"In choosing to 'help', where our role is to pay attention to **someone else's needs**, we are entering into a relationship that is **different from the normal** and the everyday."Discuss this statement in the context of the **need for supervision** for those working in the therapeutic field.

### Introduction

The counselling relationship is a unique domain, at once authentic and artificial, emotional yet professionally detached, naturalistic yet invisibly structured: a relationship which places demands on the affective resources, learning capacities, maturity and resilience of the counsellor. While the unequal power relations and transference dynamics of the counselling dyad offer a fertile ground for personal growth, they can also facilitate neglect, unintentional damage or outright exploitation. The supervisory relationship has developed to meet these challenges, providing a support and pedagogic aid to beginning and continuing counsellors, while serving to ensure clients receive useful interventions and a professional standard of care. The British Association for Counselling, and the British Psychological Society both require supervision for trainee and practicing counsellors (Carroll, 1996, pp 12), as do the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP, 2012). Research on psychiatrists

indicates they self-rate supervision as more influential on their performance than lectures, conferences and study (Carroll, 1996, pp 12). The extent and duration of systematic abuse within Irish social care and corrective institutions (CICA, 2009), evidence the need for supervision of helping professionals working with vulnerable clients.

## The Development and Purposes of Supervision

Supervision developed initially out of psychoanalytic practice. Self-analysis plays an important part in most psychodynamic approaches, both as a way of ensuring analyst emotional readiness for dealing with clients, and as a pedagogic tool – exposing the trainee to the forces they are to encounter and identify as professionals.

Even this early, a conflict existed over whether supervision should be a separate process to therapy. Later, as psychotherapy / counselling became more diverse, orientation driven approaches (e.g.: person centred supervision) developed, utilising the theories and techniques of their counselling style within the supervisory encounter. These approaches added the analysis of recorded and transcribed sessions, group and co-supervision, and up-skilling the counsellor as additional functions of supervision (Carroll, 1996, pp 14).

The supervisor has a role in collaboration with the supervisee, in establishing and defining ethical counselling practice. Today's eclectic therapists require a supervision approach that tolerates, supports, and encourages the diverse intervention strategies of 'integrative' counselling (Hollanders, 2003, pp 290).

**Supervision Frameworks & the need for Supervision**

Approaches to supervision are no longer necessarily tied to a specific theoretical orientation. 'Cross theoretical' models of supervision incorporate research and techniques from individual difference, instructional psychology etc. (Holloway, 1992). The skills needed by the contemporary supervisor include an understanding of adult learning styles, the ability to critically evaluate recorded sessions and to provide helpful feedback. Supervisors should have an awareness of multicultural issues, of current research, and of the legal responsibilities and boundaries of both supervision and counselling (Skipp, 1996, pp 272-274).

Supervision frameworks serve a number of functions. These include preparing the supervisor to provide support in novel and unpredictable situations, structuring the supervision relationship to gradually increase the counsellor and client autonomy, providing a shared understanding of the rationale behind interventions, and ensuring a consistent comprehensible supervision approach (Page & Wosket, 2001, pp 13).

Theorists disagree as to the relative importance of aspects of the supervisory relationship. Page and Wosket make preeminent the supportive 'containment' and advisory functions, together with client advocacy (Page & Wosket, 2001, pp 104). Caroll favours the educative and therapeutic functions (Carroll, 1996, pp 27). However, Caroll does not dispute the usefulness of Page & Wosket's approach as a practical, detailed, well structured account of the supervision relationship (Carroll, 1996, pp 44 / pp 97).

## Supervision and the counselling relationship

Counsellor's motives for beginning psychotherapeutic work can manifest as anxiety and ineffective practice. Depending on the efficacy of supervision, these issues may be sublimated into effective therapy or serve as blocks to listening. Carl Roger's childhood loneliness motivated a lifelong quest to improve the self-regard and interpersonal connectedness of others (Kirschenbaum, 2007), while the losses and infantile rivalries of Freud's childhood echoed his frequent 'splitting' from once valued colleagues (Breger, 2000).

The need to help that leads many to counsel can manifest as passive caretaking, an unwillingness to challenge clients, or a need to be liked (Walborn, 1996, pp 47). Therapists may have desire to resolve their own interpersonal issues, to understand or to have power over others, or simply to be appreciated for their insights. The loneliness which can entice some towards

counselling can motivate overdependence on the supervisor. (Walborn, 1996, pp 52)

Walborn, 1996, catalogues four ways of being that supervisees employ to deal with their anxieties. Diffuse counsellors have failed to develop a secure identity through crisis, and lack a strong theoretical orientation. These counsellors don't assert themselves in supervision (Walborn, 1996, pp 56). Foreclosed counsellors too rapidly fixate on a theoretical orientation through simplicity or convenience rather than personal struggle. They may choose a theoretical approach congruent with their insecurities, for example, selecting person centred counselling in order to avoid confrontation / aggression. These counsellors fear conflict and remain limited to their original approach (Walborn, 1996, pp 56). Moratorium counsellors accept the ambiguity and anxiety of development and uncertainty; motivating healthy improvement, scepticism and autonomy (Walborn, 1996, pp 57). Identity achievement occurs where a counsellor commits to a therapeutic style in tune with their beliefs and develops autonomy (Walborn, 1996, pp 59).

Although this approach usefully highlights maladaptive styles of counselling that supervisors should challenge, it seems incompatible with the contemporary counselling and clinical psychological approach of eclecticism. However, Walborn makes a vital point - without a therapeutic aspect of supervision, its

pedagogic function must remain stilted and cognitive. Counsellors need a reflexive space to discuss their doubts and anxieties (and reactions to confidential client revelations). The ability to form a healing relationship is contingent on counsellor's personal growth and engagement with the issues that arise in their practice. Some of this self-examination can occur in therapy, but much of it will inevitably form part of the discussion of case material and transference within the supervisory encounter (Walborn, 1996, pp 69).

Jacobs & David address the question of how far the supervisory session should extend beyond the discussion of client material (Jacobs & David, 1995). They suggest the supervisor should teach how to understand and contain emotions which arise in relation to therapy – so counsellors can develop a self-supportive and analytical capacity in relation to their own emotional responses (Jacobs & David, 1995, pp 143). Counsellors need to acquire the ability to contain emotions without ignoring them or desensitizing themselves, or resorting to defence mechanisms like humour. They need to physically and emotionally remain in the tension of the counselling encounter (Jacobs & David, 1995, pp 145). This can entail tracing the source of strong emotional reactions or associations back to incidents in their own life in order to understand aspects of the client's behaviour or relating (Jacobs & David, 1995, pp 145). Transference from client's past relationships onto the counsellor, or counter transference from the supervisor's

own 'shadow' to the supervisory encounter, can transmit emotional material from counselling to supervision and vice versa. The analysis of this material may provide insight into how clients provoke negative reactions in their daily life, or to internal experiences they have not yet articulated, or become aware of (Halpern, 2009). In this sense the therapeutic and pedagogic functions of supervision are not so different; since examining the counsellor's case-relevant emotions, relational style, and reflexivity is directly relevant to their empathic clinical skill development.

## Conclusion

Supervision serves a diverse and often contradictory set of functions. The supervisor provides another 'set of ears', reconsidering and elaborating on the counsellor's hypothesis. The supervisor scaffolds the supervisee's intellectual and interpersonal development. However, the supervisory relationship is also an evaluative one, and exists in part to protect the client in counselling. Supervisors need to lend their experience and affirm the insights and successes of their supervisees, while working with them to ensure their client's needs are met. Colluding is a clear danger, especially with co-supervisory or long term supervision relationships. The appropriateness of therapist self-disclosure is a complex issue, as the space to support their revelations is necessarily limited. The supervision encounter needs to be a

platform for highlighting client issues, and yet one secure enough to gain from brief insights into the counsellor's own struggles (Walborn, 1996, 156). For it is within supervision that the work of growing from a theorist into an emotionally fluent practitioner occurs.


**Words:** **1,382**

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