenological as well as quantitative methodologies.

Recommendations for future research include the following: First, consistently examine the developmental level (experience and other measures) of counselors and trainees in future research. In a recent review of supervision research (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Crethar, 1994), we noticed that a majority of research studies on counselor supervision ignored examining the developmental level of the trainees (or even experience level). We believe there is sufficient empirical support for the importance of this variable that necessitates its inclusion in most investigations. To ignore this potential confound may leave any conclusions drawn from these studies uncertain.

Second, test specific predictions for supervisor influence for various levels of trainees (assessing motivation and ability) for specific supervisory interventions. Test for the presence and implications of supervisor power bases for the cognitive processing of the trainees. Are attitudes affected and,

perhaps more important, is information processed more deeply in response to one approach versus another for various developmental levels? What effect does this processing have on subsequent counseling and supervision sessions?

Third, examine processes across professional domains for various levels of trainees. We need to move beyond a general classification of level and, probably, self-efficacy and examine domain specific factors.

Fourth, look more closely at affect in counseling and supervision, and how it influences counseling process outcomes as well as learning and development of the counselor. Can we sort out self-consciousness from self-awareness at the emotional (or cognitive) level? Can trainees at different levels of development sort out their emotional reactions stemming from accurate empathy, a generalizable emotional response to the client, or those personal reactions constituting countertransference or related processes?

Fifth, how can supervisors assess and assist trainees in proper encoding of information and experiences? How do we encourage development of elaborate and specific schemata, and associated linkages, in trainees? Are the recommendations of the SCMCT for supervisor behavior adequate for this? Does sensitivity to the particular developmental needs of the trainee at given levels help the supervisor encourage this degree of processing?

In summary, good reviews and good models often stimulate more questions than answers. I think the two articles constituting the major contribution to this issue go a long way in moving our investigation into the supervision and training process into the next level of analysis.

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