

Summer 2011

Doctoral Students' Experience with Using the Reflecting Team Model of Supervision Online

Jodi Sindlinger

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DOCTORAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH USING
THE REFLECTING TEAM MODEL OF SUPERVISION ONLINE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Jodi Sindlinger

August 2011

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Jodi Sindlinger

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**DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education

**DOCTORAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH USING THE REFLECTING TEAM
MODEL OF SUPERVISION ONLINE**

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program

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ABSTRACT

DOCTORAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH USING THE REFLECTING TEAM MODEL OF SUPERVISION ONLINE

By

Jodi Sindlinger

August 2011

Dissertation supervised by David Delmonico, Ph.D.

Evidence of the increasing use of technology in counselor education is indicated by the increase in journal articles, programs, websites, and books on this topic (Albrecht & Jones, 2001; Layne & Hohenshil, 2005). The Internet has emerged as an important tool in the training and supervision of counseling students (Conn, Roberts, & Powell, 2009; Watson, 2003). The purpose of this investigation was to explore doctoral students' experience with using the reflecting team (RT) model of supervision online as part of the supervision they received for their internship experience. Five doctoral students and a course instructor from an accredited counselor education and supervision program were the informants for this study. Emerging from the personal narratives of the participants and the subsequent data analysis were several themes related to doctoral students' experience with using the RT model of supervision online. The findings suggest that

users' experience of technology, prior supervision experiences, and individual supervisee factors influenced the meaning made of online RT supervision. The results of the study are discussed within a social constructivist framework and provide a foundation for future discussion and future research related to the distance education and supervision of counselors in training. Limitations, implications, and recommendations for counselor educators and supervisors using online RT supervision are provided.

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CHAPTER I

By 2020 over 60% of college and university students will be taking all of their classes online (Van Der Werf & Sabatier, 2009). Technology experts and scholars describe the increase in the number of students enrolled in distance education programs as an avalanche waiting to happen (S. Fox, Anderson, & Rainie, 2005; Kim & Bonk, 2006). According to *Learning on Demand: Online Education in the United States*, a national report published in 2010, the growing enrollment rate for online programs exceeds the overall higher education student population enrollment (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Graduate students' demand for distance learning surpassed undergraduate student demand for distance learning opportunities from 2002 to 2009, and the demands are expected to continue growing (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Approximately 67% of masters and 77% of doctoral programs surveyed in 2009 report the demands for both current and new online courses has increased (Allen & Seaman, 2010). The same survey reports the demand for online, undergraduate courses has increased by approximately 60% from 2002 to 2009 (Allen & Seaman, 2010).

With the expansion of online learning in the past decade, concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of the online delivery format. In response to questions and concerns about online education, the United States Department of Education published a report in 2009 comparing the effectiveness of online learning to face-to-face learning. According to the report, "The overall finding of the meta-analysis is that classes with online learning (whether taught completely online or blended) on average produce stronger student learning outcomes than do classes with solely face-to-face instruction" (US Department of Education, 2009, p. ix).

Counselor education and supervision has recognized the pervasiveness and potential of online learning in the education and training of student counselors. The promulgation of guidelines and standards related to technology in counselor education and supervision evidence the field's growing attention to the technology that makes learning and training at a distance possible. The "Technical Competencies for Counselor Education Students: Recommended Guidelines For Program Development" and "Guidelines for Online Instruction in Counseling Education" developed by the Technology Interest Network of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES; 1999), and the special technology section of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Professions' 2009 standards (CACREP, 2009) are examples of standards suggesting the professional counseling field has recognized online instruction as pedagogy.

Distance education and online training practices are topics of some controversy within the counselor education field (Burt, Gonzalez, Swank, Ascher, & Cunningham, 2011; Jencius & Paez, 2003; Patrick, 2005). Literature documents both the benefits (Renfro-Michel, O'Halloran, & Delaney, 2010) and concerns (Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007; Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006) related to incorporating distance learning into the education and training of counselors. Distanced education in counseling has been shown to overcome traditional instructional barriers, engage learners, and enhance learning experience, and learning outcome (Coursol & Lewis, 2005; Watson, 2003). Counselors' concerns about distance education include the cost of technology, issues related to the technical comfort or competency of users, and the possibilities for misuse of confidential information (Haberstroh, Duffey, Evans, Gee, & Trepal, 2007; Haberstroh, Parr, Bradley,

Morgan-Fleming & Gee, 2008; Janoff & Schoenholtz-Read, 1999; Sampson, Kolodinsky, & Greeno, 1997).

It has been suggested that counselors possess a general “resistance” to technology, specifically technology that enables counseling and education to occur at a distance (Burt et al., 2011). This resistance might be explained by the counseling field’s strong ties to historical tradition (Burt et al., 2011; Patrick, 2005). According to Patrick (2005), counseling identifies strongly with a traditional educational and supervision approach that “typically relies on face-to-face, real time interaction between students and faculty.” Despite some resistance, online learning and online training opportunities in counselor education programs are increasing (Hayes & Robinson, 2000). It is inevitable then that programs in counselor education and supervision will increasingly explore offering coursework and clinical experience at a distance.

The Present Study

The purpose of this study is to explore doctoral students’ experiences with online supervision involving the reflecting team (RT) model. Members of a student cohort in an accredited doctoral counselor education and supervision program and their internship faculty instructor were recruited for the study. All participants had at least one semester of online RT supervision during the internship phase of their program of study. Participants were asked particularly about the online RT supervision experience they had received in the previous academic year. In that year, students were responsible for completing the training and supervision requirements set forth by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Professions (CACREP, 2009), including weekly group supervision with other student members and program faculty. In addition to face

to face, on campus supervision sessions, the students and faculty also participated in online supervision sessions. Both face-to-face and online supervision session formats included case presentation and the RT model (described later in this introduction and in chapter 2). Although all had participated in traditional, face-to-face, supervision using the RT model, the participants' specific experience using the RT model online was the subject of this inquiry.

The Reflecting Team Model of Counselor Supervision

Format for group supervision varies across supervisors and university settings. Case presentations are an example of a typical group supervision intervention. In case presentations, the supervisor directs the supervisees to share a clinical case with the group, and then solicits feedback from the group to aid the supervisee. The format of supervision explored in this study is the reflecting team model (RT) influenced by Andersen's reflecting team model of family counseling (Andersen, 1987, 1991). A review of supervision literature comparing the RT format to other supervision formats indicates three features define the RT approach and separate it from other approaches (Prest, Darden, & Keller, 1990). These features include the unique structure or positioning of the experience, the therapeutic posture of the team, and the language used in the reflecting process (Landis & Young, 1994; Monk & Winslade, 2000; Prest et al., 1990).

Collaboration is a key feature of RT supervision. Monk and Winslade (2000) suggested that in RT model of group supervision, the supervising faculty member moves into the position of co-participant, and out of the position of expert. In this way, collaboration is emphasized over critique, and supervisees tend to feel empowered rather

than defensive. Both the supervisors and supervisees benefit from the collaborative effort, which brings multiple perspectives to the supervision experience (Prest et al., 1990). All members of the supervision group become participants, versus removed group members functioning as observers or advice givers (Monk & Winslade, 2000).

Most often a face-to-face RT session involves 2 groups and 4 steps (Paré et al., 2004). The first group, which is often called the interview dyad, includes the supervisee and an interviewer. The second group, the reflecting team, is formed by the remaining group members. The process begins with the interviewer asking questions of the supervisee, phase one. In phase one, the environment should be arranged so that the interviewee and reflecting team cannot make direct eye contact. The reflecting team does not ask questions or participate in this phase. The questions asked in phase one are generally open-ended and intended to facilitate an explanation of the case so that the group is able to learn about the supervisee's client. The interviewer also asks particular questions, such as "What do you think you did well in this session?" or "What areas would you like the reflecting team to discuss?"

In the second phase, the interview dyad is quiet. The group turns its focus inward, away from the dyad, and begins to reflect tentatively on the case. The group formulates reflections in a questioning way, such as, "I wonder what would happen if . . .? Or "I wonder how the client/supervisee . . .?" All reflections are offered verbally, without direct eye contact with the interview dyad. The supervisee in the interview dyad should be able to clearly hear the reflections and is encouraged to take note of the reflections that are particularly helpful or interesting. The supervisee does not comment on the reflections or respond to questions during this phase.

In the third phase, the interviewer asks the supervisee to consider the thoughts and questions raised by the group. The interviewer encourages the supervisee not to feel the need to correct or inform the group, but merely to take those suggestions that are helpful and discard those that are redundant or not helpful. In the fourth and final step, both groups process the experience together.

The Online Delivery of the RT Model of Supervision

The participants in this study used the RT method of supervision in both a traditional and a virtual classroom. The virtual classroom was offered through the Wimba™ live classroom (2010) application of the university's Blackboard (2010) learning system. Students and the course instructor logged in to the room from remote locations. They were able to type and view text, speak, hear, and be heard by others within the classroom. The format for the online RT sessions involved the same 2 groups and 4 steps described earlier (Paré et al., 2004). Phase one looked the same both on- and offline. Because the virtual classroom was not equipped with video/web cameras, participants in online focus groups could not see each other or the instructor, and therefore the interviewee and reflecting team could not make direct eye contact. During this phase, the interviewer and interviewee were the only two speaking, while the team listened from their remote locations.

As in the face-to-face version, in the second phase, the interview dyad became quiet. The remaining members then reflected tentatively on the case. This was done much in the same way as it was done in person, with the exception that online, participants had an additional option of using the text box feature to type comments. Both the interview dyad and the team could read the comments as they were typed, as

well as hear the reflections. As in the face-to-face RT session, the supervisee does not comment on the reflections or respond to questions during this phase, but is encouraged to take note of significant reflections. Just as in the face-to-face setting, the third phase of the online RT asks the supervisee to consider reflections and ideas raised by the team. In the fourth and final step, both groups process the experience together using voice and text box features.

Background of the Problem

Programs of counselor education and supervision are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Professions (CACREP, 2009). CACREP's guidelines include not only recommendations for instruction, but also standards related to the unique clinical training of future counselors. Supervised practical experience in counseling is a required component of training and takes the form of a practicum and an internship placement. The internship serves as professional practice for the student and is considered the "capstone" experience that "integrates and authenticates professional knowledge and skills" (CACREP, 2009, p. 61). Each student's internship includes direct training and experience and requirements for supervision including the following:

Weekly interaction that averages one hour per week of individual and/or triadic supervision throughout the internship, usually performed by the onsite supervisor [and] an average of 1 1/2 hours per week of group supervision provided on a regular schedule throughout the internship and performed by a program faculty member.

Hybrid methods of supervision (methods that combine face-to-face and online communication) have been increasingly used to bridge distance between university faculty members and students at internship or practicum sites (Conn, Roberts, & Powell, 2009). Hybrid methods have been increasingly considered when other supervision methods are difficult to access or unavailable (Gainor & Constantine, 2002) and recommended as supplements for regular face-to-face supervision (e.g., Clingerman & Bernard, 2004). In combining face-to-face and online interactions, hybrid methods of supervision provide greater opportunity for connection, promote feelings of support among users, and increase the opportunity for participation (Janoff & Schoenholtz-Read, 1999).

There are a number of caveats among the potential benefits of using the Internet for counselor supervision. First, confidentiality over the Internet is suspect. While measures such as encryption software show promise of improving the privacy of information exchanged over the Internet, much about the Internet is still unknown. In addition, there are dilemmas relating to licensing of and legal liability of online supervision. Because online supervision can bridge physical distance, supervisors need to be aware that sessions may occur across state lines. Supervisors and supervisees also need to be aware of how distance supervision counts (or does not count) toward the required supervision of internship students, and other pre-licensed professionals. Finally, the essential challenge to online supervision is that little is known about how people relate online as opposed to face to face. One area to explore is how video teleconferencing (online communication with audio and video capabilities) might contribute to the supervisory relationship and whether supervisors can explore affect

through text alone. Similarly uncertain is how parallel process, transference, and other elements of counselor supervision exist in the online medium.

Purpose of the Study

Little is known about how students, instructors, and supervisors experience supervision at a distance, how distance affects the supervision experience, or how particular models of supervision translate to the online environment. The purpose of this study was to illuminate doctoral students' experience with using the RT model of supervision in an online, virtual classroom, having previously experienced the RT model in a traditional classroom setting. The purpose of this study was to explore students' perspectives of their online RT supervision experience.

Research Questions

In light of what is known about the use of Internet technology in counselor education and supervision, the question under investigation in this study was, "How do doctoral students experience online RT supervision?" Secondary research questions included, "What about the experience of being online for the reflecting team supervision differs from the experience of being face to face for the reflecting team?" and "What suggestions do doctoral students have about using the RT model of supervision online?" Unlike in quantitative research, the purpose of this qualitative study was not to test a specific hypothesis or to make predictions. In the qualitative tradition, this study was designed to elicit information about online RT supervision by communicating the story of those who participated in the experience.

Rationale

Trepal, Haberstroh, Duffey, and Evans (2007) described the growth of Internet use in the United States as staggering. The percentage of Internet users in North America is nearly 75% (Internet World Stats, 2009). Counselors and counselor educators are increasingly working within the demographic of Internet users. Many counselor education students (and their potential clients) already consider using the Internet daily as a virtual textbook, tutor, study group, or notebook, a normal part of the day (Pew Internet and American Life Project [S. Fox et al., 2005]).

Green, Lawson, and Getz (2005) argued that counselors develop new competencies “in order to serve computer savvy clients.” To remain competent and professional in an ever-changing world is an ethical responsibility of counselors and provides a basis for this study. The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005) provides guiding principles for counselors and “reflects the profession’s understanding of changes in the role of the professional or changes in the society counselors serve” (Ponton & Duba, 2009). Section A of the 2005 Code suggests that within the counseling relationship, counselors be aware of the contextual variables that affect the client (ACA, 2005). It could be argued that the Internet is the context for many client’s social engagements and relationships with others. The Code of Ethics, in its 2005 revisions related to computer technology and the Internet, suggested that technology is influencing the profession and the society in which we practice (Ponton & Duba, 2009). By exploring doctoral students’ perspectives about one online supervision method, this study will inform counselors and counselor educators about the technological context of client’s life experience.

This study also provides a demonstration of how counselor educators can incorporate technology into educating and training counselors as recommended in the guidelines for Technical Competencies for Counselor Education Students: Recommended Guidelines For Program Development Guidelines for Online Instruction in Counseling Education (ACES, 1999b). Exploring effective uses of technology during the education of counselors will assist students in becoming more technically competent and familiar with working with clients who use these technologies regularly. Similarly, to understand the phenomenology of today's doctoral student, counselors must be able to recognize the role the Internet plays in the student's school, work, and life. This study will contribute to an informed understanding of counselor education students.

The US economy provides an additional reason for undertaking a study related to distance education and supervision. Nearly all public institutions (87%) say the economic downturn has increased demand for their existing online courses and programs (Allen & Seaman, 2010). The demand for online learning opportunities in graduate programs of study exceeds demands in undergraduate programs (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Approximately 67% of masters and 77% of doctoral programs surveyed in 2009 report the demands for both current and new online courses has increased (Allen & Seaman, 2010). The same survey reports the demand for online, undergraduate courses has increased by approximately 60% from 2002 to 2009 (Allen & Seaman, 2010).

Further justification for the current study is found in the literature. Literature suggests technological advances will significantly impact counselor education, including the supervision of students' clinical experiences (Burt et al., 2011; Mascari & Webber, 2008; Quinn, Hohenshil, & Fortune, 2002; Renfro-Michel et al., 2010). Mascari and

Webber (2008) suggested that the counseling field keeps pace with technological advances or risks being “left behind” in society’s technology revolution. Others agree that not recognizing potential uses for technology could be detrimental for counselor education and training programs (Burt et al., 2011; Mascari & Webber, 2008; Wantz et al., 2003). The impending transformation in the education of counselors-in-training necessitates research related to how students experience technology in their education and training (Burt et al., 2011).

The Internet has been recognized by the counseling profession as an emerging supervision medium (Conn et al., 2009; Watson, 2003). This study will contribute to the literature related to using the Internet to provide supervision opportunities from a geographical or physical distance. While the full potential of the Internet has yet to be recognized in counselor education and supervision, its potential benefits include closing the physical distance among supervisees and between supervisor and supervisees (Butler & Constantine, 2006; Sampson et al., 1997; Trolley & Silliker, 2005). This study will contribute to the growing research in the online training and supervision of counselors.

The rationale for this study might be found in CACREP’s guidelines for the supervision of counselors in training delineating the amount and type of supervision students must receive from faculty members. This study might provide for discussion around how faculty members can effectively and efficiently deliver the required supervision to students during fieldwork. In light of CACREP’s standards, the changing student demographic, and the current state of the economy, faculty members might be challenged by supervising students who are comfortable using the Internet, and demand online opportunities for such supervision. In an economic downturn, faculty workloads

may be stretched and supervising fieldwork might be assigned as additional work beyond the expected teaching, research, and service (Freeman & Coll, 2009). The increased demand for faculty time and increased cost for travel may prompt faculty to consider providing supervision from their homes or nearby locations. Further, tech savvy, globally-connected students may seek fieldwork locations outside of the local community where faculty members are in close physical proximity. While the need for the remote supervision of global fieldwork placements has not been documented, an increased need could be seen as a natural progression following the recent increase in demand for online graduate education (Allen & Seaman, 2010). The need to explore various ways faculty members might access a number of students simultaneously and without the inconvenience and expense of travel supports this research.

Implications of the Study

This study will add to the existing literature on the reflecting team (RT) model of supervision. The literature documents that the RT model is especially effective in helping supervisees to receive feedback (Prest et al., 1990) and in its ability to generate “alternative frameworks” in the supervision process (Landis & Young, 1994, p. 217). Missing in the literature is any exploration of if or how the essence of the RT model of supervision exists in an online venue. This study will provide information useful to those modifying existing methods of supervision for use online and for those designing new, online supervision methods for counselors in training.

While literature relating to client and counselor experiences of online counseling and consulting is plentiful, research related to the education and training of counselors using distance technology is comparatively sparse (Conn et al., 2009; Vaccaro & Lambie,

2007). By uncovering the lived experience of students who received supervision online, this study will likely uncover their descriptions of additional benefits and limitations concerning online supervision. Understanding more about the phenomenology of online supervision may clarify some inconsistencies in the existing literature. While counselors and counselor educators may not be quick to embrace the use of the Internet in supervision (Patrick, 2004, 2005), hybrid methods that combine both online and face-to-face modes of interaction are associated with a positive supervisory experience (Conn et al., 2009). Findings from this exploration will inform the practice of online supervision and using the RT model through an online method.

In exploring doctoral students' experience with using the RT model of supervision online, this study will advance the knowledge and practice of counselor education and supervision. In giving a voice to these doctoral students, particular aspects of doctoral supervision, the internship component of counselor education, peer supervision, and online supervision experiences will be illuminated. The students' descriptions may produce previously unknown characteristics of the advanced level doctoral students and suggestions for counselor training and supervision.

By using online focus groups, this study will contribute to the literature regarding the increasingly popular use of the Internet for qualitative research. Exposure to alternative methods of research is especially important in the counseling field, where many counselors characterize themselves as apprehensive of technology. Exploring new methods of research (and supervision) that incorporate technology will generate interest in the counseling field and by exposing how students experienced an online supervision method, contribute to the unknown aspects of using technology. In understanding more

about others' experience with using technology, counselors in training may be comforted in incorporating technology themselves.

In addition to contributing to the existing literature on technology and supervision, this study may serve as a springboard for new ideas, or inspire revisions of current methods. Generating interest and new ideas is particularly important in the area of counselor supervision, where many supervisors rely on supervision methods that worked for them as supervisees (Milne & Oliver, 2000). Milne and Oliver suggested the tendency to repeat what is comfortable may limit supervisees' learning. This study asks readers to consider non-traditional methods and formats for counselor supervision.

When the practice of supervision is well informed, the benefits extend to counseling and, ultimately, the client. By uncovering supervisees' experience with a particular model (RT) and delivery method (online) of supervision, counselor educators and supervisors will learn more about the delivery of clinical supervision. The benefits of effectively supervised students then extend to the client.

Summary

This chapter informed the reader of current trends in incorporating distance technology into counselor education and supervision. The purpose of the study, to explore doctoral students' perceptions about online RT supervision, was shared, and a rationale related to a study of this purpose was provided. Possible implications for counselor educators, students, and supervisors of counselors in training were proposed.

Chapter 2 provides a synthesis of the existing literature related to the study of counselor education doctoral students, the RT model of supervision, and online methods of supervision. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative methods designed to elicit

participants' descriptions of their experience with using the RT model of supervision online. Chapter 4 presents the data gained through a focus group and three individual interviews with doctoral students and their instructor. Chapter 5 discusses themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes are explored through a constructivist framework and a review of relevant literature. Implications and recommendations for distance supervision and counselor educators and supervisors are offered. The limitations of this study and the researcher's reflections conclude the study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework and review of literature related to this study of doctoral students' experience in using the reflecting team (RT) model of counselor supervision online. This chapter is organized in two sections. The first section presents the constructivist framework that guided this study. The second section synthesizes concepts from the literature related to the variables/concepts under investigation in this study.

Theoretical Perspective

The purpose of this study was to explore doctoral students' experiences with using the RT model of supervision online. A postmodern, constructivist perspective guides this inquiry. This section provides the reader with an introduction to constructivism as the guiding framework for exploring doctoral students' experience with online RT supervision.

A definition of constructivism is difficult to ascertain from the counselor education and supervision literature (Cottone, 1992, 2007). *Constructivism* is referred to as both philosophical and methodological (Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000). Constructivist ideas are also epistemological—that is, a theory about the nature of knowledge (e.g., Glesne, 2006)—and are used in pedagogy (Granello, 2000; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). Constructivist notions are incorporated into the literature about various approaches to counseling (e.g., see McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999; Trippany, Barrios, Helm, & Rowland, 2004) with regard to supervision (Casile, Gruber, & Rosenblatt, 2007) and counselor education (e.g., Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998).

In his 1992 article, Cottone suggested there was confusion concerning constructivist theory. A more recent work by Cottone (2007) recognized that the confusion continues to some extent, but offered some themes that are representative of most definitions of constructivism. According to Cottone (2007, p. 195), the basic tenets of constructivism generally emphasize the importance of social relationships, the nature of how one knows, the inevitability of change, the intersubjectivity of social processes, and assumptions about cause and effect.

Based on what Cottone (2007) found as common to various viewpoints on constructivism, supported by Gergen's (1985) seminal work on constructivism, and considering how the literature from the counselor education and supervision fields view constructivism, we may conclude that constructivism posits the following concepts:

1. Knowledge results from active construction; that is, an individual self-creates knowledge.
2. Reality is relativistic, deriving from the context in which it is known.
3. Truth is not hierarchical. Those seen as more powerful in any one setting can offer no better perception of truth than anyone else.
4. From 2 and 3 above, it follows that no one reality is better than another and that everyone's perspectives are valued; this theory gives rise to a multiplicity of ideas.
5. Self-responsibility is encouraged; people are active in meaning making.

The principles outlined above are present in every facet of this study—in the field's conceptualization of counselor supervision, the constructivist stance of the RT model, the

active learner/constructivist online education aspect, and the qualitative nature of the design.

Constructivism in Supervision

Philp, Guy, and Lowe (2007) suggested constructivist counselor supervision can be conceptualized “not as a quest for objective truth about clients or the finding of appropriate, corrective interventions, but as the co-creation and development of new meanings through conversation” (p. 51). In this way, constructivist models of supervision are open to a number of outcomes and understandings. Additionally, supervision has traditionally been conceptualized within a modern or pre-modern framework in which supervisors have the power and offer their expertise to the supervisee. When supervision is reconceptualized from a constructivist standpoint (J. M. Bernard, 2005; Jevne, Sawatzky, & Paré, 2004; Rigazio-DiGilio, 1998), the hierarchy in the supervisory relationship is de-emphasized, inviting multiple meanings and perspectives to surface. Conceptualizing supervision within a constructivist framework frees supervisees from the traditional supervisor-supervisee power hierarchy and encourages the sharing of multiple perspectives. These principles are inherent in the model of supervision that is the subject of this inquiry.

Constructivism in the RT

The literature supports the idea that constructivist underpinnings may be applicable to the reflecting team (RT) concept (Andersen, 1987, 1991; B. A. Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Landis & Young, 1994; Paré et al., 2004). The RT model embodies a number of constructivist principles (Haley, 2002). Consistent with the principles of constructivism described earlier, the RT concept minimizes the role of the expert and

welcomes a multiplicity of ideas and meaning. Other qualities shared by the RT concept and social constructionist concepts include the emphasis on the social experience of knowledge construction, the subjective, contextualized view of problems and solutions, and the value of empowerment through collaboration (Haley, 2002).

Constructivism and Online Education

Many potential applications of constructivist principles to classroom education are well documented (Granello, 2000; Guiffrida, 2005) but are outside the scope of this study; however, those that apply to the online learning environment are applicable here. Constructivism provides a useful framework for understanding online educational environments. From a constructivist standpoint, learning is active, student-driven, and interactive; the learner has control over the learning process, while the instructor guides and scaffolds the learning. The learning that results from interaction with others occurs through interpersonal perceptions, communications, and relationships within the learning environment.

Literature in education and in other areas suggests that constructivist principles are present in online learning environments (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 1995; Kanuka & Anderson, 1998; Maushak & Ou, 2007). Much nursing literature also demonstrates constructivist approaches that are consistent with online learning or education experiences (Engebretson & Littleton, 2001; Hunter & Krantz, 2010; Thurmond, 2002).

The counselor education literature also supports the shared tenets of constructivism and online learning. Online environments actively engage learners and

provide space for the interpersonal interaction that produce personal knowledge construction (Baggerly, 2002; Patrick, 2005; Richardson & Swan, 2001).

Constructivism in Research Design

Qualitative research tends to be guided by constructivist notions (Merriam, 2002); hence constructivism influenced the design of this study. Research conducted in the constructivist tradition is not an attempt to find an objective reality or ultimate truth (Krauss, 2005). In this study, deriving any number of understandings related to doctoral students' experience with online RT supervision is the goal. This study employs qualitative interviewing techniques to solicit multiple perspectives and possibilities about these doctoral students' understanding of online RT supervision. The interview procedures were guided by these notions; consequently, no set of particular questions was developed, but instead general interview guides (see Appendices D, E, and I). The interviews were designed to encourage conversation among participants, and the conversation became the data for the study. The data generated from the interviews were constructivist also in that conversations among participants produced rich descriptions (Glesne, 2006) and unearthed a variety of perspectives about their experience with online RT supervision.

Literature Review

This section is divided into three parts, which review the literature pertinent to the participants, supervision model, and method under inquiry. The first section presents the literature related to the reflecting team (RT) model of counselor supervision. This section begins with an historical overview of the reflecting team concept. Through an examination of recent literature, a commonly employed format for using the RT model in

counselor supervision is given. The second section includes a synthesis of the available studies of supervision provided in a distance venue/online format. The commonly found benefits and challenges of distance supervision are presented. The third section describes the literature relating specifically to the clinical supervision of doctoral students in counselor education and supervision programs. Accreditation standards and program descriptions related to the education and supervision of doctoral students in counselor education and supervision programs are reviewed. The literature review concludes with a summary offering a number of arguments to support this study.

The Reflecting Team Model of Supervision

The reflecting team method (RT) has been described as an “innovative method” in supervising counselors (Chang, 2010, p. 36), but the reflecting team concept itself first appeared in the counseling literature in the mid- to late 1980s when it was introduced into marriage and family work by Norwegian family therapist Tom Andersen (1987, 1992, 1995). Andersen (1987) described the reflecting team concept not as a method of counseling, but as a therapeutic posture or attitude that allowed equality between counselor and client, and allowed for multiple interpretations of a client’s situation.

Andersen (1987) discovered reflecting team format as it has been used in counseling when observing a young therapist counseling a family experiencing chronic dysfunction. Using a one-way mirror, Andersen and several professional counseling colleagues observed the frustrated therapist working with the family. To provide feedback and instruction to the therapist, Andersen and his colleagues were continually asking the therapist to leave the therapy room to come into the observation room to hear their input. Andersen then noticed a microphone in the observation room that was

connected to a speaker in the therapy room. He proceeded to ask the family if they would be interested in hearing his feedback to their therapist. The family agreed and in addition to hearing the therapy team, the family opted to open the one-way mirror so that they could see the team. The family, the therapist, and Andersen's colleagues noted that the reversal of the mirror and the microphone in the counseling and observation room enabled them to feel freer to share their thoughts and to listen quietly to others' reflections. Offering the family and the therapist the space and time to consider the perspectives of others proved helpful. The Norwegian *refleksjon* refers to taking time to think about something before giving a response (Andersen, 1991, p. 12), hence the term "reflecting team."

Andersen's guidelines for implementing his RT approach in family therapy appeared in his 1991 book, *The Reflecting Team: Dialogues and Dialogues about the Dialogues*. Andersen noted that these guidelines ought to be flexible and should suit the style and comfort level of the counselor and the family. Andersen suggested that the family be consulted on their level of comfort in using a team of professionals to learn the most about the presenting situation. If the family agreed, Andersen suggested introducing the team of professionals to them. Andersen explained that it is preferable for the counselor to share the family's background information with the family present and listening. This arrangement sets the stage for respectful interaction and open sharing.

Central to Andersen's concept was a unique interviewing process that used a particular method of questioning and reflecting aimed at eliciting varied perspectives from participants. Typically, the interview arrangement consists of an assigned interviewer meeting with the family while a reflecting team listens and observes them

from either a separate area of the room or from another room completely. The interviewer begins the process by asking general questions aimed at eliciting the family's description of what brought them into counseling. The intent is not only for the team to get to know the family, but also to see how family members differ in their explanations for seeking counseling. All family members present are given an opportunity to describe the issues they would like to discuss in the session, and a conversation commences among the family members. While the family converses, the others wait quietly in what Andersen (1991) called "the listening position" (p. 58).

During the family's conversation, Andersen (1991) suggested, the interviewer might wait for an opening or invitation to join the conversation. This might come at a pause in the family's flow of talking or when a particular idea or theme appears helpful to explore. While the interviewer may have some questions in mind, the sequence and direction of the interview is not predetermined. Andersen suggested using questions that create more questions and openings to expand the conversation. Examples of questions that might result in further exploration could include, "How is what you've just described different from before?" or "What did you experience?" or "What did you perceive as . . .?"

After the interview, those in the listening position (i.e., the reflecting team) begin to speculate about the conversation they have just heard and observed. Speculation is followed by the sharing of reflections. When the team members share their reflections, it is important that they face each other and do not face the family. The family is invited to listen and see what they have been talking about from a more distanced position. The family is instructed not to interrupt the team as they share reflections, but to listen to what

is being shared until they feel their concerns, issues, or perspectives have been heard by the team. This arrangement is part of the therapeutic posture of the experience.

After the team has finished sharing reflections, the family is then directed back to a conversational position, while the team returns to the listening position. The interviewer might make this shift by asking, “Is there anything from what you have heard that you would like to comment about?” Again, all family members have an opportunity to talk if they desire. The interviewer again asks questions that result from the family’s comments. The interviewer might also share thoughts that emerged for him or her while listening to the team’s reflections.

According to Andersen’s (1991) general guidelines, the shifting between listening and reflecting positions might take place several times within a session. Upon conclusion of the session, all participants might take part in a final discussion about the process in which they took part.

The manner in which participants question and reflect is integral to keeping the process constructive. The open-ended nature of the questions described earlier maximizes the potential for varied responses. Andersen (1991) suggested that the reflections be phrased in a way that respects the variety of all the perspectives offered. To do this, reflections should be phrased with some uncertainty in mind. For instance, “I am not sure, but I think I heard . . .” or “I can see both this and that could be happening.” The reflecting team should not reflect on something outside of the context of the conversation heard and observed, nor should they focus on negativity. During the team’s sharing of reflections, Andersen suggested, the listeners should “let go” and “let come” (1991, p. 67). In this way, the family is freed from responding to every reflection and is

able to take away what was meaningful to them personally versus what a professional told them was important.

Use of the reflecting team in counseling. Applications of the RT in practice appears most often in the family therapy literature (e.g., Karr, 1998; Naden, Callison, & Haynes, 2002; T. E. Smith, Jenkins, & Sells, 1995; T. E. Smith, Sells, & Clevenger, 1994). The literature indicates that the reflecting team concept has also been used in the treatment of couples (Sells, Smith, Coe, Yoshioka, & Robbins, 1994); for working with the medically marginalized client (J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 1995); for use in school systems (Swim, 1995); with groups (Chen & Noosbond, 1999); and, more recently, in university counseling centers (Stough, 2000), with stepfamilies (Berger, 2000), and with the deaf (Munro, Know, & Low, 2008).

In several instances where the RT appears in the counseling literature, it is combined with other therapies, such as MRI therapy or Solution Focused Brief Therapy (Johnson, Waters, Webster, & Goldman, 1997) and the strategic team model (McGovern, 1996). In these cases and others, most of the research about the use of reflecting teams is anecdotal or descriptive in nature.

Marriage and family therapy literature offers the bulk of studies on RTs. Bacigalupe (2003) noted that reflecting team practices were of the most important and enduring traditions within the field of marriage and family therapy. T. S. O'Connor, Davis, Meakes, Pickering, and Schum (2004) explored the reflecting team from a narrative approach. Eight therapists working at an outpatient clinic offered perspectives of both positive and negative aspects of their experience. The multiplicity of ideas created in the RT process and the helpfulness associated with RT experience were two

positive aspects of therapists' experience. Negative aspects of RT work suggested the quantity and depth of the reflections offered from the reflecting team could be overwhelming. Using a Delphi technique, Jenkins (1996) also mentioned found that the reflections offered by the team can be confusing.

Other qualitative studies reported only positive experiences with using the RT model (Sells et al., 1994; T. E. Smith et al., 1995). Sells et al. (1994) examined both client and therapist perceptions about the reflecting team process as used with clients in counseling. Sells et al.'s (1994) research, which explored both client and therapist perspectives of the RT, has suggested that the RT approach benefits both the client and therapist when it is incorporated into counseling. Throughout the literature, the benefits of using the reflecting team in counseling typically include the following:

- de-emphasizing the hierarchy between client and counselor
- addressing issues between client and counselor
- valuing multiple perspectives in viewing the client's situation
- creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere
- catering to diverse populations
- promoting collaboration, partnering with the client

Use of the reflecting team in counselor supervision. When used in the supervision of counselors, the RT concepts often consists of 2 groups and 4 steps (Paré et al., 2004). The first group, which is often called the interview dyad, includes the supervisee and an interviewer. The second group, the reflecting team, is formed by the remaining group members. The process begins with the interviewer asking questions of the supervisee, phase one. The reflecting team does not ask questions or participate in

this phase. The questions for the supervisee are generally open-ended, facilitating a discussion of the case so that the group is able to learn about the supervisee's client. The interviewer also asks particular questions, such as "What do you think you did well in this session?" or "What areas would you like the reflecting team to discuss?"

In the second phase, the interview dyad is quiet. The group turns away from the dyad, and begins to reflect tentatively on the case. The group formulates reflections in a questioning way, such as, "I wonder what would happen if . . .? Or "I wonder how the client/supervisee . . .?" All reflections are offered verbally, without direct eye contact with the interview dyad. The supervisee in the interview dyad makes notes of the reflections that are particularly helpful or interesting. The supervisee does not comment on the reflections or respond to questions during this phase.

In the third phase, the interviewer asks the supervisee to consider the thoughts and questions raised by the group. The interviewer encourages the supervisee not to feel the need to correct or inform the group, but merely to take those suggestions that are helpful and discard those that are redundant or not helpful. In the fourth step, both groups together process the whole experience.

While similar structures for using the RT model in counselor supervision are provided in the literature (e.g., Cole, Demeritt, Shatz, & Sapoznik, 2001; Landis & Young, 1994), no one set of practical guidelines has been published. Whereas the use of the RT concept in supervision is often criticized as lacking standard guidelines, this is not surprising as Andersen (1995) viewed his original RT guidelines as "transitional" (p. 42) and open for interpretation and modification.

A review of supervision literature comparing the RT format to other supervision formats indicates three features that define the RT approach and separate it from other approaches (Prest et al., 1990). These features include the unique structure or positioning of the experience, the therapeutic posture of the team, and the language used in the process (Landis & Young, 1994; Monk & Winslade, 2000; Prest et al., 1990; Riley, 2004).

Collaboration is a key feature of RT supervision. Monk and Winslade (2000) suggested that in RT supervision, the supervising counselor educator moves into the position of co-participant and out of the position of expert. In this way, collaboration is emphasized over critique, and supervisees tend to feel empowered rather than defensive. Both the supervisors and supervisees benefit from the collaborative effort, which brings multiple perspectives to the supervision experience (Prest et al., 1990).

Unique to the structure of RT supervision is that all members of the supervision group become participants in a sense versus removed group members merely observing or offering advice (Monk & Winslade, 2000; Riley, 2004). The reflecting team members actively listen and later provide reflections on the supervisee's interpretation of a case. The reflections are offered for consideration versus prescribed as action or given as judgments or interpretations (Monk & Winslade, 2000).

The tentative nature of the language of the reflections offered is another unique feature of the RT method (Monk & Winslade, 2000; Riley, 2004). Reflections are offered in tentative and speculative terms. Examples include, "I wonder how isomorphism is important . . ." or, "It seems that it could be the supervisee's anxiety that . . ." A number

of themes appearing in the qualitative literature offer additional considerations in describing RT supervision.

Cox (1997) explored supervisee and supervisor perceptions about the use of the RT as a form of supervision in practicum classes. Through an ethnographic methodology, themes emerged from data collected from the student and instructor interviews, journals, and the researcher's own field notes: helpful aspects of the RT, difficult aspects of the RT, the various roles of RT participants, similarities and differences between RT supervision and traditional models of group supervision, and considerations and ideas for training students and others about the RT concept.

Attridge (2007) offered a grounded theory analysis of RT supervision suggesting similar themes relating to the RT experience. His researcher involved counselor trainees, several supervisors, a course instructor, and an RT supervision key informant. Five major themes were grounded in the data: atmosphere, theoretical structures, clinical supervision, group processes, and mechanics.

This section has described the RT concept, its history as applied to counseling, and its more recent applications to supervision. The following section explores the literature related to providing supervision at a distance.

Distance Supervision

The establishment of the Technology Interest Network and publication of the *Guidelines for Online Instruction in Counseling Education* (ACES, 1999a) suggest that the counseling field has recognized Internet technology and online instruction as permanent fixtures. The distance education literature offers a description of education's progression from traditional to technological. A recent meta-analysis suggests that

distance education is in its fifth generation (R. M. Bernard et al., 2004). Bernard et al. identified the first generation of distance education as the age of correspondence coursework (printed materials delivered through the mail). The addition of audio and visual instructional materials through audio and videocassette, and later teleconferencing, mark the second and third generations of distance education. Taylor (as cited in Bernard et al., 2004) proposed the fourth and fifth generations of distance education. The fourth, Taylor added, is characterized by the increase in flexibility by offering distance education through computer-mediated communication and over an Internet connection. The current generation of distance learning reflects the “convergence of DE [distance education] and traditional education” (Bernard et al., 2004, p. 386) as represented in online interactive media.

A review of the distance education literature suggests that the online environment contains a number of unique features pertinent to how people perceive themselves and others. Suler (2004) offered the term “psychology of cyberspace” to explain the phenomenon of Internet interaction. According to Suler, “invisibility . . . gives people the courage to go places and do things that they otherwise wouldn't” (n.p.). Suler suggested that this disinhibiting effect occurs even through interactions between persons known to each other. Factors contributing to the sense of online disinhibition include an altered sense of personal boundary and a sense of minimized authority (Suler, 2004).

It is reported that distance methods are criticized in part because students experience a sense of isolation online (Bernard, Rubalcava, & St. Pierre, 2000). The distance education literature suggests that feelings of isolation in online learners are

related to the absence of a sense of community and sense of presence (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

A study by McIsaac and Gunawardena (1996) recognized the importance of a visual connection as an important component in online communication. Panos, Pettys, Cox, and Jones (2004) reported that distance education communication (without video) lacks important communication cues, such as gestures and facial expressions.

International practicum students were the participants in the Panos et al. (2004) study that suggested a relationship between adding a video component and reduced feelings of isolation. When videoconferencing was introduced, approximately 82% of practicum students reported a decreased sense of isolation.

It was natural and likely inevitable that techniques for distance education would be applied to distance supervision. In the current study, distance supervision is defined as the use of Internet technology to conduct supervision between individuals who are not in the same location. A number of terms in the literature appear to speak of the same practice. Those terms include “Web-based supervision” (Butler & Constantine, 2006), “e-supervision” (Dudding & Justice, 2004), “technology-assisted distance supervision” (McAdams & Wyatt, 2010), “technology mediated supervision” (Roberts, Powell, & Fraker, 2002), “online supervision” (Kanz, 2001), “computer-mediated” (Janoff & Schoenholtz-Read, 1999), and supervision in “cyberspace” (Myrick & Sabella, 1995). While the proliferation of terms to discuss distance supervision suggests the field’s growing interest in distance supervision, this is the first study to combine the RT model of supervision and online delivery method.

The available literature describes distance supervision methods as a promising practice in counselor supervision CITE. Asynchronous methods of supervision at a distance (methods delivered not in real time) may be an effective form of distance supervision (Clingerman & Bernard, 2004). Electronic mail exchanges between supervisee and supervisor, as well as among the supervisees, are examples of asynchronous supervision. A supervisor may access a supervisee's emailed message any time after it has been sent. The supervisee can access and review the supervisor's response when needed. Research concludes that the communication and support exchanged in email messages "can have a powerful effect" (Myrick & Sabella, 1995, p. 43).

Synchronous communication, which occurs in real time, offers the immediacy that email supervision lacks. Using instant messaging, chat rooms, and web cameras are examples of synchronous distance supervision technologies. Forms of distance supervision that include voice, text, and image capabilities are referred to in the literature as "cybersupervision" (Coursol, 2004). Communication that provides physical feedback and body language cues is described in the literature as a "rich" environment for learning (Newberry, 2001).

Advantages

The literature reports a number of advantages of distance supervision. Watson (2003) described the accessibility and convenience offered by distance supervision as revolutionary. Advantages reported in the literature by Olson, Russell, and White (2001) and others include the following:

- Supervision not bound by travel distance is more accessible to supervisees and supervisors practicing in remote or rural locations.
- Supervisees are able to seek expert or specialized supervision not available in their geographical area.
- Such supervision saves time and the cost of travel (Kanz, 2001).
- Distance supervision provides time for reflection and produces a permanent record for later review (Hara, Bonk, & Angeli, 2000).

Several advantages of distance supervision are particular to supervising doctoral students during internship. Distance supervision can provide flexibility in scheduling supervision and may increase the time faculty have to supervise (Olson et al., 2001). Distance supervision allows supervisees to serve in more diverse internships (Watson, 2003) while maintaining contact with supervisors and peers (Trolley & Silliker, 2005). Students participating in internships away from their home university can use distance supervision methods to access resources easily, submit journals, and exchange information with university faculty (Trolley & Silliker, 2005).

Challenges

Despite the advantages of distance supervision, the literature (Kanz, 2001; Patrick, 2005; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007) reports considerable challenges. That the distance format prevents opportunities for observation of behavioral cues is a frequently discussed limitation of distance supervision (Kanz, 2001; Patrick, 2005; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). Studies from Kanz (2001), Patrick (2005), and Vaccaro and Lambie (2007) indicate that both supervisee and supervisor are concerned that the absence of

perceptual cues could impede the supervision process. Additional limitations reported in the literature by Conn et al. (2009) and others include the following:

- the expense involved in acquiring the technology needed (Watson, 2003)
- variation in level of computer skill among supervisors and supervisees
- technical problems (Hara & Kling, 1999; Watson, 2003)
- concerns for confidentiality
- licensure issues related to supervising across state lines
- lack of prompt feedback and ambiguity (Hara & Kling, 1999)

Because of a number of the uncertainties of online supervision (or cybersupervision), online interaction is typically recommended as either a supplement to face-to-face supervision (e.g., Clingerman & Bernard, 2004) or only when other supervision methods are unavailable (Gainor & Constantine, 2002). Hybrid methods of supervision (i.e., that combine online and face-to-face venues) are increasingly accepted practices. The literature indicates that hybrid methods of supervision enhance the connection between supervisees, peers, and supervisors, promoting feelings of connectedness and support, and increasing opportunities for participation (Janoff & Schoenholtz-Read, 1999).

Counselor attitudes toward technology and the distance venue. Many counselors believe that counselor education and supervision do not lend themselves to a distance venue (Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006). Counselors' concerns about the use of technology in supervision have been similar to the early concerns about using technology in counseling. These included the high cost of technology, issues related to the technical comfort or competency of users, and the possibilities for misuse of confidential

information (Haberstroh et al., 2007; Haberstroh et al., 2008; Janoff & Schoenholtz-Read, 1999; Sampson et al., 1997; Shaw & Shaw, 2006; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007; Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006). Jencius and Paez (2003) reviewed survey instruments used to measure factors relating to students' attitudes toward technology. Factors commonly associated with such attitudes include interest, confidence, anxiety, respect, and perceived usefulness of the technology. Students' perceptions of the value of incorporating technology and their perceived competency level were related to their frustration with technology (Jencius & Paez, 2003).

Patrick (2005) confirmed that counselor educators and supervisors are particularly sensitive to the potential pitfalls of distance counseling and supervision. Patrick identified the field's strong ties to historical tradition as explanation for why counselors are deeply entrenched in the debate around distance methodology. Counseling, reported Patrick (2004, 2005), identifies strongly with a traditional educational and supervision approach that "typically relies on face-to-face, real time interaction between students and faculty." Despite the controversies around distance format in counselor education and supervision, Patrick (2004, 2005) reported considerable growing interest in the application of technology to the field.

"Digital immigrants" is a characterization that may appear in the literature and may be applicable to the doctoral student participants in this study (Prensky, 2001). Prensky defined digital immigrants as students who "were not born into the digital world" (p. 1) and characterized them as often resistant to computers, video games, and the Internet. As immigrants try to adapt to a new country (or new technology) they keep one foot grounded in what is familiar and often retain an accent (Prensky, 2001). In

education also, immigrants prefer the methods most familiar to them and tend to resist newer methods.

Concepts from Jencius and Paez (2003) relating to the technology experience of counselors might further illuminate participants' perspectives related to the online venue. According to Jencius and Paez, counseling students' approaches to technology are related to their previous experiences with technology. Traditional students may have proceeded through undergraduate and other graduate educational experiences before changing standards required technology training, or the exposure they have to technology may be dated. The returning student, who may be defined as "technophobic" (p. 116), may be apprehensive about using technology that was not around during previous educational experiences. The returning counselor, or the student who returns to the educational setting after a period of employment, may not have maintained current technology awareness and skills.

While this section has synthesized ideas from the literature related to clinical supervision at a distance, the following section addresses the role of supervision in the preparation of counselors during their doctoral programs.

The Preparation of Doctoral Level Counselors

Doctoral programs of study are a demanding and challenging undertaking (Hughes & Kleist, 2005). In counselor education and supervision, doctoral programs train students to become advanced counselors, supervisors, and educators. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) offers standards related to the education of counselors in training (CACREP, 2009). Among the standards are requirements for supervised clinical experience. A 2008 survey of

CACREP-accredited counselor education and supervision doctoral programs reported that the average program of study requires 237 supervised practicum hours and 755 supervised internship hours (Schewiger, Henderson & Clawson, 2008).

At the time of this study, 53 doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision in the United States were fully accredited by CACREP (<http://www.cacrep.org/directory>, 1/15/2010). While program delivery methods vary across institutions, a review of literature suggests that cohort models of instruction have increased in popularity in recent years (Barnet, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; R. Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel, & Abel, 2006). Most of the research on cohorts is qualitative in nature. Qualitative descriptions of cohort experiences report that cohort members experience similar phenomena, a situation that creates a bond between them. Students derive feelings of support and protection (Basom & Yerkes, 2001) and a sense of a shared purpose (Lewis, Ascher, Hayes, & Ieva, 2010) in cohort experiences. Improved academic knowledge, multicultural awareness, and job readiness (Maher, 2005) are strengths often reported of cohort models in graduate education. A quantitative study by Groen, Jakubson, Ehrenberg, Condie, and Liu (2008) suggested that cohort models play a role in reducing attrition and increasing completion rates among members.

Some research on cohort models (Echterling et al., 2002) has noted that cohort models may be particularly effective for graduate students in the helping professions. Lewis et al. (2010) suggested that cohort models might be especially pragmatic for counselor education students “since counseling is all about being a good communicator” (p. 6). An increased opportunity for communication is linked to a number of strengths inherent in cohort models (Austin, 2002). In communicating and interacting with other

students, members of cohorts experience a sense of community (Harris, 2006), collaboration (Nimer, 2009), and accomplishment through teamwork (Lewis et al., 2010) and increased support and mentoring from faculty (Nimer, 2009).

Despite the many advantages, the literature indicates a number of challenges to cohort models (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). The complex relationship issues present among students sharing a cohort have been compared to the relationship difficulties of dysfunctional families (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). When personality or relationship issues present in a cohort, such issues may influence the members throughout the life of the cohort. Another limitation of group learning experiences is the propensity for conformity. Pressure to conform may contribute to group think, or the tendency for students to agree with the majority opinion may limit the meaningful contribution of individuals. A similar concept, called “automatic vision,” occurs in group learning environments when members start automatically assuming they understand another’s intended meaning instead of probing for more information that might foster critical thinking (Freiberg-Svoboda, 2003).

Summary

This first section of this chapter provided an overview of the constructivist perspective that guided this study. The second section of this chapter included the background and literature related to the RT model, the group supervision of doctoral students, and distance supervision. The first subsection included a brief history of the RT concept and a review of literature on the RT model used in counseling. The second subsection described the application of the RT concept to counselor supervision. Distance supervision methods were reviewed in the third subsection. The fourth section

offered a review of the literature related to the supervision of doctoral students in training and the professional standards relating to the supervision of students in accredited programs of study.

The literature included in this review implied a theoretical consistency in this study. The principles of constructivism were inherent in each area under review—in the field’s conceptualization of counselor supervision, the constructivist stance of the RT model, the active learning involved in distance applications, and in the qualitative nature of the design. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to access students’ understanding of online reflecting team supervision.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore doctoral students' experience with using online reflecting team (RT) supervision. This chapter describes the participants and the online setting used for data collection. Focus group and individual interview procedures are explained and the researcher's role and relevant background related to this study is provided. Data analysis procedures conclude the chapter. A qualitative research methodology is described.

Qualitative Research Design

While quantitative research attempts to predict or generalize human nature, qualitative research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of a person or phenomenon within a particular context (B. L. Berg, 2008). This study seeks to understand doctoral students' experience with using the RT model of supervision online. A qualitative approach was most consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the phenomena under investigation. Qualitative approaches posit that reality is socially constructed and no objective reality exists. Unlike quantitative methodologies, where variables are identified and measured, qualitative methodology assumes variables are known only in context. The intent of qualitative inquiry is not to generalize results to a larger population, but to understand more about the experience of a specific participant or participants (Glesne, 2006). Qualitative studies attempt to discover a way of being in the world by uncovering a variety of perspectives about the area of interest. In qualitative inquiry, conversations among participants typically produce rich, in depth descriptions about the phenomenon under study (Glesne, 2006). In this study, qualitative interviews were designed to encourage conversation among participants.

Qualitative researchers often use more than one method of data collection to make the data “richer” and “more believable” (Glesne, 2006, p. 36). In order to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study three types of interview strategies were used: a focus group, individual interviews, and a key informant interview. While the individual interviews were conducted over the phone, the focus group and key informant interviews took place online.

Procedures

Recruitment. Doctoral students and an instructor who shared the experience of online RT supervision during the internship phase of a CACREP-accredited counselor education program were recruited. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university, potential participants were sent an electronic mail (email) message requesting their involvement in this study. Email addresses were obtained from the University’s Counselor Education department. The email included an Invitation to Participate (Appendix A) and Consent to Participate in a Research Study form (Appendix B).

Through individual email messages, the researcher asked potential participants to review the forms and make a decision about participating in this study. All risks and benefits of participating were outlined in the documents attached to the researcher’s emailed message to potential participants (see Appendices A & B). Potential participants were encouraged to ask questions and/or seek clarification via email, and the researcher provided her phone number as well. Those who decided to participate in the study were instructed to email the researcher with the following text: “By replying to this email, I give my consent to participate in the study described.”

At the conclusion of the recruitment period five students consented to participate in a focus group interview. This researcher followed up with three other potential participants by phone and additional email messages; however, they were either unavailable for the study due to family or work obligations or they did not respond to email or voice messages to establish contact. The course instructor consented to an individual key informant interview.

Participants. The participants in this study were doctoral students and the course instructor who had participated in online reflecting team (RT) supervision. The participants were recruited from a CACREP accredited counselor education and supervision program in western Pennsylvania (CACREP, 2009). Five doctoral students participated in an online focus group interview and one course instructor participated in a key informant interview. Two of the five focus group participants were later interviewed individually. Of the five student participants, one was male and four were female. One participant was not Caucasian or of Hispanic origin; the others were Caucasian. The key informant (male) was an instructor at the university. Of the five doctoral students, four were doctoral candidates in their program of study and one had recently defended her dissertation. The participants are described here in general terms due to the small number of participants and the risk of being identified. Female pronouns are used in the reporting of interview data to further protect the identity of the participants.

Focus group interview procedures. The focus group interview used for data collection in this study was conducted online. Online interviewing techniques are sometimes used to study participants who are dispersed geographically, to keep data collection costs low, and because the data yielded are immediately available for analysis

(F. E. Fox, Morris, & Rumsey, 2007). Because this study explores participants' experiences with online RT supervision, researching in the location of interest was particularly effective. In the case that participants did not like or were uncomfortable with the online venue, this researcher offered participants the option to use the phone for individual follow up interviews.

Prior to the online interviews, participants were given information and instructions about how to access the online classroom in which the interview would take place. The researcher explained to the five student participants that the online focus group would take place in an online classroom application very similar to the online classroom used during their online RT supervision experiences. Because two semesters had passed between participants' online RT experience and this study, the researcher reminded the participants how to access the online classroom from the University's website. Several days prior to the online focus group used in this study, this researcher reminded participants through email message of the information needed (University user ID and password) and the procedures to access the University's online learning environment (Blackboard, 2010) and entering the Wimba™ live classroom (2010). In the email message, the researcher also asked students to test the procedures by running a compatibility wizard in the classroom to make sure the participants' connection, speaker, and microphone were compatible with the application.

Limitations related to using online research methods are inaccessibility (Kenny, 2005), the unpredictability of the computer connection and processing speed, and interviewee ability to use technology (H. O'Connor & Madge, 2003). Many concerns typical of online research were eliminated by having participants use an environment

identical to the one with which they were familiar. Still, this researcher opted to put several procedures in place in case of unexpected problems. First, a manual, micro cassette recorder was used in addition to the archive feature of the online classroom application to back up the data. Second, this researcher provided a call-in phone number and personal identification number for participants to use to enter the classroom by phone should there be problems in accessing the classroom online. Because participants had used the same technology to connect in their online RT supervision sessions, potential problems with navigating the environment were minimized.

The evening before the scheduled focus group, the researcher emailed a reminder to participants about the time and location of the interview and provided instructions on how to access the online location for the focus group. Upon entering the classroom, participants were asked a second time to run the compatibility wizard and to take note of a call in phone number that could be used in case their Internet connection was problematic. These additional steps were taken to minimize potential technological problems that could interrupt data collection.

On November 1, 2010, five doctoral students participated in the online focus group. Three of the students successfully entered the online classroom through the University's website, and two students used the phone in feature due to connection problems. Upon entering the classroom, participants were greeted with a welcome message and instructions for the focus group interview. The instructions reminded participants to review the consent form that this researcher emailed to them previously. A link to the electronic copy of the consent form was provided. Participants were asked to run the set up wizard if they had not done so already and to enter the online classroom

entitled “reflecting team focus group.” Figure 1 depicts the participants’ view of the online classroom upon sign in.

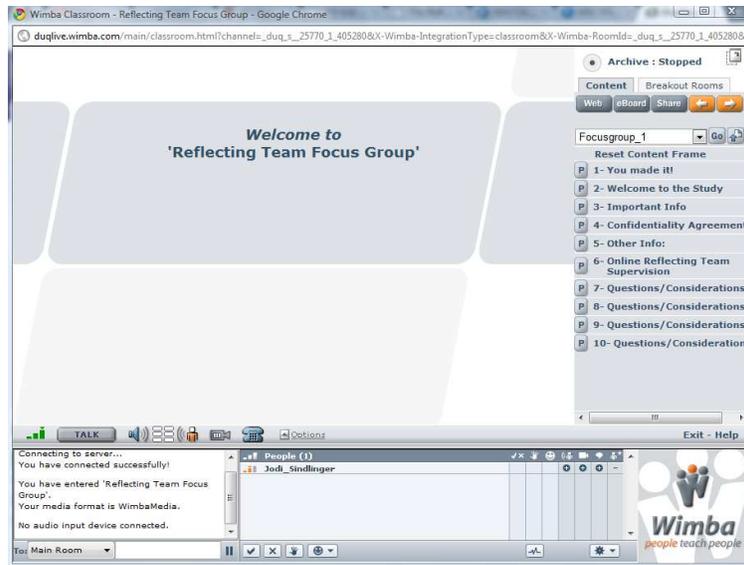


Figure 1. Welcome message in online classroom.

Once inside the online classroom, participants were able to talk and to be heard by the other participants and the researcher inside the classroom. The two participants who connected to the classroom using the call in number were also able to talk, hear, and be heard by others, although they were not able to see the text box or whiteboard areas. Those inside the virtual classroom then viewed a PowerPoint® presentation in the whiteboard area. The presentation is attached as Appendix C. The researcher read aloud the information on each slide and any information typed into the text box so that those using the telephone connection would be aware of all the information being shared. The purpose of the PowerPoint® presentation was to introduce the participants to the study, to review confidentiality issues, and to provide participants with further instructions for the

interview. Those connected by phone could hear the information while those connected online were able to see and hear the information presented.

The PowerPoint® presentation also highlighted the confidentiality concerns in this study. While participants in this study could not see each other, they were able to see each other's names as they logged into the online classroom. Because the participants were members of the same cohort, they could identify each other by name. Examples of the additional confidentiality issues included in the PowerPoint® presentation included instructions to keep one's identity and the identity of other participants confidential, reminders that the former course instructor would not have access to the classroom or to the transcripts created after data collection, and that the participant responses should focus on the experience of online RT supervision, not on evaluating the instructor or the supervision course in which they were previously enrolled. The researcher reviewed the consent form and special confidentiality concerns and asked participants to indicate their understanding and agreement of the terms by putting a checkmark by their name in the participant window (illustrated in Figure 2). A screen capture tool (Snagit, 2009) was used to take a snapshot of the screen.

The PowerPoint® presentation also included several guiding questions for the focus group. Five open ended guiding questions ordered from general to specific (Krueger & Casey, 2000) were drawn from the researcher's semi-structured interview guide. See Appendix D for a copy of the semi structured focus group interview guide. The interview guide assisted the researcher in using time wisely, making sure each area of interest was explored, and maintaining consistency across interviews. Patton (2002)

suggested that using systematic and comprehensive approaches to interviewing improves the trustworthiness of the data collected.

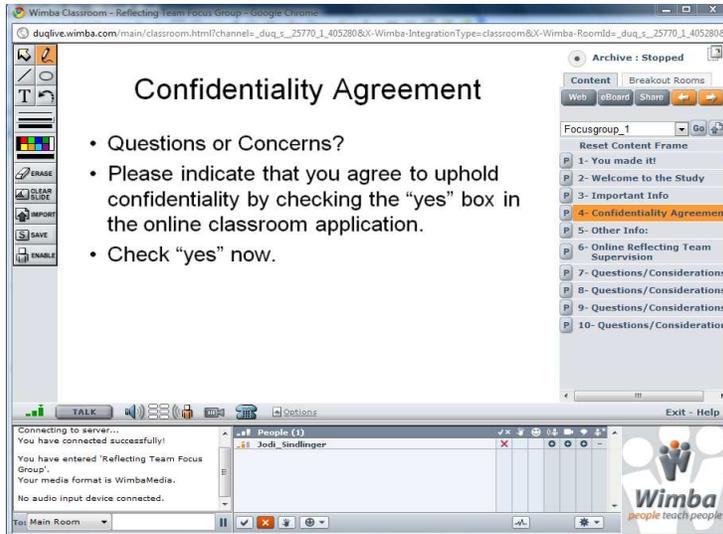


Figure 2. Confidentiality screen capture.

After the first guiding question was posed, the focus group interview flowed in a conversational manner until no new information was presented. The focus group lasted approximately 70 minutes. At this point, the interview reached a point of saturation marked by longer moments of silence, participants repeating themselves and expressing that they had nothing new to add. The interview concluded with directions on how to access the researcher with questions or concerns, directions on how to complete individual interviews, and by thanking the participants for their time. The final slide provided the contact information for the researcher.

The online classroom's archive feature recorded all events that occurred in the focus group including the audio, PowerPoint® presentation and text box comments. The researcher also took notes and used an audiotape recorder as back up methods for preserving the data. The archived session was then closed so that it could no longer be

accessed through the online classroom. A back up copy of the archive, the audiotape recording, and the researcher's notes were then stored in a locked location in the researcher's home.

Individual interview procedures. Individual interviews were completed with two of the focus group participants. The purpose of conducting additional interviews was to add to the depth of the information provided earlier and to offer participants multiple venues to share their experience (Morgan, 1996). Through email the researcher asked each focus group participant to schedule an individual, follow up interview. Two individuals scheduled interviews. One of the focus group participants did not respond to the researcher's repeated requests for contact. One individual indicated that she was unavailable for an individual interview. One other focus group participant agreed to an individual interview, but scheduling conflicts prevented the interview from being completed.

Separate individual interviews were completed by phone with two consenting participants. Both individual interviews were conducted from the researcher's home office. Field notes, a speakerphone, and audiotape recorder were used to record the interviews. One participant was at home for the phone interview and the other was in an office-like setting. Both settings were private and the participants indicated that they felt comfortable sharing in the chosen locations. In each interview, this researcher reviewed the confidentiality issues and offered another opportunity for the participant to ask questions or seek clarification about the study, the confidentiality agreement, and/or their continued consent to participate in the interview.

A semi structured interview guide was used to structure the individual interviews. A copy of the guide appears as Appendix E. Additional interview questions for the individual interviews surfaced from the topics and issues that emerged from the focus group. In conducting individual interviews after the focus group interview, this researcher was able to close some gaps in the focus group data. This researcher asked the participants in the individual interviews clarifying questions such as “can you elaborate on the description of the online experience you described earlier?” and “could you speak more directly about the online experience of ____?” One interview lasted approximately 35 minutes, and the other lasted approximately 50 minutes. Researcher reactions and impressions were journaled immediately after each of the individual interviews. The recordings, interview notes, and journal were stored in a locked location in the researcher’s home.

Key informant interview procedure. Key informant interviews are used in qualitative research to access information not directly observable or identifiable (Patton, 2002). While this study seeks to understand the experience of the online RT from doctoral students’ perspectives, a key informant interview with the course instructor was also completed. The course instructor recruited for this study taught the supervision course in which the participants were previously enrolled, and was therefore able to speak from a uniquely informed perspective. The key informant in this study also had expertise in using the RT model in both traditional and online venues. She is a practiced counselor educator with significant experience supervising doctoral students. The information gained from the course instructor described the online RT experience from the instructor’s vantage point, which furthered the understanding of the experiences reported

by the doctoral students. Additionally, the key informant interview data contributed to the consistency and accuracy of the data collected from the focus group and individual interviews.

This researcher contacted the course instructor (key informant) via email. An invitation requesting the instructor's participation and asking her to read the attached consent form was emailed. Copies of the invitation and consent form may be found in Appendices F and G. The instructor replied to the researcher with an email message stating, "By replying to this email, I give my consent to participate in the study described." An online interview was then arranged with the key informant.

The interview for the key informant was conducted in an online classroom separate from and inaccessible by others. This classroom was nearly identical to the classroom used for the focus group interview as described in the section entitled "focus group procedures." An exception was that the PowerPoint® presentation was modified for the key informant. The modified presentation is included as Appendix H. Upon signing into the online classroom, the instructor was able to communicate verbally and textually with the researcher. The key informant interview began with a welcome message and a statement about the nature of the study. The key informant was reminded about the issues of confidentiality and consent to participate. A screen capture tool (Snagit, 2009) was used to take a snapshot of the screen with the key informant's consent indicated in the participant window.

A semi structured interview guide was used to organize the key informant interview. The interview guide is included as Appendix I. The interview began with a general introduction. The key informant was provided with several prompts and

questions such as “tell me about your on line reflecting team supervision experience” and “what about your online reflecting team supervision stands out for you?”

Throughout the key informant interview, this researcher asked for clarification on the participant’s responses and encouraged and supported her participation in the interview. The interview proceeded in a conversational style and naturally ended after approximately 55 minutes, at which point, the researcher began to notice some repetition in the informant’s responses and asked if the key informant had anything else to add. She responded that she felt the information she provided was complete. The recording was stopped and the entire session was archived for data preservation. Upon completing the key informant interview, this researcher journaled her impressions and ideas about how to manage the data. The interview was then transcribed from the recording. Typed words and phrases from the text box were copied and pasted chronologically into the transcript. The researcher’s notes and an audiotape recording of the key informant interview were used to verify accuracy in the transcript. The transcripts, recordings, notes, and journal entries were stored in a locked location in the researcher’s home.

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is often referred to as the instrument of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, the researcher selected the topic of study, and established and asked the questions for all interviews. This researcher also transcribed and interpreted the data. In this manner, the researcher acted as the instrument through which data were gathered and eventually analyzed. By being involved in every phase of this research, the researcher had the potential to effect every phase of the research. Denzin suggested that “interpretive research begins and ends with

the biography and self of the researcher” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 12). In order to understand the “self of the researcher” and address potential for researcher bias, this section presents the background of this researcher.

By selecting the topic this researcher had already revealed her interest in online supervision methods and in the RT model of counselor supervision. Participating in online RT supervision sessions as a doctoral student prompted an interest in accessing doctoral students’ perspectives about online RT supervision. As a doctoral student, counselor supervisor, and counselor educator, this researcher had experience with the RT model (both online and face-to-face methods) prior to the start of this study. Because of this, the researcher was aware that her feelings about her personal and professional experience with online RT supervision methods might bias the experience of collecting and analyzing the data for this study. Consequently, this researcher used self-reflection and debriefing to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings and interpretations of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Peer debriefing and journaling enhanced reflection as the data were collected and analyzed. Peer debriefing is the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Peers familiar with qualitative methods of inquiry and experienced in online, RT supervision were selected to provide peer debriefing sessions by phone or email and in person throughout the study. Debriefings with members of the dissertation committee provided additional opportunities for the researcher to share interpretations.

The practice of reflective thinking is an important component in counseling and in the development of counseling professionals. The literature urges professionals to reflect

continuously on their own beliefs and assumptions to facilitate self-understanding and reinforce new understandings about a phenomenon (B. A. Griffith & Frieden, 2000). Having personal experience with using the RT model of supervision in both face-to-face and online settings, there was a possibility that personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings could influence the participants in the interviews or influence the data that emerged from those interviews. Vigilance in self-monitoring bias and assumptions was necessary. Journaling and peer and committee debriefings were used toward that end and contributed to the credibility of the analysis and interpretation.

This researcher's counseling knowledge and skills helped guide the interviews and encouraged sharing. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) indicated that it is important for those conducting focus groups to be flexible, be aware of their own biases and assumptions, be able to express thoughts quickly, be empathetic, be expressive of their own feelings, be genuinely interested in other peoples' thoughts and feelings, and be insightful about others. As a counselor, supervisor, and counselor educator, this researcher is skilled and/or proficient in each of the areas described.

Upon reflection and a review of related literature this researcher became aware of three presuppositions. First, this researcher believed that doctoral students would describe an online supervision experience by comparing the online method to the face-to-face method. Further, this researcher believed that doctoral students' online supervision experiences might be similar to the experiences of students in comparable professional preparation programs. Research demonstrates that online learning is a positive experience for most students, in terms of learning outcome and satisfaction (Reisetter, LaPointe, & Korcuska, 2007).

Because the participants in this study are trained counselors, this researcher presumed they view client-counselor interaction (or the therapeutic relationship) as a defining feature of counseling and supervision. It was expected that the participants would discuss online supervision methods and the reflecting team model in terms of interactivity (Bannan-Ritland, 2002) and relationship issues.

The special relationship among the participants and between the participants and key informant were important considerations in this study. Because the focus group participants were part of a doctoral cohort, the researcher presumed their responses might be affected by past experiences, events, and other dynamics present in the cohort. In a focus group composed of people who have had or have regular interaction, “familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure” (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In this study, it was presumed that participants’ responses could have been influenced by the pre-existing relationship and that data collection and analysis would need to consider these dynamics.

Because the participants in this study and the researcher were studying at the same institution, it was also presumed the participants could know this researcher. While this researcher had no existing relationships with any of the potential participants, there was a possibility that some of the potential participants may know of this researcher if they happened to meet on campus, through program activities, and/or coursework. This researcher was not a classmate of or a member of the potential participants’ cohort group. Procedures used to inform the participants about the researcher’s role can be found in the section entitled “Trustworthiness,” later in this chapter.

Because of her online RT supervision experience, a course instructor was interviewed as the key informant for this study. While the key informant was not the

direct supervisor of any of the participants at the time of this study, she was serving at the same university during this period. Because four of the participants involved in this study were current students, it was important to protect their confidentiality. It was presumed that because the participants' responses could be affected by their relationship with the university and those under its employ, precautions should be taken to recognize and minimize this influence to the extent possible. Strategies aimed at recognizing and minimizing the instructor's influence are included in the following section.

Trustworthiness

The participants in this study were known to each other. The key informant was the students' instructor during their online RT supervision experience. Pre-existing relationships can threaten the validity of a study. The benefits of accessing the key informant's perspective, having expert advice on the writing of this dissertation outweighed the risks. A number of measures were taken to minimize how the pre-existing relationships might jeopardize the study.

Prior to commencing any interviews, this researcher asked participants to review a description of the study that included an explanation of how this researcher would assist in protecting their identity. In consenting to participate in this study, participants agreed to keep the identity of other students confidential. Participants were asked not to use each other's names during the interviews. If names were used during the interviews, the researcher removed them during transcription of the data.

Because the research question in this study asks about a particular supervision experience that was part of a doctoral supervision course, participants were given specific instruction to avoid evaluation of the course or its instructor. Each research question was

developed and phrased to elicit the students' current feelings about their previous online RT experience, not past feelings about course-specific proceedings or information. For instance, instead of asking participants to describe the problems and benefits of their online supervision course (which could elicit course or instructor-evaluative comments), participants were asked to describe how they might use online RT supervision as a supervisor in the future (to focus students' descriptions on the RT process).

Additional measures were taken so that the participants felt confidence that both positive and negative reports about their online RT supervision experience would be anonymous and unknown to the former course instructor. The focus group was conducted in a secure online classroom. Only the participants who had agreed to be interviewed were given access to the online classroom. No other students, faculty, or administrators other than this researcher were able to access the online classroom before, during, or following the focus group. Upon completing the focus group, the data were archived, saved, and stored in a password protected file in a password protected computer in the researcher's home.

Participants were offered reports of the data and quotes from the transcript and asked to confirm or revise the findings before the data were shared with others. After transcription, this researcher emailed each participant asking them to read the quotations she planned to use to illustrate the study's findings. Participants were given the option of rephrasing quotations if they felt that the quotation could identify them in some way. This step served to assure participants that they could be truthful and accurate in their interviews. None of the participants changed any of the quotations.

To further protect the anonymity of the participants, this researcher also consulted with a dissertation committee member from outside of the university setting where this study took place. All participants in the study were unknown to the outside committee member. This researcher used the outside committee member as a consultant when debriefing was needed or questions arose during data analysis. This committee member's input was important because she could remain impartial in her review of the quotations selected for use in chapter 4. The outside committee member did not identify any quotes as risking exposure of any participant's identity.

Throughout the analysis process, the trustworthiness of the data was increased through the researcher's efforts to debrief and process the research with others. Two peer reviewers provided support and challenged this researcher's assumptions and interpretations of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The members of the dissertation committee provided additional opportunities for peer debriefings, contributing to the credibility of the study. For example, as an overall picture of the participants' experience of online RT supervision began to emerge, the researcher asked a peer to review the material and offer her own sense of the participants' experiences. Debriefings with peers and committee members helped in determining the consistency and completeness of the coding structure. Continued debriefing throughout the entirety of the research and interpretation process supported an accurate understanding of the data.

Methodological triangulation was used to increase trustworthiness in the findings of this study. Patton (2002) defined the triangulation of method as using several different strategies to gather data. In this study, both students and an instructor were interviewed about online RT supervision. Several students participated in individual interviews and

together in a focus group interview. Interviewing multiple people, using two types of interview strategies, led to a more diverse construction of the experience of online RT supervision.

Through triangulation of method, standardizing the interviews, using debriefing strategies, and clearly explaining and minimizing risks related to confidentiality, the trustworthiness of this study was enhanced. The strategies employed to ensure participants' anonymity also increased the likelihood the participants in this study would be accurate and truthful in their descriptions of their online RT supervision experience. Throughout data analysis, it was important for the researcher to keep in mind that the results of the study could be influenced by the familiarity of the participants, researcher, and role of the key informant.

Interview Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined the process of qualitative data analysis as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145). Patton (2002) suggested this is an inductive process, meaning that themes of meaning emerge out of the data. While there is no singular prescribed method to analyze qualitative data, there are general phases of analysis reported in the literature (Giorgi, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Five general steps suggested in the literature (Giorgi, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002) were taken to analyze the interview transcripts: (a) data immersion, (b) meaningful concept identification, (c) organizing data by categorizing or coding, (d) applying the code structure, and (e) communicating the findings.

Prior to conducting the focus group interview, reservations and expectations about the data to be collected were explored. During the interviews, copious notes were taken on the content of each interview, participant characteristics, and her feelings and impressions as they occurred. Journaling exercises were completed before and after each interview.

In the first step of data analysis this researcher immersed herself in the data collected through each interview (Giorgi, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Each interview was recorded, and the researcher took plentiful notes during each interview with informal journal entries before and after each interview. For instance, the focus group interview was recorded digitally and with a micro cassette while the researcher kept notes on paper. After the focus group ended, the researcher made additional notes in a private journal describing the experience of collecting the data. Next, the researcher replayed the digital recording of the online session. The online classroom's archive feature not only provided a digital audio recording of the focus group interview, but also a minute-by-minute screen capture. Therefore, the researcher was able to re-experience the focus group interview in the same sequence in which it occurred. While viewing the archived session, the researcher reviewed and reflected on her pre-interview and post-interview journal entries and the notes taken during the interview.

A basic word processing program was used to transcribe the verbal portion of the focus group interview. Next, the researcher immersed herself in the data provided through other sources. For this study, the other sources of data included the textually communicated words typed in the text box of the online classroom during the focus group

interview, and the researcher's own notes and journal entries. These data were incorporated into the transcript.

To create an integrated, master transcript, the researcher used the archive feature from the online classroom (Wimba™, 2010) where the focus group and key informant interview took place. Wimba's archive feature recorded and synchronized all the audio and text comments as they occurred during the interviews. Upon viewing the archived session, the researcher took note of the place within the focus group transcript the textually communicated information appeared, and then incorporated the text comments into the transcript. The researcher's own notes were also incorporated into the transcript by hand at or near the place in the conversation the researcher originally made the notes. By reading and re-reading the integrated transcript, the researcher became completely immersed in the data.

Next, the researcher checked the accuracy of the transcribed material. First, the researcher viewed the archived session again while reviewing her notes and the master transcript. A final transcript was compared with each archived and recorded session again to confirm that the interview data was accurately transcribed. Later, after the researcher selected quoted material that exemplified particular concepts well, the researcher offered the participants access to the transcripts and/or selected quotes. Participants were given an opportunity to edit the quoted material that they felt were unclear or jeopardized their anonymity. No suggestions or changes to the material were requested, although one participant suggested that removing male and female pronouns may further protect the identity of some participants. The researcher shared this suggestion with the off-campus member of the dissertation committee who agreed the

final transcript and results of the study should use only feminine pronouns to protect the confidentiality of the very few male participants in the study. When the transcripts were considered accurate and complete, data analysis continued.

In the process of creating the master transcripts of each interview, the researcher noticed similarities emerging. Similarities between interviews were noted and provided the foundation for the major categories that are reported in chapter 4. Open coding yielded a number of possible subcategories significant to each category. The researcher used the highlighter feature of a word processing program to color code the parts of each transcript that appeared to be related. These color-coded subcategories formed the code structure eventually applied to the data.

The next phase of the data analysis involved comparing and combining several of the sub categories. After grouping, regrouping, and recoding the data several subcategories seemed necessary to paint a clear picture of participants' experience. Identifying subcategories also helped in containing and organizing the large amount of data. The completeness of the data set was evidenced by saturation of the data. Each of subcategories became saturated when no new information related to them emerged from re-examinations of the transcripts. Additional subcodes were tried and tested. Throughout the analysis process, some subcategories were modified or eliminated. Several subcategories appeared more central to making meaning of the data, and other subcategories were reframed as concepts related to existing subcategories.

After further review of the transcripts, an overall picture of the participants' experience of online RT supervision began to emerge. Peer and faculty debriefings helped in determining the consistency and completeness of the coding structure. Next,

the researcher selected specific words and phrases from each transcript that appeared to best illustrate each subcategory. The researcher used a word processing program to copy selected words and phrases and paste them under subcategory headings in a word document.

Finally, the coding structure was applied again to each interview transcript and related data. It became apparent that the data had reached saturation when subsequent examinations of each interview transcript did not produce any new information that required new categories or codes to be developed. The analysis process produced the major categories that best encapsulate doctoral students' experience with online RT supervision. Subcategories of each major category were used to organize and manage the data. Chapter 4 reports the categories and subcategories yielded by the data.

A number of understandings related to participants' experience with online RT supervision were implicit in the themes that emerged from the analysis of data. A discussion of the themes in relation to the literature and the implications of this research are presented in chapter 5.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore doctoral students' experiences with online reflecting team (RT) supervision. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews provided the format for data collection. This study employed methodological triangulation (Patton, 2002) to increase trustworthiness. Triangulation of method included examining several types of interviewing methods (individual, focus group, and key informant) and using a semi-structured interview guide approach. Triangulation of data included committee consultation, peer and faculty debriefings, field notes, reflective journals, audio recordings, and archived online session recordings. Data collection yielded in-depth descriptions of the participants' online RT experience.

The participants in this study included doctoral students who had participated in online reflecting team (RT) supervision during their internships in an accredited counselor education and supervision doctoral program. Five individuals participated in an online focus group interview, two of whom gave individual interviews. One key informant interview with the supervision course instructor (hereafter identified as the "key informant") further informed the study and validated the information obtained in other interviews.

The data analysis process included five general steps (Giorgi, 1985; Patton, 2002): data immersion, meaningful concept identification, organizing data by categorizing or coding, applying the code structure, and communicating the findings. A brief explanation of each step follows.

1. Data immersion: This step included repeatedly listening to recordings made during the data collection and reading the transcripts from them. It also

encompassed reviewing the accompanying field notes and journal entries made during each interview and incorporating all sources of data into a master transcript.

2. Meaningful concept identification: This step included comparing and contrasting the meaning of participants' reports until the point of saturation.
3. Organization of data: This step consisted of identifying categories and subcategories as they emerged from the data and making modifications until no new categories were needed.
4. Applying the code structure: In this step, the code structure was applied to all the interviews and modified until no new categories were needed. Identifying exceptions was included in this step.
5. Presentation of findings: This step first consisted of organizing the findings from the study. Focus group, individual interview, and key informant responses were integrated, analyzed, and reported.

Several important categories emerged from the integration and analysis of data.

Within each category, subcategories emerged that proved helpful in organizing and reporting the study's findings. This chapter summarizes the categories and subcategories that emerged from data analysis and presents the findings, representing each category with key quotes in the narrative. A summary of the findings and an introduction to the discussion of these findings conclude the chapter.

A number of themes are important to understanding doctoral students' experience with online RT supervision. Participant responses are integrated into three thematic areas:

1. **Supervision at a Distance:** This section refers to issues related to the technology used to deliver online RT supervision. Participants' perspectives related to the convenience and comfort of online supervision, as well as to the legitimacy of receiving supervision at a distance.
2. **Computer-mediated Interaction:** This theme illustrates participants' perspectives about interacting in the online venue. Participants shared a number of viewpoints about the nature of online conversation and the absence of visual information.
3. **Learning Styles and Expectations for Supervision:** This theme relates to the influence of supervisee factors in participants' experience of online RT supervision. Participants' descriptions indicated that they shared a number of perspectives regarding their preferred supervision styles.

Theme 1: Supervision at a Distance

The participants in this study reported a number of advantages and disadvantages associated with RT supervision via the Internet. All participants acknowledged the convenience of the delivery method while, at the same time, the convenience of the online RT sessions contributed to participants' questioning the legitimacy of the online method. Participants described the comforts and distractions of being outside of a traditional campus setting for supervision sessions, alluding to these factors as possible reasons to question the authenticity of the experience. Both student and key informant participants offered suggestions related to delivering RT supervision at a distance.

The legitimacy of online supervision. The participants clearly enjoyed the convenience offered through Internet-based supervision, as they generally participated in

the RT sessions from their homes or home offices. Participants clearly explained the sense of comfort and the convenience they associated with being able to stay home for supervision sessions.

The participants used vivid descriptions that illustrated the comfort of being at home for supervision sessions. Several spoke of enjoying a cup of coffee, relaxing on the couch, or wearing pajamas during the online sessions. Participant #2, for example, indicated that “being able to do it in your pajamas sitting in your house was kind of nice.” The participants discussed this perception several times throughout the individual and focus group interviews. Participant #1 recalled, “I was drinking coffee in my jammies” during an online RT supervision session. Wearing headsets with earphones and microphones allowed participants to move around during supervision. Participant #2 mentioned that during sessions she could “bounce a ball” or do other activities while still being part of the supervision session.

The student participants shared a concern that participating in supervision from home could be distracting. In an individual interview, one participant said, “When you’re at home you’re surrounded by all your stuff, going ‘Good grief! Look at all the stuff I could do!’” Other participants agreed that participating in supervision from home was difficult when faced with housework and other household responsibilities. One participant noted, “The laundry was always calling me,” demonstrating that housework competed for students’ attention when they were online. Participants identified taking care of children and cleaning the house as other household responsibilities that competed for their attention when they were online. This theme was consistent across the focus group and individual student interviews. Participant #1 reflected the same sentiment:

“Online . . . I’m drinking coffee . . . finding a million other things to distract myself.”

She contrasted this experience with being in supervision on campus, which she described as less distracting: “No kids in the next room . . . not confronted by all the things I could be doing.”

All student participants described online RT supervision as convenient.

Perspectives about the convenience of supervision at a distance related to savings in travel time and expense. Participant #2 joked that the part of the online RT experience she enjoyed the most was “the free parking!” Her statement elicited audible laughter from the other participants and participant #4 entered an affirmative “Amen” into the text box. Others described how carefree the convenience made their Saturday mornings. Participant #2 described “rolling out of bed” as the only preparation involved in online RT supervision sessions. The participants contrasted the experience of “rolling out of bed” with the tasks related to going to a physical campus, such as getting gas, fighting traffic, and finding and paying for parking.

Another perspective the participants shared was that the online RT supervision was particularly convenient when distance and busy schedules might have prevented them from participating in any supervision. Two participants shared that they took part in online RT sessions when out of town on personal vacations. If the RT sessions had been held on campus on those dates, these participants said they would not have attended. Another participant felt fortunate to be able to be part of the online RT supervision sessions after moving out of state to complete the internship and look for work. “I could be in [another state], get online, and be part of supervision.”

The participants further explored the benefits of participating in supervision from a distance when they discussed the applicability of distance supervision in general.

Participant #4 initiated a discussion regarding how distance supervision might be especially beneficial to supervisees in rural areas:

I think that there is possibly a place for colleges or universities that are located in a rural area; I don't know a lot of people commuting. Maybe the merits outweigh the negatives; . . . there is a place in certain areas where it is beneficial.

Another meaningful concept emerged, however, when participants noted that they may have regarded the experience as less authentic than supervision provided in a traditional classroom or office setting. Participant #2 offered a statement encapsulating this perception:

Honestly, it's really hard to take it seriously when you don't go to class or you don't go to supervision. I mean, I like rolled out of bed. I sat down at my computer and didn't feel like I was really in supervision.

Participant #4 explained that the benefits of convenience took away from “the nature of supervision [and] the quality of supervision . . . all I really cared about was that I didn't have to drive to [the university].” Others related to this sentiment and offered descriptions of how distance supervision felt inferior to face-to-face methods in terms of quality. Participant #3 related quality to effort, noting that “you can put in very little effort, so it's difficult to take it seriously.”

Participants in this study shared a number of challenges related to supervision at a distance and particularly to the online classroom used in online RT supervision. The Wimba™ live classroom (2010) resembled a chat room and allowed supervisees to

communicate with one another individually and with the whole group by speaking into a microphone, or by typing into a text box. Students could both listen and read others' responses. The communication was instant and in real time.

Key informant perspectives about the features in the online classroom were generally positive. From this instructor's position, the technical applications used to organize online RT sessions were "effective." When probed further about effectiveness, the key informant responded that the technology used to deliver the supervision was complementary to the RT model. She described both the steps used to access and take part in online classroom discussions and the procedural steps delineated in the RT process as predictable and invariable. The key informant described the procedures of the RT process and the nature of online interaction complementary, "linear processes . . . that really blend well" and enhance the effectiveness of both the model and method.

The text box was one online classroom feature discussed by both the instructor and student participants. The key informant pointed out the text box offered students an additional and alternative way to participate in the RT sessions. She believed the text box feature contributed to the "free flow of information" exchanged during online RT supervision sessions. The text box feature was used several times by this researcher to indicate to the key informant that her connection was deteriorating and the quality of her audio communication was diminished briefly and temporarily.

One advantage emerged from participants' descriptions of the Wimba™ live classroom (2010) application used to manage the online RT sessions: student participants agreed that the classroom's archiving feature made supervision more efficient. Participant #4 explained that in using the feature, "especially, after a particularly

productive session, you could always get a transcript of it [the session] and look back on it to kind of reflect more independently.”

Students found the text box feature distracting. Participants identified the text box as contributing to the overall sense of distraction they experienced during online supervision sessions. Participant #2 communicated this perspective when she said, “the text box . . . just added another distraction,” and all the student participants shared her viewpoint. Participant #4 added, “When I realized I could [use the text box] to side bar, it just added another distraction.”

During the focus group interview, the text box feature was used 16 times. Focus group participants used the text box 9 times, whereas the researcher used it 7 times. Participants used the text box to affirm others’ ideas ($f = 4$) by typing, “I agree,” or “Me too.” Participants also used the text box during the focus group to present a new idea ($f = 1$), offer additional related information ($f = 1$), check in with others to see if what they said was understood ($f = 1$), and joke with each other ($f = 2$). The researcher used the text box to encourage or support participants’ sharing ($f = 4$) and to ask clarifying questions ($f = 3$).

Challenges of using technology. The student participants all agreed with a conclusion that constitutes a major finding relating to distance supervision: students experienced the technology as “frustrating.” Variations on the word *frustrate* occurred more frequently in the transcripts than any other word. Student participants described losing their Internet connection, problems with equipment, and interruptions in the flow of conversation as technology-related frustrations in their online RT supervision experience.

A question in the focus group interview asked participants to consider what would be important to them when using the online RT model as a supervisor. Participant #1 responded assuredly, “Quality technology.” Participant #1 sounded exasperated when she recalled the problems she had experienced during online RT sessions: “The whole nonsense of calling in and people can’t hear you and there’s problems with this and problems with that.”

Focus group participants identified other features of the online classroom as disruptive; for example, they shared stories about trouble signing into the online classroom. When unable to sign on, participants used a phone to call into the online classroom. Most student participants reported that the quality of the audio component of the classroom was inconsistent. Participants described their frustration when “sometimes people can’t hear you.” Individual interview data supported this perspective. The participant in the first individual interview reported, “People are always getting kicked out of the Wimba™ classroom [2010], and then they have to come back in. Sound would be bad, or you would lose their sound.” Participant #5 concluded that “with all those other distractions, it takes away from the experience, and it makes [supervision] less effective.”

Students translated their experience of technical glitches into suggestions for supervisors. All the participants strongly agreed with participant #2 when she said, “I would want to make sure that all my systems were a go because [problems with technology] add frustration.” The key informant interview yielded similar considerations for testing equipment and training students to use the technology. All participants believed that experience moderated frustrations with the technology for the user. The

shared belief that increased exposure to reflective supervision and the technology used in online supervision would increase performance is evident in this statement: “Having been through the experience a few times increases the comfort level, which then allows them all to be more effective.”

In sum, doctoral students’ perspectives about online RT supervision were modified by their experience of the technology through which it was delivered. It was apparent that the major feeling expressed by student participants was frustration. All student participants experienced frustration with the technical glitches that accompanied the online delivery of the RT supervision they received. Participants indicated that the comfort and convenience associated with supervision at a distance did not compensate for the frustrations and distractions they described.

Theme 2: Computer-Mediated Interaction

This theme illustrates participants’ shared perspectives about interacting in the online setting. Participants in this study perceived computer-mediated exchanges in online RT supervision as limited and possessed the potential for miscommunication. This section describes the concepts meaningful to participants’ experiences of social exchanges online. The concepts that emerged relate to participants’ feelings of isolation and invisibility.

Participants described computer-mediated communication as isolating and lonesome. They evaluated online RT supervision as less interactive than face-to-face RT supervision sessions. Participants linked feelings of isolation to the lower level of interaction present online. Participant #1 said, “Online supervision is less personal and it feels more disconnected.” All the student participants provided similar evaluations.

Participant #2 reported, “When you’re online . . . it makes the experience very sterile.” Later, she compared the process of offering reflections to her classmates online as “not engaging other people . . . just thinking out loud.”

Participants described “not being able to see each other” as the major factor contributing to their sense of being alone. Participant #1 shared a metaphor with which all student participants seemed to relate; “We can’t see . . . if anybody is paying attention or if anybody [is] listening, so sometimes it feels like you’re driving your car down the highway with nobody there.” Other participants’ descriptions of the online RT experience reflected a similar sense of isolation. Participant #2 described her experience as “sterile.”

Some participants described the use of the RT model as contributing to the “sterile” environment. For some participants, “it’s just a very passive model. You don’t engage other people. You don’t ask each other questions. All you do is just reflect your own thoughts.” Participants asserted that without visual information, any form of supervision “is impersonal” and “ineffective.” It was clear that participants in this study shared a sense that they had lost something of value by using the RT model of supervision online.

Participants identified the absence of one another’s physical appearance as primarily responsible for the confusion and isolation they experienced. They explained that they had found it difficult to interact in a setting devoid of “body language and non-verbal [behavior.]” Participants shared a sense that the behavioral cues present in face-to-face supervision helped them know when to take their turn and how to participate without interrupting another person. Students reported, “Online we trip over each other.

You never know when someone is going to talk.” Findings suggest that participants viewed the lack of physical presence as a major contributor to their shared sense of confusion and chaos.

Participants reported the familiar manner they interacted in the traditional classroom settings was absent in the online classroom. A statement by participant #2 reflected their shared sentiment; “When you’re sitting in a room live with one another, everything is out in the open; that’s not the case when you’re online.” Participants shared the sense that their interactions were often “awkward” when they had to rely only on non-verbal information. Participant #1 explained, “When you are in person, with one person going at a time, you . . . get some feedback from the non-verbals . . .” that help facilitate the reflecting process. Online and without visual cues, the participants felt ill at ease. When prompted to describe how online sessions felt, participant #1 responded, “awkward and uncomfortable, and then sort of scattered.”

Participants shared that “not being able to see each other” affected the facilitation of the online sessions. Across interviews, student participants used phrases indicative of the visual deficit they experienced. Phrases used to describe this deficit included “the missing visual cues,” “the missing behavioral things,” and “you can’t look at your colleagues.” Participants made a connection between the visual deficit and the awkward silences or lulls in online RT supervision. In referring to the lulls, participant #2 said, “We can’t see who’s thinking about talking, so you wonder . . . is anybody going to talk; am I going to talk? So that’s part of it, you can’t see what their eyes are doing.”

Participant #2 reported a similar sentiment after the focus group experienced a short period of silence. “I think the experience we just had, of watching us all just do

nothing, is my problem with online supervision. It's that there are lots and lots of lulls.” Participants often described their experience of “lulls” as uncomfortable. In her individual interview, participant #1 said, “We would sit here for several minutes until someone decides to say something . . . and then there is silence, and just the process of waiting . . . because you don't know when someone is going to speak.” To illustrate the contrast between online and face-to-face dialogue, participants explained, “At least when you do it in person, you can kind of see when someone is gearing up to say something, but you can't do that online.”

Most participants shared the perspective that the absence of a visual connection contributed to the “scattered” feeling they reported. Participant #5 described the experience as chaotic:

It seemed like there really was no order; if I were to label it, I would label it chaotic, because there was typing, and then some of the background, people talking over, and it is very difficult for you to know when someone is getting ready to talk.

Similarly, participant #2 recalled the mix of “talking, people typing, whispering back and forth” as being difficult to follow. Participants surmised that visual information would be helpful in reducing the chaos and provided examples relating to how visual cues could inform the flow of the online RT sessions. Participants also suggested that visual cues might signal the transition between different phases of the RT method. For example, “if the facilitator is able to see that people are done,” she could ask the team to move on to the next phase.

All student participants agreed, adding that a video component would improve the online RT supervision sessions. A focus group discussion prompted participant #3 to explain that she would not use online RT supervision for supervising others unless she and the others had video capabilities. Most participants agreed when she indicated, “I think some type of video . . . would be important to me.” Participant #5 also shared that “a quality video component” would help eliminate frustration over knowing “who was gonna talk next.” Participant #4 related to the need for a video component and entered “I agree” into the text box.

Participants suggested the invisibility of the supervisor and other supervisees had an impact on behavior. Without a visual connection, participants believed they were missing much of the communication in online RT supervision sessions. Focus group and individual interview data indicated the value of non-verbal forms of communication. The key informant’s description of behavioral changes she associated with the sense of invisibility experienced online further confirmed the importance of this theme.

All participants in this study agreed that face-to-face communication was especially important to them as counselors and supervisors. Participant # 4 said, “We all are trained counselors, and so we’re trained to observe people on behaviors, and I know that [not being able to observe other’s behaviors] is one of the things I struggle with the most with online RT supervision.”

One focus group participant connected non-verbal communication in the online RT supervision experience to parallel process, a phenomenon of counselor supervision (J. M. Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Parallel process can be described as a phenomenon in which supervisees present themselves to their supervisors as the client has presented to

the supervisee (J. M. Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Participant #3 stressed it was important for her to “keep in mind about the parallel process; it’s important that the supervisee is getting enough supervision related to the body language along with the supervisor’s body language . . . that’s what they’re going to take into their counseling sessions.”

Other participants in the focus group and the individual interviews echoed this sentiment. Participant #1 cautioned, “It would be difficult for you to read your supervisee, for instance, if they were resistant to feedback, or they were having a difficult time taking things objectively, you wouldn’t really know it because you couldn’t read their body language.” When prompted for examples, participant #4 related her experiences working with supervisees when she felt her supervisees were “not giving me the whole story” with their words. All the student participants shared the view that a supervisor’s picture of a supervisee was incomplete without visual information, and several of them recalled situations when supervisees’ verbalizations were not congruent with their non-verbal behavior. Participants felt that they were able to detect the incongruence because they had visual information.

Participants suggested that the sharing of reflections was based, in part, on non-verbal feedback from others. Participant #4 described this common perspective: “Online . . . you can’t look at your colleagues when they’re wondering [or offering reflections] about the case that you are presenting and [without] seeing the expressions on their faces . . . you had no idea what they were thinking.” The key informant offered a different perspective. She suggested that the absence of a visual connection might contribute to the reflecting process and described the online atmosphere as a place where a supervisee

could offer reflections without worrying about others' non-verbal messages. The key informant said:

There is something about sitting at a piece of technology that in some ways feels disinhibiting. It [online interaction] allows us to kind of take down our guard a little bit. Online reflecting . . . frees people up to just have honest reflections.

One student participant conveyed a similar perspective. Online, this participant experienced the freeing sensation that the key informant described. She explained that online “it was easier to come out of my shell” and accurately present her case for supervision. Both this participant and the key informant described the online setting as being without many of the inhibiting behaviors experienced in face-to-face supervision. The student participant indicated that during online RT supervision, she was able to avoid what others might do or say to influence her participation. The key informant described how supervisee behavior in person influences reflections:

When we are face to face, we have a lot of non-verbal cues. [Supervisees] may sigh. They may roll their eyes. They might look a certain way. They might smile and confirm my reflection. The online environment doesn't have any of that. The online version [of the RT] takes that non-judgmental part [of the reflecting team concept] to the next level and allows sharing reflections in a way that is devoid of that [which] sometimes shapes our reflections.

According to participants, the invisibility of the instructor and other supervisees had behavioral implications in the online classroom. Participation in supervision sessions and a reluctance or propensity to share reflections were two behaviors described as being influenced by the environment. Different from the environment devoid of judgment

described by the key informant, participant #1 described a “pressure to participate.” Participant #1 verbalized the inner dialogue she typically experienced during lulls in the team’s reflections. She recalled thinking, “Oh my God, I have to say something!”

Other participants agreed and added that a sense of pressure to participate led them sometimes to offer superficial reflections instead of meaningful contributions. When asked how she experienced this “pressure” online versus face to face, participant #1 responded, “It was pretty much all the same,” suggesting participant #1 experienced a similar pressure in the traditional classroom delivery of the RT model as well.

Student participants confirmed the pressure that participant #1 described was common. They then discussed other concerns they felt were related to being invisible and not being able to see others. Participants felt the invisibility experienced online magnified a fear of evaluation. They identified sources of evaluation as both the instructor and fellow cohort members. Online, participants sensed a pressure in “trying to kind of come up with the smartest answer possible.” The participants were prompted to clarify whether the notions of “pressure” and “evaluation” were part of face-to-face experiences in addition to the online experience. A statement from participant #3 reflected the opinion shared by most participants:

It was different to some extent. Online, I think there was slightly less pressure because the instructor is not looking at you, at least, I didn’t know if she was wondering why I wasn’t reflecting . . . In person you’re kind of on the spot have to come up with certain responses . . . you feel more pressured when people are looking at you [than when you are invisible.]

Theme 3: Learning Styles and Expectations for Supervision

Across interviews, a number of factors related to learning styles and preferences for supervision emerged. Participants described a self-identified learning style. They compared and contrasted their preferred styles of learning with their perceptions of the style of supervision offered in online RT supervision sessions. Participants described the developmental level of the supervisee as an important consideration for using the online RT model of supervision. Issues related to participants' expectations for supervision and to the relationship between members of the supervision experience emerged as important shared concepts with regard to how doctoral students experience online RT supervision.

Learning style. Learning style might be generally defined as individual, preferential strategies for gathering, interpreting, organizing, and thinking about new information (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In this study, the participants' perceived level of interaction emerged as an important preferential element in their learning. Participants identified the degree of interaction between supervisees as an important factor in their experience of the RT model of supervision regardless of venue (online or face-to-face). Findings indicate that participants perceived their preferred learning styles as misaligned with the style of learning in online RT supervision.

Participant #2 evaluated the RT model of supervision as weak because "you're not engaging other people." Other participants shared this assessment, explaining that a low level of engagement was present, "even when in person." Participants compared and contrasted their preference for interactive learning with the low level of engagement they experienced in online RT supervision.

Participants in this study shared a preference for models of supervision without guidelines for when and how to participate. Four of the five focus group participants used the term “frustrating” to describe the nature of the RT model of supervision. Participants reported that the linearity of the RT model limited the level of interaction they preferred, noting instead that they wanted to offer reflections and suggestions as they emerged versus confining them to the phases of the RT model. Participant #1 described the frustration most student participants shared:

I find [RT supervision] really frustrating because I tend to think fast and process out loud, and so someone would wonder or be curious about [something] and I wanted to have dialog around that. Something would strike my interest and they would want to talk about it, and I would want to process it, and work on that, [but] I had to sit there with my mouth shut while wondering about other stuff, and people wondered about stuff because they felt like they had to wonder about stuff because that was the process.

Participants experienced the online RT model of supervision as deficient in the interaction level they valued as learners. Participant #1 described the reflecting process as difficult “because you’re not engaging other people, you’re just thinking out loud.” Participant #4 stated that during online RT supervision, “there wasn’t that level of interaction” that she preferred to occur in supervision. Participant #3 sounded frustrated when she shared, “You don’t ask each other questions. All you do is just reflect your own thoughts, your own perceptions.” Participant #2 encapsulated the frustration of the participants about the lack of interactivity in the RT model by noting that “there was no place for quality dialog and collaborative work; it just frustrated me to no end.”

The key informant shared a similar perspective. She described seeing even more experienced supervisees sometimes struggle with the linear process of the reflecting team.

There are students who struggle with the reflecting team model because they want the dialogue, they want the interaction, so that when a reflection comes they want to be able to respond to the reflection or to say, “Yes, I did that,” or “Here is the piece of information you are asking about.”

Participants used the terms “learning style” and “supervision style” interchangeably, identifying both as inconsistent with the RT model of supervision. Participant #1 stated that the RT concepts did “not mesh well with my style.” She described her preference for highly interactive supervision experiences and, in contrast, described her experience of the RT model of supervision (both on and offline) as “very passive,” “laid back,” and “mellow.”

Participants identified various concepts of the RT model that they did not prefer, describing the manner in which feedback is offered as “very contrived,” “very focused,” and “restricting.” Most participants preferred supervision methods in which there was more spontaneity in sharing from both the supervisee and supervisor. Participants reported the component of the RT model that kept participants from facing each other in person was a challenge. To many participants, not facing each other felt isolating. Participant #1 described this as “thinking out loud and talking to yourself.” Participants #1 and #3 explained that procedures for when and how to engage others in the RT model felt restrictive. Participant #3 experienced supervision through the RT model as “useful,” but “not able to be appreciated by everyone.”

Affective factors, including “motivation,” “attention,” and “open-mindedness,” related to how they experienced online RT supervision. The supervisees indicated that their state of mind was important in their experience of online RT supervision. Participant #3 was asked to explain more about what she referred to as “the supervisees’ own state of mind.” What she described was essentially the commitment, motivation, and attention with which participants approach the online RT supervision experience. Most participants described similar factors.

Participants believed that a high degree of benefit would result from a high degree of effort or interest from supervisees. One participant recalled her own experience with this concept: “If I go in and try to get the most out of it and try to take the feedback in the best possible way, then that’s what I get.” Participant #3 offered a similar perspective:

[The RT] takes a little bit of hard work. Just wondering, not just judging how people should be counseling, but what is good for people, and without making presuppositions is hard. It’s hard to let things evolve and unfold. The frustration is, some things go unquestioned and unanswered. I struggled with it. The days that I was able to be more open-minded, be more welcoming of other perspectives, I got more of the RT. On other days, I didn’t.

The key informant also described students’ experiences of online RT supervision as reliant on open-mindedness, flexibility (with new ideas, new applications, and acceptance of a less directive model for supervision, giving up control), and participation. The key informant’s identification of affective components in online RT supervision further confirmed the importance of these concepts in doctoral students’ experience with online RT supervision.

Supervising others. The participants in this study described a number of factors related to how they might use the online RT method when supervising others. The developmental level of the supervisee emerged as an important factor related to participants' understanding of the online RT supervision experience. Participants #2 and #5 shared that the developmental level of their supervisees would be a major consideration in using this method to supervise others. Participant #2 stated that because "as doctoral students we had a hard time staying focused . . . I would never use it with a counselor in training or somebody that was new to supervision." She explained that the online delivery method of supervision adds to the difficulty experienced by the supervisee. "I think supervision is hard enough with a new counselor or counselor in training, and then RT supervision is even harder, and then online RT supervision harder yet."

The key informant shared the perspective that the RT model works especially well for "students that are further along in their program." When asked for more information, the key informant described the efficacy of the RT model as requiring a certain level of insight and awareness not typically demonstrated by less experienced supervisees. She described less mature supervisees as possibly not being able to understand the "role of feedback and the receiving of feedback," although she has found the RT model "particularly helpful with students who struggle with hearing feedback and feeling defensive." The RT concept, she believes, helps less experienced supervisees to sit back and listen to feedback without needing to respond to it.

Participant #3 surmised that there was "some amount of getting used to the RT model" and that becoming familiar with the RT model seemed important to how she

experienced the online delivery of that model. Further, she felt that “if we only did online supervision reflecting teams [and not face-to-face RT supervision], then it would have been more difficult” to learn how to use the model productively. Participant #3 expressed that becoming familiar and comfortable with the RT model of supervision, regardless of the method of delivery, was “almost like learning a different language.”

Relationships. Participants indicated that issues related to the relationship among students, and between students and instructor were important to the experience of online RT supervision, even suggesting “relationship issues” are “extremely important.” Participant #3 suggested that the relationship issue has two components, the first being, “just the way people feel comfortable with one another,” and the second, “respect for their world view and whatever they bring culturally . . . and [from] true life experience to the table.” Participants shared the perspective that comfort and respect were essential to effective online RT supervision. One participant explained that effective online RT sessions “can happen only when the relationships are clear and healthy.” When prompted for an explanation, participant #3 replied, “People tend to hold back, and not much can come out of the RT” if clear, healthy relationships are not present. Other participants clarified that clear and healthy relationships were important to the RT concept, both online and in person: “You can’t use [the] RT model anywhere if it’s not comfortable to wonder.” Participants surmised that a low level of comfort might result from individual inhibitions. “Not getting along” was identified as another condition that would result in a low level of comfort between and among members of the RT. Participants offered the example of a team member who does not socialize with other members of the RT outside of class; such a person might also be less comfortable being herself during online RT

sessions. Participants then discussed how they believed that the relationship dynamics present in face-to-face supervision sessions “transfer to the online classroom.”

Participant #5 suggested that the online RT supervision experience might vary with the strength of the connection between students and with the length of time the group spent together in training to use the model online. When prompted for other perspectives, participant #4 seemed to agree that prior emotional connections or relationships might be important to how the online RT is experienced. She found that knowing the other members of the online RT prior to interacting online was a necessary condition for her to be able to feel connected online. “Because we all had relationships or friendships prior to doing the online RT supervision sessions, we all had a sense of the way each other communicated and what our non-verbals looked like.” Participants #5 and #2 explained the effect of having a prior relationship with the online RT members differently. Participant #5 explained, “Because we [the members of the face-to-face RT supervision sessions] were invested in one another . . . I would try to pay attention just out of courtesy, or a sense of obligation, because we were friends.” Conversely, participant #2 suggested that if she had not known the other supervisees prior to working online, she “might have been a little more present.” She saw her comfort level and prior face-to-face relationship with her cohort members as permission to disconnect or become distracted during the online RT supervision sessions.

Participant #1 discussed her experience using the online RT model with others by describing relationships within her cohort. In this study, a cohort comprises a group of graduate students who proceeded through the doctoral program course sequence together. Participant #1 said that within her cohort, she felt “closer to some folks . . . than to

others.” She believed that the strength of the relationship influenced her choice of partner in the interview dyad group of the online RT. She explained that her relationship with other members influenced whom she chose to be the interviewer when she was the interviewee. “I think we sort of took easy relationships where you knew you could relate well.” Participant #1 qualified that she did not see the relationship between members as playing a “substantial role other than that we often felt the need to bail each other out.”

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore doctoral students’ experience with online reflecting team (RT) supervision. Semi-structured, qualitative interviews provided the format for data collection. A focus group interview and an interview with the key informant were conducted in an online classroom setting. Two students participated in follow-up individual phone interviews. Synthesis of all interview data resulted in the discovery of several themes that encapsulate doctoral students’ experience with online RT supervision. Issues relating to experiencing supervision at a distance, the technology used in distance supervision, the nature of online interaction and communication, and factors related to supervisee expectations and preferences for supervision emerged frequently and consistently. This chapter identified and described the key findings related to understanding the participants’ experience of online RT supervision. Chapter 5 offers an interpretation of the findings, implications for the field, and recommendations for counselor education and supervision.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore doctoral students' experiences with online reflecting team (RT) supervision. With the rising popularity of distance supervision, it is increasingly important for counselor educators and supervisors to understand how students experience supervision in an online setting. The literature suggests a need for exploring how the Internet affects existing models of supervision (Katz, 2002; Sampson et al., 1997). This study has explored how doctoral students experienced the RT model of supervision in a virtual classroom environment offered through a university's online course management system.

One of the challenges in this study was the difficulty of separating the model of supervision from the method used to deliver the supervision. In this study, participants' experiences of the RT model of supervision appeared to be connected to their feelings about the technology used for RT distance supervision. Participants reported that the online venue contributed to their negativity. As reported in chapter 4, participants often paired their descriptions about the RT model of supervision (in general) with descriptions of using the RT online. The consistent pairing of the two seemed to indicate that they had difficulty separating the method from the model, and vice versa.

Five doctoral students and a course instructor were the informants for this study. Participants shared their experiences in individual phone and online focus group interviews. Emerging from the personal narratives of the participants and the subsequent data analysis were several themes related to doctoral students' experience with using the RT model of supervision online. Participants demonstrated enthusiasm for the convenience associated with online delivery of supervision, but expressed reservations

about the quality of distance supervision. Challenged by the technological aspects of the online environment, the participants questioned the legitimacy of an online supervision venue without video capabilities. The findings suggest experience of technology, prior supervision experiences, and individual supervisee factors influenced the meaning these doctoral students created from their experience of online RT supervision. This chapter explores possible interpretations of the findings of this study. A number of implications stemming from the findings are presented. Practical recommendations for counselor educators and supervisors generated from the study's conclusions are given. The limitations of this study and exploration of the researcher's role in this study conclude the chapter. For consistency, this chapter is organized according to the sub-section titles presented in chapter 4.

Findings and Interpretations

In this section, the findings from this study are discussed in relation to existing studies and the theoretical framework within which this study was designed. Social constructivism or a constructivist theory offers a lens through which to view participants' experiences of online RT supervision. Though described at length in chapter 2, a brief summary of constructivism is included here.

Constructivism. Constructivist assumptions about the nature of knowledge influenced this study. Commonly accepted notions of constructivism maintain that human beings understand and interpret the world in the context of their own subjective experience. Knowledge and understanding is constructed out of the meaning each person assigns to an experience. Accepting that humans subjectively construct knowledge about the world implies that no one person's way of knowing is more right than any other

(Glesne, 2006). Constructivism asserts, “Multiple knowledges can coexist” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 112).

This study began with the assumption that these doctoral students may construct any number of possible meanings from their experiences with online RT supervision. Each construction would be considered valid. Also consistent with a constructivist approach, the method of inquiry in this study was naturalistic, or completed in an environment that closely resembled the environment the participants had experienced online RT supervision. The researcher served as an instrument in collecting the data by observing and interviewing the participants. The data analysis was open to any number of interpretations. The findings were complex, subject to bias, and involved a multitude of variables and perspectives. Results were reported in a descriptive format (see chapter 4), offering diverse perspectives of a co-constructed experience. The intent of this chapter is to reflect upon the context that shaped the constructed perspectives reported in chapter 4.

Theme 1: Supervision at a Distance

The legitimacy of online supervision. Faculty supervision of students’ practicum and internship in counselor education and supervision programs typically occur face to face in a classroom setting (Burt et al. 2011). The doctoral students interviewed for this study participated in both face-to-face and online RT supervision, although their experiences in the online RT sessions were the phenomenon of interest. Instead of meeting in a classroom on the university’s campus, students participated in RT supervision from a distance, typically from their homes or offices.

A major finding from this study relates to a topic of controversy in the literature (Lie, as cited in Patrick & Flanagan, 2008). Is the quality of traditional supervision maintained when offered at a distance? Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) described a similar controversy regarding the distance education movement. Because human processes are emphasized (Lie, as cited in Patrick & Flanagan, 2008), recognizing the potential applications of computer processes (distance technology) might be especially difficult for counselors. The doctoral students in this study recognized both sides of the current debate. Participants described the convenience offered by distance supervision as beneficial, but suggested distance supervision was less legitimate than face-to-face supervision. Themes relating to convenience and legitimacy almost always occurred together in interview transcripts.

Chapter 4 reports that participants in this study enjoyed the convenience of online RT supervision. A savings of time and money were noted benefits of the experience. This perception is in line with what is reported in the literature related to distance education, distance counseling, and supervision at a distance (Trolley & Silliker, 2005; Watson, 2003). One exchange between several members of the focus group demonstrates participants' linking of concepts related to convenience and legitimacy. When prompted to describe her online RT supervision experience, participant #2 said, "Being able to do it in your pajamas sitting in your house was kind of nice." Two other participants offered agreement with the statement. When participants were prompted to explain how "sitting in your house in your pajamas" contributed to their experience of RT supervision, participant #2 explained,

Honestly, it's really hard to take it seriously when you don't go to class or you don't go to supervision. I mean, I like rolled out of bed. I sat down at my computer and didn't feel like I was really in supervision.

The literature offers a number of possible explanations related to participants' concerns about the authenticity of supervision provided at a distance. Abney and Maddux (2004) suggested counselors view distance practices as inconsistent with the humanistic traditions of the field. All participants in this study identified themselves as professional counselors. It might be inferred that distance supervision, like distance learning, confronted participants' beliefs about counseling and education. Literature (Patrick, 2005) supported the notion that distance formats may challenge counselors' concept that counseling and counselor education require face-to-face, real time interaction. The doctoral students in this study may have questioned the legitimacy of online RT supervision in response to their identity as counselors or educators.

The meaning participants construct from online RT supervision is also influenced by the context in which they receive the supervision. In this study, participants experienced the online RT supervision through a Wimba™ live classroom (2010) application of the Blackboard (2010) learning system. A sense of frustration permeated the meaning participants extracted from their experience of the Wimba™ classroom. They perceived multiple challenges in using the technology in the Wimba™ classroom.

Challenges of using technology. The perspectives shared by the participants in this study were affected by their experience of the technology through which the online RT sessions were delivered. Chapter 4 reports a number of participants' frustrations, which included having trouble with entering and staying connected in the live classroom,

difficulty hearing or being heard, and distractions created by the opportunities for interaction available in the online classroom. Participants experienced various technological frustrations, and the frustration seemed to build up. One person referred to “the whole nonsense of calling in, and people can’t hear you, and there’s problems with this and problems with that.” Other findings reported in chapter 4 illustrate the participants’ sense of frustration.

The literature supports the notion of “challenges and frustrations” experienced by counselors and counselor educators when using technology (Hara & Kling, 1999; Jencius & Paez, 2003). Jencius and Paez reviewed survey instruments used to measure factors relating to students’ attitudes toward technology. Factors commonly associated with attitudes toward technology include interest, confidence, anxiety, respect, and perceived usefulness of the technology. Although none of these factors were explicitly measured in this study, it is possible that such aspects as students’ level of interest in online RT supervision, their confidence level, or their anxiety about using technology spurred feelings of frustration.

An article by Hara and Kling (1999) identified student frustration as a fundamental issue and an important problem in distance learning. They identified three sources of student frustration: lack of prompt feedback, ambiguous instructions, and technical problems. Several interpretations of the results of the current study could be explained by the Hara and Kling findings. First, students in this study described confusion in terms of the interaction they had with others. Participants reported a preference for the feedback offered in a traditional classroom over the feedback they

received online. Students found the lack of a physical presence disconcerting and felt it resulted in ambiguity.

As described earlier, participants in this study reported a number of frustrations involving technological problems. Because students reported experiences similar to those of the informants in the Hara and Kling (1999) article, it can be assumed that these students perceived online supervision in much the same way students perceive online distance education. Hara and Kling found that students' frustrations with online distance learning can overwhelm them to the point they dismiss the overall experience of the course. It is possible that participants' sense of frustration overwhelmed their experience of online RT supervision. In other words, the sense of frustration might have provided the context in which they made meaning of the entire online RT supervision experience.

Doctoral students' experience of frustration in this study of online RT supervision could be related to their age and their level of experience with the technology. The literature might describe the doctoral students in this study as "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001). Prensky defined digital immigrants as students who "were not born into the digital world" (p. 1). Digital immigrants are often characterized by a resistance related to computers, video games, and the Internet (Prensky, 2001). As immigrants try to adapt to a new country (or new technology), they keep one foot grounded in what is familiar and often retain an "accent" (Prensky, 2001). In education, immigrants prefer the methods most familiar to them and tend to resist newer methods.

Jencius and Paez's (2003) concepts related to counselors' experience of technology further illuminate participants' perspectives about the online venue. According to Jencius and Paez, counseling students' approach to technology is related to

their previous experiences with technology. The *traditional student* may have proceeded through undergraduate and other graduate educational experiences before standards required technology training, or the exposure they have to technology may be dated. The *returning student*, defined as “technophobic” (p. 116), may be apprehensive about using technology that was not around during previous educational experiences. The returning *counselor*, or the student who returns to the educational setting after a period of employment, may not have maintained current technology awareness and skills.

The participants in this study may have had little or very dated exposure to technology during their education. Doctoral students typically return to school after a period of working in the field. Because the counseling field is not typically technology forward, participants who have worked in the field may not have used much technology. Their relatively low level of exposure to technology during their training and work in the field could explain the challenges and frustrations shared by the participants in this study.

Social constructivism offers interesting interpretations of findings related to participants’ experience of the technology used in online RT supervision. Constructivism explains meaning making as dependent upon context (Haley, 2002). Participants in this study experienced online RT supervision within cultural and historical contexts. The culture of counseling provided a context in which participants questioned the legitimacy of supervision at a distance, and previous experience with technology provided a historical context in which participants viewed online RT supervision.

Participants’ contextualized meaning making of online RT supervision offers a number of implications related to using supervision at a distance. The following section summarizes the implications of this study for counselor education and supervision.

Recommendations resulting from the implications are provided for students and counselor educators.

Implications for counselor educators and supervisors. Wantz et al. (2004) estimated that just under half of Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) approved programs were using distance-learning technology to some extent. Given the speed at which applications of technology grow, it can only be assumed that technology delivered instruction in counselor education programs has increased (Schneider, Wantz, Rice, & Long, 2005). The doctoral students who participated in this study questioned the legitimacy of the supervision accomplished from a distance. Participants' perceptions that distance supervision is less legitimate than face-to-face supervision likely affected how they viewed and experienced the event of supervision. Not trusting or respecting the delivery method certainly leads to biased conclusions regarding its effectiveness and users' satisfaction with the experience. The findings related to participants' experience of supervision at a distance in RT supervision imply that supervisee satisfaction with such supervision needs to be further explored.

The participants in this study had strong feelings about the technology used in the delivery of supervision. In this study, confusion and frustration were evidenced by doctoral students' descriptions of using technology in providing the online RT supervision. Society's enthusiasm for technology's ability to transform higher education might silence some students' expressions of dissatisfaction (Hara & Kling, 1999). In the face of growing support for incorporating technology, students may feel that their frustration about the technology and concerns about legitimacy are not valid. A number

of recommendations pertinent to counselor educators and supervisors using distance supervision methods stems from the implications of this study.

Recommendations related to supervision at a distance. The broader implications of this study relate to distance learning in counselor education and supervision. To what extent are counselor education programs incorporating distance learning practices in the training of counselors? Has incorporating standards governing the application of technology in counseling and in counselor education and supervision had any effect on student perceptions about technology? Should counselor education programs embrace distance supervision? The literature examined for this study and the conclusions from this study support the following recommendations:

- Departments of counselor education should be aware that students' evaluation of online courses or online supervision might be influenced by any of the contextual factors described above, including students' frustration with technology.
- The quality of technology available to implement supervision at a distance may affect students' experience of supervision.

Recommendations for instructors and supervisors using distance supervision methods include the following:

- Instructors need to recognize how the culture of the counseling field affects students' approach to incorporating technology into classrooms and counseling sites.
- Instructors need to legitimize counseling students' apprehension about technology in general.

- Instructors need to explore students' personal history related to the use of technology. Factors of interest might be students' past exposure to and experience with other technologies in education, and students' interest in or anxiety about using distance supervision strategies.
- Instructors offering online supervision should provide clear instructions to students, including training on how to use the technology needed to access the online environment.
- Instructors should solicit frequent feedback about students' experience of the distance and the technology through which they experience online supervision.
- Instructors need to be supported in their own education and training regarding using technology in counselor education and supervision.
- Instructors should provide for students' expected sense of frustration when using distance supervision. They might offer additional training, easily accessible back-up methods for students experiencing technical difficulties, and reinforcement for students' attempt to use non-traditional methods of supervision.

The findings of this study have resulted in a number of recommendations for students experiencing supervision at a distance. Students might find distance supervision comfortable and convenient in terms of time and cost, but they should explore these benefits in light of a number of caveats. Recommendations for students stemming from the findings and from the literature reviewed include the following:

- Students might benefit from examining contextual factors influencing their attitudes about technology. This assessment might include self-reflection on

the history of their use of technology and of the counseling culture in which they experience technology.

- Students should understand that technological frustrations are likely to occur with any application of supervision at a distance.
- A student's experience of distance supervision could depend on the quality (speed, sound) of the technology used in supervision.
- A student's experience of supervision could be dependent on the method used to deliver the session.

Theme 2: Computer-Mediated Interaction

Participants' perspectives about the nature of online interaction are meaningful for understanding their online RT supervision experiences. The participants in this study perceived online distance supervision as isolating and possessing great potential for miscommunication. Participants found interacting and communicating without a physical appearance as challenging.

The findings reported in the related section of chapter 4 demonstrate participants' experiences of "isolation," "disconnect," and "feeling alone." Participants' reports of "disconnect" are similar to the concept of isolation discussed in online and other distance education literature. Problems associated with the practice of online distance education have been attributed in part to students' feelings of isolation (R. M. Bernard et al., 2000).

Participants' stories also reflected a sense of "disconnect" in their experience of computer-mediated communication. Participants expressed a desire to connect to each other beyond the text-based and verbal interaction present in the online RT sessions. The doctoral students in this study described online RT supervision as "less interactive." The

findings in chapter 4 demonstrate the way in which participants contrasted the online experience from their face-to-face experience with the RT. Participants agreed receiving feedback through the text box “was very different than if you’re sitting in a room.”

While participants recognized the text box feature as an additional way for students to communicate online, they did not view the communication as particularly interactive. In this study, students’ sense of “isolation” and “disconnect” could be related to interactions they perceived as different and deficient.

Challenges connecting to and interacting with others without a physical presence emerged as significant themes in this study. In the online delivered RT sessions, students participated from a distance without a video connection. Students do not see each other or their instructor at any point. Participants found the absence of physical appearance meaningful to their experience of supervision. The students in this study described this component of their program as uncomfortable. Students shared the perspective that the absence of body language and physical cues limited their sense of the supervision process. Chapter 4 reports findings related to this theme. According to one participant,

When you’re sitting in a room, live, with one another, everything is out in the open . . . you could kick people under the table or something . . . Everything is out in the open. That’s not the case when you’re online.

Participants in this study had a clear preference for face-to-face communication where “we can see body language and non-verbal [behavior].” The absence of physical cues led to significant confusion in knowing how to interact online. Chapter 4 reports the findings that exemplify the confusion experienced by students. Participants shared a sense that the behavioral cues present in face-to-face supervision helped them know when

to take their turn or how to participate without interrupting another person. Students reported, “Online we trip over each other. You never know when someone is going to talk.” The findings suggest participants viewed the absence of a physical presence as a major contributor to their shared sense of confusion and chaos.

The absence of physical appearance also affected students’ experience of the reflecting process. Students perceived visual information as necessary to understanding the reflections offered during sessions. Participants agreed that online “you can’t look at your colleagues when they’re wondering about the case that you are presenting, and without seeing the expressions on their faces, you . . . had no idea what they were thinking.” Participants’ need for a visual appearance was also evidenced in their repeated suggestions to incorporate video capabilities into online RT supervision.

This issue with lack of physical appearance has been identified in the literature (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996; Panos, 2005). McIsaac and Gunawardena (1996) reported the lack of communication cues, such as gestures and facial expressions, as a major disadvantage in online (non-video) communication. Others recognize the ability to “see” others as an important component in online communication (Panos, 2005). Panos assessed the impact of adding videoconferencing technology to the distance supervision of international practicum students. When videoconferencing was introduced, approximately 82% of practicum students reported a decreased sense of isolation.

In a departure from existing research in online counselor supervision, this study focused on a particular supervision model, the reflecting team. Seeing and being seen are important concepts in the RT process. Traditional, face-to-face RT model supervision situates the supervisee so that he or she cannot make direct eye contact with the reflecting

team. As described in chapter 2, this arrangement is intended to disconnect the supervisee from the team in order to enhance the supervisee's sense of freedom and decrease fear of judgment. Although this study did not ask participants to compare and contrast their experience of "not seeing" each other in person with "not seeing" each other online, findings suggest that participants experienced not seeing online more negatively than not seeing face to face.

One explanation for this finding could be that while students did not look directly at each other in face-to-face RT supervision, they experienced a sense of the others' being physically absent online. Participants' feelings of isolation, confusion, and frustration may also be attributed to the absence of physical presence.

Another tentative interpretation from these research findings could be that supervisee anxiety influenced the level of satisfaction with online RT supervision. Supervisees normally feel some amount of anxiety, especially graduate students in training (Borders & Leddick, 1987; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Anxiety in supervision becomes problematic when it inhibits the learning process, supervisee performance, and interactions with the supervisor (J. M. Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Ellis & Douce, 1994). Ambiguity is the most prominent source of anxiety in supervisees (J. M. Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). In this study participants reported ambiguity related to the absence of physical appearance and the expectations of others.

An intolerance for ambiguity may be another factor related to participants' perceptions that online RT supervision is confusing. Participants recalled a number of experiences when they felt ambiguity concerning what "others might be thinking" or "projecting onto me." The findings in chapter 4 describe students' concerns about their

performance. A sense of being evaluated or judged appeared to result from the online interactions with other students and the instructor. Participants shared the perspective that observations from other students feel evaluative. Most participants shared that they felt vulnerable due to the lack of physical appearance of their peers. They preferred to be aware of others' non-verbal reactions, whether the reactions felt supportive or evaluative.

Most participants reported that online feedback (which was limited to verbal and text) was more ambiguous than feedback offered where they could observe physical appearance. Participants reported a sense of comfort in being able to check in with peers while reflecting or sharing feedback in person. In person, they "knew what others were thinking" because they "could see group members exchanging eye contact," or they "could pass notes" or, more subtly, "kick people under the table." Most participants shared a sense of vulnerability associated with not being able to see others.

In contrast, the absence of physical appearance relieved some participants' fears of being judged, as some reported, "It was easier to come out of my shell" when "not looking at people." The literature about online behavior is consistent with the phenomenon the key informant described as the "disinhibiting effect" of sitting in front of a computer monitor (Suler, 2004). Some participants in this study perceived the online environment as allowing students to "take down their guard a little bit."

Some of the literature (Suler, 2004) supports the existence of disinhibition (or inhibition) as reported by the participants in this study. According to Suler, the sense of online inhibition or disinhibition varies with individuals and also depends on the person and the situation. Suler identified a number of factors that contribute to the concept he

calls “self-boundary.” Among these factors (reported in chapter 2), “invisibility” and “minimizing authority” relate specifically to the findings of this study.

Suler (2004) proposed that one’s sense of personal boundaries is altered online. This is in part due to an “invisibility” that “gives people the courage to go places and do things that they otherwise wouldn’t.” He suggested that invisibility amplifies disinhibition, even in interactions between persons known to each other. In online RT supervision, students identified themselves by name, but Suler suggested physical invisibility also results in disinhibition.

The atmosphere of the online environment contributes to minimizing authority (Suler, 2004). According to Suler, everyone on the Internet has an equal opportunity to voice himself or herself, regardless of status. A perspective offered by the key informant echoes this sentiment: “Everyone’s input matters; all the reflections are weighted the same.” The key informant explained that the online RT method “frees people” from the judgment they might perceive from those listening to reflections. In this study, the open, accommodating nature of the online setting could have amplified the non-hierarchical stance of the RT model of supervision.

This study’s findings concerning computer-mediated interaction suggest that the students in this study experienced online RT supervision as isolating and confusing. Participants expressed a preference for interaction and communication in which non-verbal behaviors are physically visible. The findings of this study are consistent with literature in the communications field suggesting that the online atmosphere changes how people relate to and communicate with others.

Constructivist theory contends that learning is an interactive process. Interpersonal perceptions, communications, and relationships with others affect personal knowledge construction (Richardson & Swan, 2001). Baggerly (2002) suggested that interactive technology (such as that used in distance supervision) supports the co-construction of knowledge through such interaction. Participants in this study found online RT supervision to lack the interaction and connectedness they prefer in a supervision experience. While students successfully negotiated interactions with the instructor and among themselves during online RT supervision, they perceived face-to-face interaction and communication as more meaningful.

Implications for counselor education and supervision. Findings related to social connectedness have important implications for supervising doctoral students at a distance. These findings imply that the doctoral students in this study did not feel as connected to each other online as they preferred. The findings also suggest these students experienced challenges in relating to and interacting with others without a physical appearance. Counselor educators should recognize the implications of this study when supervising students. Due to the social nature of learning, it is important to understand how students/supervisees experience physical presence, the nuances of online communication, and factors involved in relating and interacting online. The results of this study suggest that students who feel isolated may not experience the interaction that promotes a co-construction of meaning. From these implications stem a number of recommendations specific to counselor educators and supervisors using distance supervision.

Recommendations related to computer-mediated interaction. Participants in this study described computer-mediated interaction as isolating and computer-mediated communication as confusing. They frequently suggested that adding a video component to the online RT supervision experience might assuage their concerns about feeling distracted, disconnected, and/or invisible. The literature classifies videoconferencing as “rich” in terms of its ability to provide students with physical feedback—that is, body language cues (Newberry, 2001). It appears that students’ sense of isolation can be alleviated with the incorporation of video technology (Panos, 2005). The students in this study suggested that seeing each other (in person or by video) may provide not only a non-verbal connection, but also a visual unit on which they could focus.

Counselor education and supervision programs should recognize the limitations of computer-mediated interaction. While research demonstrates that computer-mediated interactions imitate face-to-face interaction in a number of ways, the findings in this study suggest a number of caveats to interacting and communicating online. The following are recommendations for instructors and students using computer-mediated methods of supervision gleaned from the findings from this study and from the review of related literature:

- Counselor educators and supervisors might incorporate a video component into similar online supervision experiences.
- Instructors should frequently assess students’ sense of connection or isolation during online supervision.
- Instructors should try to create an online sense of community to assist students with feeling present and connected.

- Instructors should consider establishing relationships among RT members in a face-to-face setting before entering the online setting.
- Instructors should offer students information regarding the nature of computer-mediated interaction and should tell them how to connect and relate in an online environment. This recommendation is especially important for instructors working with students with little knowledge or conception of being online.
- Instructors should describe and model computer-mediated interactions that promote the use of familiar face-to-face interaction strategies. Showing students how to use technology for emotional expression might be useful (for example, emoticons, online gestures, etc.).
- Instructors must compensate for the lack visual social cues by substituting or increasing verbal or text-based interaction.
- Instructors should explore how students' anxiety issues in online supervision compare to anxiety issues in face-to-face supervision.
- Instructors and students should discuss how anxiety and evaluative components in supervision present themselves in online supervisory relationships.

Theme 3: Learning Styles and Expectations for Supervision

This theme relates to the influence of supervisee learning styles and expectations in the RT model of supervision. Results from this study found that participants preferred interactive learning and perceived a mismatch between the RT model and supervisee learning preferences. Secondary themes included considerations for how these doctoral

students might use the online RT with their own supervisees. Learning style and relationship issues are explored as important to making meaning from an online RT supervision experience.

Participants in this study compared their perception of the RT model and online method with more traditional approaches to counselor supervision. A shared perspective emerged from this study: using the RT model was challenging, and using the model online was “like learning a different language.” Findings related to participants’ preferences for “more interactive” learning are discussed.

Learning style. Participants in this study shared the perception that the RT model of supervision did not match their preferred style of learning or supervision, noting that, whether in person or online, “it is very easy to become disconnected . . . because you’re not engaging other people.” Findings show participants experiencing a conflict between the RT method of supervision and their preferred learning or supervision style. As reported in chapter 4, participants described the RT model (both in person and online) as “passive,” “mellow,” “laid back,” “restricting,” and “non interactive.” Participants described their preferred learning style as “direct,” “collaborative,” having “quality dialogue,” and resulting in “feedback on a course of action.”

Participants’ frustration with the “restrictive” structure of the RT model was apparent in the findings of this study. This was evidenced in the frustration participants expressed when they recalled “having to wait” until the appropriate phase of the RT process to provide feedback. Participants shared the frustration of withholding their reflections “because that was the process.” Their frustration appeared to be with the linearity of the RT model. As described in chapter 2, one of the hallmark features of the

RT model used in counseling and supervision is the way the structure “allows space” for the participants to reflect. Students in this study were frustrated with a designated time for reflection. They seemed to want to be able to offer reflections as they emerged.

Curry’s (1983) “onion model” is often used to understand students’ learning styles. Curry conceptualized learning and cognitive styles as a three-layered onion, with each of the layers of the onion representing a particular construct related to learning style. The outermost layer represents instructional format; the middle layer, cognitive processing style; and the inner layer, personality elements of the learner.

Instructional formats influence the students’ preferences for how they interact with and respond to the learning environment (Beyth-Marom, Saporta, & Caspi, 2005). The first two themes that emerged from the findings in this study speak to the importance of instructional format in participants’ experience of online RT supervision. Participants preferred face-to-face supervision in which participation was unrestricted.

According to D. Kolb (1984), there are four general cognitive styles of learners: converger, diverger, assimilator, and accommodator. The convergent learning style favors active experimentation and abstract conceptualization. Convergent learners excel at decision-making, problem solving, and practical applications of theories (Liu & Ginther, 1999). Divergent learning styles emphasize concrete experience and observation. Divergers excel at recognizing different perspectives. The assimilator learning style depends upon abstract concepts and ideas. Assimilators use inductive, rather than deductive reasoning. The accommodative learning style depends on active experimentation and concrete experience. Accommodating learners tend to be open to new opportunities and flexible in adapting themselves to new situations (D. Kolb, 1984).

While this study did not assess students' learning styles and preferences, examining the link between learning style and preference for supervision method presents options for future research.

Gee (1990) compared in-class students' learning style to distance learners' style. The results of this study showed differences between the preferred learning styles of in-class students and distance students. Students who were successful distance learners preferred an independent learning environment. Students who were more successful in face-to-face settings preferred collaborative learning. Whereas participants' learning styles were not assessed in this study, the different preferences described in the learning style literature might explain participants' experiences with online RT supervision. Although all students successfully completed the supervision course, they reported that they prefer the face-to-face venue.

Supervising others. Participants in this study communicated their feelings related to how they might use online RT supervision to supervise others. All student participants and the key informant described developmental considerations for using the online RT supervision method in the supervision of others. Student participants' explained online RT supervision as "difficult" for advanced students and expected it to be more difficult for master's level counselors in training. The key informant shared the perspective that online RT supervision requires higher-level skills.

Developmental approaches to supervision focus on how supervisees progress through a number of stages as they gain experience (J. M. Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). While there are a number of developmental models, most assume that supervisees at different stages have different needs and require different approaches. Several

developmental approaches were summarized in chapter 2. One model that may help in explaining the findings of this study is the integrated developmental model (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998).

The integrated developmental model (IDM) of counselor supervision describes supervisees across three levels, each having certain characteristics and related supervision needs. Level one supervisees are inexperienced, anxious, and, therefore, dependent on structure and direction from the supervisor. At level two, supervisees begin moving away from a dependence on the supervisor toward more autonomy. At this level, supervision needs to be more flexible to support supervisees' fluctuating confidence. Supervisees are better able to tolerate feedback. At level three, supervisees are confident; they need less structure and direct feedback from a supervisor as they become more self-reflective. Supervisee needs at this stage are often met in collaboration with others.

The participants in this study are advanced doctoral students. They described the online RT supervision model as "difficult." Their appraisal seemed based on their conjectures that "new supervisees" might have difficulty paying attention during the experience and difficulty using the method in a novel environment. The key informant felt that "a certain level of insight and awareness not typically demonstrated by less experienced supervisees" was necessary to appreciate the online RT supervision experience. She also found the RT model helpful for less experienced supervisees who struggle with hearing feedback.

The experience level of the participants in this study was not examined. It might be assumed that participants' experience ranged from very little to extensive, dependent on the number of years they had worked and were supervised in the field before entering

their graduate work. Those with less experience, while at an advanced education level, could be conceptualized as Level 1 supervisees. The number of participant statements describing frustration with the ambiguity and the need for more direct dialogue supports this conclusion. Other participants with more extensive experience described an appreciation for the multiple perspectives offered through the online RT experience.

Relationships. Participants' relationships with others were significant in their experience of online RT supervision. Participants indicated that "knowing each other" played a role in how they interacted online. The participants in this study were part of the same doctoral cohort. These students entered the doctoral program at the same time and proceed through the program together. From a cohort community, students derive feelings of support and protection (Basom & Yerkes, 2001; Teitel, 1997) and a sense of shared purpose (Teitel, 1997). Participants suggested forming relationships with fellow supervisees was important to the supervision experience both online and in person.

Improved academic knowledge, multicultural awareness, and job readiness (Potthoff, Dinsmore, & Moore, 2001) are reported strengths of cohort models in graduate education. Participants in this study seemed to benefit from the "multiple perspectives" offered through online RT supervision and appeared to use their relationships with each other to encourage productive participation in the online RT sessions.

Several of the disadvantages of cohort models may also relate to this study. The literature has compared the relationship issues present in cohort models to the relationship difficulties of dysfunctional families (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). When personality or relationship issues present in a cohort, the issues may influence the members throughout the life of the cohort. Cohort models can also result in

the formation of cliques or sub groupings that are detrimental to the group's progress. Cohort models can minimize students' individual needs and contributions. It is possible that any of the reported advantages or disadvantages of cohort models could have affected the outcome of this study.

Some research in cohort models (Echterling et al., 2002) suggests that they may be particularly effective for graduate students in the helping professions. Echterling et al. suggested the many opportunities to collaborate and communicate within a cohort contribute to the collaboration and communication skills required to be an effective counselor. Participants in this study expressed that these skills were important to them as professional counselors and supervisors. Concerning their online RT supervision experience, participants viewed the opportunities for interaction (and communication and collaboration) as insufficient.

A constructivist lens views opportunities for interaction, communication, and collaboration as central to learning. Participants in this study learned through their shared experience of online RT supervision sessions. All participants successfully completed the course. They constructed knowledge from their social interactions with others online. Their shared knowledge indicates that previous relationships among participants are important to the experience of online RT supervision. In this way, students' relationships within the cohort provided the context in which to interpret participants' online RT supervision experience.

Supervisee learning styles and preferences, considerations for supervising others, and relationship issues are important factors in how the participants in this study experienced online RT supervision. Participants reported a preference for face-to-face

interactions and for increased opportunities to interact. Participants felt that knowing each other influenced their interaction in online RT supervision sessions. Some students felt inhibited by dynamics present in the cohort; others felt encouraged and supported. These findings offer a number of implications related to interactivity, learning style, and relationships related to counselor education in general and to online RT supervision specifically.

Implications related to learning styles and expectations for supervision. The findings of this study imply that students' preferred learning styles are important considerations for online educators and supervisors. A student's understanding of the RT model, as well as its intention and purpose, is also important to highlight. References to collaboration, the active construction of knowledge, open-ended problem solving, generating many possibilities, and perspectives were found in participants' descriptions of online RT supervision. The results of this study raise the question whether or not the online RT supervision experience offers sufficient opportunities for interaction and collaboration for students to co-construct knowledge.

Recommendations for counselor education and supervision. The following recommendations are offered for theme 3 in light of the literature related to, and the conclusions supported by, this study:

- Supervisors should consider introducing master's level students to RT concepts early in their training and supervision.
- Instructors should frequently assess students understanding of the RT concept, procedures, and process of online RT supervision.

- Instructors and students should engage in conversation that helps students prepare cognitively attend to and process the team's reflections (Paré, 1999).
- To facilitate greater interaction during the RT, instructors might consider adapting the phases of the model to include a period for the team members to ask questions, seek clarification from other team members, or respond spontaneously.
- Instructors should develop scaffolding to facilitate the learning process and to help students adjust to new technology and non-traditional applications of counselor supervision.
- Counselor educators might investigate how various instructional formats influence students' interactions with and responses to the online learning environment.
- Counselor education programs and instructors should create opportunities for cohorts to build collaborative working relationships prior to online work.
- Instructors should focus on creating a community of learners (Palloff & Pratt, 1999) to enhance the connection among students, and between students and the instructor.
- Counselor education programs should offer online "space" where students can converse outside of class and experience informal, but meaningful, connections online.
- Instructors might consider assessing learning style, supervision preference, and level of supervisee development prior to implementing online RT supervision.

Conclusions

The participants in this study successfully completed an online supervision experience using the RT model of supervision. In online and phone interviews, participants processed and made meaning from their experiences. A constructivist interpretation of this study's findings in light of the existing literature relating to online RT supervision offers several broad conclusions:

- The doctoral students in this study questioned the quality and legitimacy of supervision delivered through an online venue. This viewpoint speaks to the problems identified earlier in this paper regarding the increasing prevalence of online education, counseling, and supervision.
- Meaning making of online RT supervision is influenced by historical and cultural factors. This conclusion is particularly important in light of the counseling professions' continued debate over distance learning methodologies and the idea that many students in counseling programs may be "technological immigrants."
- A sense of frustration resonated with the doctoral students in this study with regard to assimilating novel models and methods of supervision into their existing concept of counselor supervision. The participants in this study described a preference for traditional models of supervision delivered through traditional methods.
- Participants' expectations regarding the delivery methods and the RT were inconsistent with self-identified learning styles.

A conclusion from the constructivist perspective might be that participants' experience with online RT supervision is dependent upon historical, educational, and cultural context. The participants in this study made meaning of an online RT supervision based on more familiar ways of understanding supervision. Overall, participants in this study described online RT supervision as unfamiliar. Unfamiliarity with the supervision model and method may have contributed to questions about the legitimacy and the quality of the online RT supervision experience. The familiar (face-to-face supervision) was preferred over the unfamiliar online venue. Participants described communicating and relating online as confusing and frustrating when compared to the familiarity of face-to-face interaction. The doctoral students in this study preferred familiar supervision methods for learning, receiving supervision, and supervising others.

Participants' perceived the online RT supervision experience as incongruent with their expectations and preferences related to supervision. In this study, participants' perspectives indicated the online RT supervision experience challenged more familiar ways of supervision, learning, and interaction. Each of the conclusions from this study relate to an adjustment from the more familiar to the less familiar. Participants in this study described various experiences that challenged their pre-existing assumptions about counselor supervision. They told their story in their own words. Participants in this study described how they confronted the new ways of understanding associated with online RT supervision. Novel methods (online delivery) and models (RT) challenged participants to sit in ambiguity as they examined their thinking about how supervision is

“supposed to be.” Ambiguity is typically uncomfortable, but important to reaching self-knowledge and the construction of alternative paradigms (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Tentative conclusions from this study suggest online RT supervision may challenge traditional paradigms about the nature of supervision. Table 1 illustrates the contrast between traditional and alternative ways of knowing related to the online RT supervision experience. Responses representative of participants’ experience of the delivery method, RT model, and format for communicating are illustrated.

Table 1

Paradigm Shift

Experience	Traditional Supervision Paradigm	Alternative Supervision Paradigm	Illustration of Participants’ Experience
Delivery Method	Face to Face	Other than Face to Face	“[I] didn’t feel like I was really in supervision”
Supervision Model	Traditional	Constructive-Reflecting Team	“Like learning a different language.”
Processing of Feedback	Through dialogue	Self-Reflection	“Frustrating . . . you’re not engaging other people.”
Nature of Communication	Verbal & Non verbal observation	Verbal without visual	“. . . without seeing the expressions on their faces . . . [I] had no idea what they were thinking.”
Presence	Physical	Virtual	“driving your car down the highway with nobody there.”

Limitations

Qualitative, online interviewing methods were used to investigate doctoral students' experience with online RT supervision. The intent of this inquiry was to describe the nature of an online, RT supervision experience. Five doctoral students and one instructor provided the data for analysis in this study. Most students were Caucasian and in their 30s. Most participants were female. All participants were at or near the end of their doctoral program in counselor education and supervision and had experienced at least one semester of online supervision. A larger or different sample of participants might have resulted in the emergence of themes undisclosed by this small group of participants.

The cohort model for doctoral study may also have been a limiting factor in this study. The participants in this study all attended the same doctoral program where they proceeded through their coursework as a cohort. Because of the influence of groupthink, participants in this study may have felt pressure to share the majority opinion expressed. Because the individual interviews were completed later than the focus group interview, the groupthink mentality may have affected the individual interviews as well.

The course instructor, researcher, and participants are members of the same university community. At the time of the study, participants may have been conscious that their former course instructor, the current program director, would recognize their opinions. The participants' previous relationship with the course instructor and/or the researcher may have affected the results of this study. Although a number of precautions were taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants, including doctoral students

and instructors from other counselor education programs might have altered some or all of the findings in this study.

The method of sampling could be a limitation to the study. All members of a doctoral cohort who were supervised using the online RT method were invited to participate in this study. Of the seven members of the cohort, five self-selected to participate in a focus group interview. Two individuals from the focus group agreed to provide individual interviews. Participant interest (or reluctance) with regard to involvement in the study could have influenced the results.

Researcher bias and subjectivity are “commonly understood as inevitable and important” by most qualitative researchers (Mehra, 2002). Because this researcher was directly involved in every stage of the research process, a critical examination of the “self of the researcher” was employed throughout every stage as well. The researcher’s presence in data collection may have influenced how the participants interacted in the focus group, what information they decided to share, how they reacted to their assumptions about both research and researcher, or how they experienced researcher comments or behaviors during any of the interviews (Patton, 2002).

A final limitation of this study relates to the online method used for data collection. Though no significant disruptions or problems were experienced during data collection, face-to-face interviews might have yielded information that could have led to different findings in this study. Several of the findings from this study have led to important considerations regarding the limitations of this research. This study found that participants experienced isolation and frustration during online RT supervision. Did participants experience similar isolation and frustration during the online focus group

interview? If so, how may the context of the interview have influenced participants' words or behaviors? The doctoral students in this study experienced online RT supervision as less legitimate and less interactive than face-to-face supervision. How may participants' views about online interaction have influenced how they participated in the online focus group? This study found that students considered communication online as incomplete and confusing. How might a video component have affected the way participants interacted in the focus group interview? Did the absence of any non-verbal cues or body language contribute to my misunderstanding any part of participants' experience of online RT supervision? Might participants have questioned online data collection methods similar to the way they questioned the legitimacy of online supervision methods? If so, how might their responses been different with more traditional approaches to the research?

Because of the limitations inherent in qualitative approaches, this study employed a number of safeguards to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Qualitative researchers often use more than one method of data collection to make the data "richer" and "more believable" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36). In order to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study, data were gathered from three different types of interviews. The focus group, individual interviews, and key informant interview were all helpful in triangulating or strengthening the data. Although a number of themes appeared repeatedly in the initial focus group interview, two individual interviews and an interview with a key informant contributed to the confidence concerning data saturation.

Throughout this study, the researcher remained conscious of her preconceived notions about the research. Prior to conducting the focus group interview, reservations

and expectations about the data to be collected were explored. During the interviews, the researcher kept notes on the content of each interview, participant characteristics, and her feelings and impressions as they occurred. Journaling exercises were completed before and after each interview. Peer debriefing further ensured that the analysis and interpretations of the study were not unduly influenced by researcher bias, improving the overall consistency and reliability of the study.

Speculations

The findings and conclusions of this study generate a number of additional speculations related to doctoral students' experience of online RT supervision. The findings suggest further inquiries about the particular sample of doctoral students; for instance, what if the students had not have been in a cohort program of study? How might the dynamics or personality of a cohort affect the information shared or not shared in the focus group? What if a different cohort of the same program had been interviewed? How might the results differ across different instructors, or if an off site course instructor had supervised these students?

Additional speculations relate to the methods used for data collection. For instance, how did the online venue affect data collection? How might the results have differed if traditional, face-to-face focus groups were used to collect the data? Would collecting data through email or other asynchronous method have yielded different results?

Researcher Reflections

No other family of modern theories asks its adherents to maintain such a degree of self-examining openness, to so painstakingly tolerate and harvest (rather than

eliminate) ambiguity, or to so thoroughly question both the answers and the questions by which they inquire. (Mahoney, 2003, p. 207)

This qualitative inquiry involved a daily reexamination of what this researcher knew (or thought she knew) about counselor supervision. Mahoney's (2003) description of postmodern supervision captures the methodical reevaluation and deliberation experienced throughout the research process. This section documents the researcher's reflections and concluding impressions, informed by her experience of the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the qualitative data used in this study. For ease of understanding, this section is reported in the first person.

I found it exciting to conduct research through an online venue. I experienced some anxiety related to the "what if's" of conducting a focus group online. The anxiety was tempered by familiarity with the Wimba™ classroom (2010) that I had used in supervision and in the collection of these data. Overall, I was impressed by the easy flow of conversation in the online interviews and by the technological applications that allowed me to use a PowerPoint® presentation, screen capture tools, and a text box feature during this investigation.

On the other hand, I shared the sense of frustration reported by the participants in this study. My notes refer to some disappointments I experienced when a participant's online connection failed and she had to connect to the online focus group by phone. In two brief instances, I could not hear the key informant's voice through my headphones. The sense of frustration was only temporary because I was simultaneously impressed with how quickly the issue was corrected after I used the text box to inform him of the problem.

Initially, in addition to frustration, I experienced disappointment. Upon conclusion of the focus group, I detected a general negativity from the participants regarding their experience of online RT supervision. I had to work hard to adjust my preconception that the online RT experience would be an enjoyable, useful, and effective form of counselor supervision. In immersing myself in the data, I had to allow myself to hear what the participants were saying. It was important for me to hear their personal stories of their experience in their context, not in the context of my own experience. My notes and journaling entries were important in reflecting on my biases and assumptions. Peer and committee member debriefings were extremely valuable for staying true to the data.

I also had to bracket the energy I gleaned from the key informant interview. I was able to relate to some of the experiences she shared about her online RT supervision experience. It was equally important for me to set aside any bias related to our shared perceptions. Again, discussions with colleagues and committee members assisted me in this pursuit.

I used many strategies to assess the relative importance of the different themes emerging from this study. The assembling, dissecting, and reassembling of themes and categories took on a life of its own and resulted in countless hours and reams of paper. Eventually I began the more difficult task of interpreting my findings. In this phase I asked myself what major lessons could be learned from the way participants construct meaning from online RT supervision experiences. I realize now that I was trying to make this dissertation about the RT model of supervision. In fact, participants' experience of the (online) RT model was defined by their experience of the online venue.

The previous section discussed the major findings of this study in relation to the literature and the constructivist theory within which the study was framed. The doctoral students in this study characterized their general experience of online RT supervision as “frustrating.” As described in the section titled “Theme 1: Supervision at a Distance,” participants experienced frustration with the technology and physical distance through which online RT supervision was delivered. The section titled “Theme 2: Computer-Mediated Interaction” reports participants’ sense of frustration, which was created by the isolation and invisibility experienced in the online classroom environment. Related to the third major finding, a mismatch between students’ preferred learning styles and the learning experience of online RT supervision was at least partially responsible for participants’ frustration. In conclusion, the doctoral students who participated in this study successfully completed the online RT supervision experience, the course, and their internships. Though it seems online RT supervision could potentially be effective, the students in this study preferred face-to-face supervision. Participants’ ages, history of computer use, and preferred learning and supervision style were possible mitigating factors.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate: Student Form

Invitation to Participate

To: (student email address) (*Sent via email to potential participants*)

Dear Doctoral Student:

You have recently participated in online supervision of your Practicum and/or Internship experiences in the ExCES program. As part of your experience, you participated in online supervision sessions that included the reflecting team model of supervision. This student researcher is studying doctoral students' experience with using the reflecting team model of supervision online. I plan to use a **one-time, online focus group** and **one online individual interview** to collect data about using the reflecting team online. I am requesting that you consider participating in this inquiry, as you are particularly well positioned to assist me in exploring this application of counselor supervision that has not yet been investigated. If you elect to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

- (1) Read and review the *Consent to Participate* form attached to this email.
- (2) Log into a Wimba Classroom™ similar to the one you used for your supervision course to participate in a one-time, online focus group with your cohort members and the student researcher. (Focus group is expected to last 60-90 minutes.)
- (3) Indicate your agreement to keep confidential the identity of the other participants, and any information shared in the focus group proceedings.
- (4) Participate in a one-time, online, individual interview (30 minutes) with the student researcher on an agreed-upon day/time.

If you think you may be interested, please respond to the student researcher as indicated at the bottom of the *Consent to Participate* form attached. Please respond within 5 business days. You may also email questions and concerns to jodis110@gmail.com or contact me by phone at 724-813-2765.

Thank You,

Jodi Sindlinger, Student Researcher

Jodis110@gmail.com or 724-813-2765

APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate: Student Form



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY - STUDENT

TITLE: A Study of an Online Reflecting Team Supervision Experience: Student and Instructor Perspectives

INVESTIGATOR: David L. Delmonico, PhD
School of Education
Office Phone: 412-396-4032
Email: Delmonico@duq.edu

Student Co-Investigator: Jodi L. Sindlinger, MA
Doctoral Candidate
Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Program
539 Superior Street
Grove City, PA 16127
Cell Phone: 724-813-2765
Email: jodis110@gmail.com

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate your experience with using the reflecting team (RT) model of supervision in an online environment. A one time focus group of 3-16 people will be conducted in an online classroom. The focus group will last approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Examples of questions you may be asked to discuss include: How do you see online RT supervision differing from other forms of supervision? If you were going to use online RT supervision as a supervisor in the future, what might be important to you?

The focus group interview will be recorded and transcribed. Identifiers of focus group participants and any other person they may discuss will be deleted from the transcript. In addition, you will be asked to participate in a follow up, online, individual interview. The individual interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The individual interviews will also take place in the online classroom and be recorded and transcribed. Identifiers will be omitted as described above. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

Revised: October, 2009

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APPENDIX C

-INSERT PDF Power Point

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Guide-**Focus Group**

Semi-Structured Interview Guide-**Focus Group**

I. Introduction

A. Greeting: Thank you for consenting to participate in this study.

B. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this investigation is to explore Doctoral students' experience with using the reflecting team (RT) model of supervision online as part of the supervision they received for their practicum and internship.

C. Special Concerns: Your former course instructor/current program director will not have access to this online classroom or to the interview data obtained in focus group interview. So that others, including the program director, will not know who participated in the study and who did not, you are reminded to keep all information, including the identity of other participants, confidential. You are discouraged from sharing experiences that may directly identify yourself or others. You are encouraged to discuss the *process* of online reflecting teams, versus particular examples from your previous class. This is NOT an evaluation of your previous supervision course, or of any part of your doctoral program.

Your former course instructor will not have access to the original data. The student researcher will email the focus group transcript to you so that you have the opportunity to revise or remove any material that you believe might identify you to the chair and other members of the dissertation committee. You will be asked to read and revise the transcript and email the changes back to the student researcher who will edit the changes into the final, de-identified transcript.

Please indicate that you agree to uphold confidentiality by checking the "yes" box in the online classroom application. [The student researcher will then confirm those

participants who agreed, and those who indicated that they cannot keep others identity confidential will be excused from the study.]

D. Ground Rules:

1. You do not need to use the raise your hand feature.
2. When another participant is speaking, please wait until they have finished before pressing your talk button.
3. You may choose to participate either verbally or by using the text box feature.
4. Please do not share specifics from your course, but instead your experience with using the Reflecting model of supervision online.
5. If you experience technical difficulties, use the phone number provided to access the classroom by phone.
6. Questions/concerns

II. Sample Interview Questions

1. How do you see online RT supervision differing from other forms of supervision?
2. If you were going to use online RT supervision as a supervisor in the future, what might be important to you?
3. What about the experience of being online for the reflecting team supervision differs from the experience of being face to face for the reflecting team?
4. An item you mentioned was _____. Can you tell me more about how you experienced _____ in the online RT process?
5. An area you mentioned was _____. What makes _____ so central/so important to experiencing the RT process online?

(Additional questions may be developed keeping in mind that the focus is on the online RT process, and not the specific experience of the participant's supervision experience with the course.)

III. Wrap Up: Thank you for your participation in this study.

APPENDIX E

Semi-Structured Interview Guide-**Individual Interview**

Semi-Structured Interview Guide-**Individual Interview**

I. Introduction

A. Greeting: Thank you for your continued participation in this study.

B. Purpose of the Study: As you know, the purpose of this investigation is to explore doctoral students' experience with using the reflecting team (RT) model of supervision online as part of the supervision they received for their practicum and internship.

C. Special Concerns: Your former course instructor/current program director will not have access to this online classroom or to the interview data obtained in focus group interview. So that others, including the program director, will not know who participated in the study and who did not, you are reminded to keep all information, including the identity of other participants, confidential. You are discouraged from sharing experiences that may directly identify yourself or others. You are encouraged to discuss the *process* of online reflecting teams, versus particular examples from your previous class. This is NOT an evaluation of your previous supervision course, or of any part of your doctoral program.

Your former course instructor will not have access to the original data. The student researcher will email the interview transcript to you so that you have the opportunity to revise or remove any material that you believe might identify you to the members of the dissertation committee. You will be asked to read and revise the transcript and email the changes back to the student researcher who will edit the changes into the final, de-identified transcript.

II. Sample Interview Questions

1. Is there anything you needed to add or clarify from the focus group interview regarding the information you shared about the online reflecting team process?
2. What about the experience of the online RT stands out for you?
3. An item you mentioned was _____. Can you tell me more about how you experienced _____ in the online RT process?
4. An area you mentioned was _____. What makes _____ so central/so important to experiencing the RT process online?

(Additional questions may be developed keeping in mind that the focus is on the online RT process, and not the specific experience of the participant's supervision experience with the course.)

III. Wrap Up: Thank you for your participation in this study.

APPENDIX F

Invitation to Participate: Key Informant



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

Invitation to Participate-KEY INFORMANT

To: Instructor (Sent via email to potential key informant)

Dear Dr. Delmonico:

As you know, I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision Program. Throughout the doctoral program, I have studied various aspects of counselor supervision. I am particularly interested in online supervision methods, specifically, the reflecting team (RT) method you used online with your doctoral counselor education students. I am requesting that you consider participating in this inquiry, as you are particularly well informed about the online RT process. To access your unique perspective on students' experience with online RT supervision, I would like to conduct a one-time, key informant interview with you. If you elect to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

- (1) Read and review the *Consent to Participate* form attached to this email.
- (2) Log into a Wimba Classroom™ similar to the one you used for your supervision course to participate in a one-time, online key informant interview with this student researcher. (Interview is expected to last 60 minutes.)

If you think you may be interested, please respond to the student researcher as indicated at the bottom of the *Consent to Participate* form attached. Please reply within 5 business days. You may also email questions and concerns to jodis110@gmail.com or contact me by phone at 724-813-2765. Thank You.

Jodi Sindlinger

APPENDIX G

Consent to Participate: Key Informant



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY – KEY INFORMANT

TITLE: A Study of an Online Reflecting Team Supervision Experience: Student and Instructor Perspectives

INVESTIGATOR:

David L. Delmonico, PhD
School of Education
Office Phone: 412-396-4032
Email: Delmonico@duq.edu

Student Co-Investigator:

Jodi L. Sindlinger, MA

Doctoral Candidate

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Program

539 Superior Street

Grove City, PA 16127

Cell Phone: 724-813-2765

Email: jodis110@gmail.com

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate your experience with using the reflecting team model of supervision in an online environment. A one time individual interview will be conducted lasting approximately 60 minutes. The individual interview will take place in an online classroom and be recorded and transcribed. All personal identifiers of yourself or others will be omitted from the transcript. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. The results of the study may benefit supervisors, counselors, and clients.

COMPENSATION: You will not be compensated for your participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will be made available to only the investigator and dissertation committee. The student investigator will transcribe the interview and provide de-identified transcripts to the dissertation committee. All digitally recorded data, written materials, and consent forms will be stored either in a locked file cabinet, or in a password protected file on a password protected computer in the student researcher's home. All materials will be destroyed five years following the completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Jodi Sindlinger, student investigator (724-813-2765), and/or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396-6326).

Should you choose to participate in this study, please respond to this email (jodis110@gmail.com) within 5 business days with the following text:

“By replying to this email, I give my consent to participate in the study described.”

APPENDIX H

Key Informant Power Point

Slide 1-2



Welcome

The Key Informant Interview
will begin shortly.

Welcome to the Study

- ; This qualitative investigation uses online research methods to explore Doctoral Student & Instructor experience with using Online Reflecting Team (RT) Supervision.
- ; Because the research question asks about your experience of an online phenomenon, this study is also being conducted online.

Slide 3-4

Important Info

- ; No current or former student will be able to access the online classroom used for this interview.
- ; All data will be transcribed by the student researcher only.
- ; Your former/current students will not have access to the transcript of this interview.
- ; All information in the transcripts will be de-identified prior to any one else seeing the transcripts—a professor from outside of Duquesne University could be asked to view the de-identified transcripts if I need her assistance in analysis.
- ; You will have the opportunity to read and revise the transcripts if needed—and you may remove any potentially identifying information.
- ; This researcher's interest is in THE EXPERIENCE OF ONLINE REFLECTING TEAM SUPERVISION METHODS in general, and not your evaluation of your previous supervision course/s or former students.

Confidentiality Agreement

- ; Questions or Concerns?
- ; Please indicate that you agree to uphold confidentiality by checking the "yes" box in the online classroom application.
- ; Check "yes" now.

Slide 5-6

Other Info:

- ; You do not need to use the raise your hand feature.
- ; When another participant is speaking, please wait until they have finished before pressing your talk button.
- ; You may choose to participate either verbally or by using the text box feature—or both!
- ; If you experience technical difficulties, use the phone number & code provided to access the classroom by phone.

Questions/Considerations

- ; Please describe your experience with traditional reflecting team supervision

Slides 7-8



Questions/Considerations

- What about the online reflecting team process stands out, or is significant for you?



Questions/Considerations

- How is online reflecting team supervision different than other forms of online supervision you have used?

Slides 9-10



Questions/Considerations

- As the course instructor, describe what about the online reflecting team process changed from the student's initial exposure to trying the RT online to the end of the semester.



Questions/Considerations

- As the course instructor, describe how the online reflecting team process differs across students/cohorts.

Slide 11



Questions/Considerations

- Describe some other factors that influence the online RT experience for you...for your students.

What factors contribute to a successful experience?
An unsuccessful experience?

APPENDIX I

Semi-Structured Interview Guide-**Key Informant Interview**

Semi-Structured Interview Guide-**Key Informant Interview**

I. Introduction

A. Greeting: Thank you for your participation in this study.

B. As you know, the purpose of this investigation is to explore Doctoral students' experience with using the Reflecting Team (RT) model of supervision online as part of the supervision they received for their practicum and internship.

C. Ground Rules:

1. You may choose to participate either verbally or by using the text box feature.
2. If you experience technical difficulties, use the phone number provided to access the classroom by phone.

II. Sample Interview Questions

1. Please describe your experience with traditional reflecting team supervision.
2. What about the reflecting team process stands out, or is significant for you?
3. How is online reflecting team supervision different than other forms of online supervision you have used?
4. As the course instructor, describe how the online reflecting team process changed across students/cohorts.
5. As the course instructor, describe what about the online reflecting team process changed from the student's initial exposure to the end of the semester.

III. Wrap Up: Thank you for your participation in this study.