

The American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) put forth mandatory guidelines and requirements for all counselor trainees that specify the type of relationship needed between the supervisor and supervisee. The supervisee/supervisor relationship serves as the foundation trainees need to become qualified counselors by providing a process that assesses and promotes personal attributes (e.g., awareness, openness), skill acquisition related to theoretical learning and case conceptualization, and fulfillment of multiple role responsibilities necessary for counselor competency standards (Rust et al., 2013). Various researchers have explored this dynamic by examining the strength of the supervisor/supervisee relationship, perceptions of supervision, and growth facilitating elements of the supervision process (e.g., empathy, support, challenge; DePue, Lambie, Liu, & Gonzalez, 2016; Tangen & Borders, 2016). More specifically, over the last 30 years, scholars have indicated that supervisees in clinical settings and graduate programs can benefit clinically from a cognitive development supervision approach (Lambie & Sias, 2009; Simmons & Fisher, 2016).

However, a specific gap in supervision scholarship is the absence of research that investigates supervisees' experiences with supervisors who use cognitive development supervision models. Furthermore, qualitative research on the perceptions of the individual supervision process of master's-level counseling students by supervisors who are also doctoral students is limited. A qualitative investigation on master's-level counseling students' experiences and interactions with supervisors in individual supervision using a deliberate psychological educational program (DPE; Mosher & Sprinthall, 1970) process may provide useful findings for counselor education programs. Previous researchers suggest master's students may have different supervision experiences with supervisors who are current doctoral students than they have with faculty

supervisors because supervisees may perceive less of a power differential (Fernando, 2013; Scarborough, Bernard, & Morse, 2006).

### **Cognitive Development Theory and Deliberate Psychological Education**

Cognitive developmental theory (CDT; Piaget, 1936) scholars suggests reasoning and behavior are strongly associated with the developmental level of complexity and psychological functioning of an individual as described by developmental stage growth of trainees (Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2013, 2017). CDT encompasses a set of 11 unifying assumptions about human thought process and how these thought processes affect behavior (Goswami, 2019). First, humans have an intrinsic and innate motivation and potential for growth that allows them to seek to understand their environment and make meaning of their experiences. CDT also notes that stage functioning is modal, in which each stage represents an individual's current preferred style of comprehending the environment. Stage growth involves qualitative transformation that is sequential and proceeds from less complex to more complex stages.

CDT dictates that the direction of stage development is invariant and irreversible; one cannot skip stages and cannot permanently revert to a lower stage (Goswami, 2019). However, growth is not automatic; it depends upon a series of significant experiences that occur at key points (Vygotsky, 1978). The resultant behaviors are consistent with a particular developmental level and consists of physiological as well as psychological transformations across specific domains. While growth in one domain does not guarantee development or growth across other developmental areas, cognitive development is universal across cultures (Bjorklund & Causey, 2017). Individuals in all cultural groups who are at higher stages of development are able to reason and respond to their environment in a more complex manner (Bjorklund & Causey, 2017). Researchers indicated that counselors at higher levels of cognitive development have increased levels of empathic responses, more effective clinical hypotheses, more complex analysis of the counselor-client

relationship, and a greater capacity to understand and meet the needs of clients (Lambie & Sias, 2009; Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2017).

### **Deliberate Psychological Education**

Over the last 50 years, counselor educators have integrated CDT in counseling training programs using the DPE model. Mosher and Sprinthall (1970) developed the DPE, an instructional process, through a process of naturalistic inquiry, where they explored how curriculum experiences could influence the cognitive development of learners. Through these examinations they were able to identify two primary processes (i.e., new role-taking and reflection), which consequently align with the supervision experience of master's level supervisees. The first process in DPE includes counseling students taking on a new role with different responsibilities (e.g., the role of a counselor) within an experiential setting such as practicum or internship and subsequent related actions (e.g., helping activities as a counselor). Researchers indicate counselor educators are effective in using DPE to support various student populations and assisting them in understanding a number of client populations (Cannon & Frank, 2009; Joe & Foster, 2017).

Counselor educators supervising the new role taking experience must embody appropriate support and challenge to create a zone of proximal growth (i.e., what a learner can do with and without help; Vygotsky, 1978) necessary for the students to integrate the latest information and learning (Reiman & Peace, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). As counseling students experience the new role taking and action, supervisors with a higher level of cognitive complexity simultaneously integrate the second process through the use of guided reflection (e.g., supervisors and faculty; Reiman & Peace, 2002). Guided reflection, which includes thoughtfully planned activities to facilitate personal analysis of performance, use of readings to provide a rationale and encourage theoretical understanding, as well as ongoing discussion and journaling are all integrated into the curriculum process (Reiman & Oja, 2006).

One of the major goals of the DPE model is to create a mismatch between the student's level of cognitive functioning and their current environment that provides an opportunity for psychological growth to occur and an expansion of awareness (Sprinthall & Mosher, 1971). Many researchers and educators encourage the use of DPE to aid in the development of effective counselor behaviors (Joe & Foster, 2017; Lambie & Sias, 2009). Counselor educators focus on how the DPE can increase empathic communication, self-awareness, and cultural responsiveness (Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2017). Students who have been trained using the DPE show higher states of cognitive development, use more complex tools for decision-making, display more adaptive behaviors, and apply multiple perspectives to understanding clinical and life experiences (Cannon & Frank, 2009).

### **Master's Student Supervisees**

Master's-level counseling students often have developmental challenges with achieving a sense of balance, managing difficult client relationships, dealing with silence, managing anxiety, understanding professional limitations, and setting boundaries (Deal, 2002). As a result, master's-level supervisees depend on supervisors for more emotional support (Ellis, 2006), prefer concrete answers to questions and instructions (Chang, Hays, & Shoffner, 2004), and rely on supervisors to provide client case conceptualization (Ladany, Marotta, & Muse-Burke, 2001). Further, the supervisory relationship often provides a parallel process between the supervisor and the supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019) which can either aid or hinder the supervisee's development of counselor competency. From a developmental perspective, the concrete needs of master's-level supervisees and heavy dependency on the supervisor at the beginning of the supervisory relationship may present a challenge for doctoral student supervisors who lack sufficient field experience and knowledge to assess a supervisee's developmental stage (Gazzola, De Stefano, Thériault, & Audet, 2013).

On the other hand, researchers specified that supervisors who use a cognitive developmental model or process with master's-level students may be better able to address the aforementioned concrete needs (Fernando, 2013), even with their lack of field experience and a lower developmental stage of supervisees. For example, supervisors who subscribe to a psychological cognitive developmental model may be at a higher cognitive development level, which allows them to negotiate complex situations and perform supervision-related tasks with greater empathy, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, and awareness (Lambie & Sias, 2009). Specifically, researchers indicated that counseling students who engage in DPE processes in supervision and in the classroom have higher levels of empathic responses, more effective clinical hypotheses, more complex analyses of counselor client relationship, greater capacity to understand and meet the needs of clients, and increases in other areas of cognitive development (e.g., moral development, ego development; Cannon & Frank, 2009; Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Although researchers have explored many aspects of the supervisory relationship, limited research is available that examines the individual supervision process of the supervisor/master's level supervisee relationship or the experiences of master's students who receive individual supervision based on a DPE process. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of master's students who engaged in individual supervision guided by a DPE process. The research question that the researchers intended to answer was “What are the experiences of master's students with individual supervisors who use a deliberate psychological education process?”

### **Method**

Using a transcendental phenomenological method, the researchers sought to understand and capture the lived experiences of a small group of research participants. The study was approved

by the university Internal Review Board (IRB) and followed the four-step model proposed by Husserl (1999) and Moustakas (1994). This allowed the researchers to illuminate an otherwise unexamined phenomenon. The researchers believed each supervisees' experience and the context in which they encountered these experiences affected their perceptions. Authentic transcendental phenomenology's foundation is the belief that if one can set aside all previous ideas about the construct under study, the true or real meaning can emerge (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, Rossman's & Rallis' (2003) phenomenological strategy enabled in-depth exploration to uncover the participants' true experience related to receiving supervision from doctoral students during their master's programs.

## **Researchers**

The research team included two self-identified Black women and one self-identified White woman between the ages of 28-45. Together, the research team had over 20 years of professional experience in supervision. The team received qualitative training in the use of the phenomenological procedures and have conducted several and published numerous qualitative studies. The research team conducted all of the interviews for this study. The researchers are all currently educators working with supervision at either the master's or doctoral level. Each team member had participated as supervisors during their doctoral program and are currently involved in the development of master's student supervision experiences. Collectively, the team conceptualized the study and participated in the data analysis.

First, to ensure reflexivity, the research team bracketed their positions at the beginning of the research process (Hays & Singh, 2011; Moustakas, 1994) in their researcher as instruments statement, which they independently wrote prior to starting the research process. During this study, the team members also maintained a reflexive journal in which they recorded their feelings, rationale for study decisions, and how the data connected to their experiences. Each week they met

and conversed about their biases, experiences, and prior knowledge associated with doctoral supervision and the use of the DPE model to ensure that they did not affect the participants' experiences or influence the data collection process or the findings. In this regard, they explored their beliefs and experiences related to the doctoral supervision and master's students' doctoral supervision processes weekly.

### **Setting and Participants**

This study was conducted at one predominantly White institution (PWI) public university in the southeast. Approximately 1,400 students are enrolled in graduate programs, and the racial demographics include: Asian (2%), Black (7%), Hispanic (2%), Native American (1%), White (73%). The counseling program is CACREP-accredited. The program offers several masters' degrees in counseling and a doctoral degree in counselor education. Student participants in this study were seeking a master's degree in the areas of school counseling, marriage & family counseling or clinical mental health counseling. Students in the program are primarily full-time and can complete all coursework and internship experiences in two years. As such, all student participants were full-time students.

Nine participants from a counseling program were selected for this study. The research team purposefully selected participants based on the following criteria: second year master's student studying counseling, completed the practicum experience as described by the CACREP standards, and received supervision from a supervisor who used DPE. In order to ensure that the sample consisted of participants with diverse educational backgrounds who represented the program's demographics, the researchers stratified the sample based on counseling program track: two from school, four from mental health, and three from family. Selecting participants from the various counseling program tracks also enabled the researchers to ascertain what, if any, influence the context of a counseling program track had on supervisees' perceptions of doctoral supervision.

The research team contacted students in-person who met the sample selection criteria and requested their participation. The sample consisted of three males and six females. Of the nine participants, five were White, one was African American, one was Latina, and one was biracial. The ages of the participants varied with the majority of participants between age 23 and 25; two were between age 45 and 55. The supervision dyads also happened to be cross-cultural in nature, based on ethnicity/race and/or gender.

**Deliberate psychological education process in supervision.** This study investigated the experiences of master's students with supervisors who were also doctoral students that used a deliberate psychological education model. All participants received doctoral supervision from a doctoral student using the DPE. The doctoral student supervisors utilized the five elements of the DPE:

- Ensured that the master's students were engaged in new role taking
- Required the master's students to engage in weekly guided reflections
- Offered a balance between action and reflection
- Created continuity for the master's students through weekly meetings over the course of six months
- Provided support and challenge within the sector of proximal growth

The doctoral student supervisors met with their supervisees in December to begin the DPE process that concluded in May. The doctoral students asked the supervisees to complete a reflection that allowed them to explore how they were feeling about the upcoming semester, what their expectations were and the anticipated challenges. The doctoral student supervisors provided feedback to the master's students designed to support and validate their concerns as well as offer support. The supervision sessions continued into the Spring in which the doctoral supervisors used



guided reflection weekly and identified areas that the master's supervisees needed to be challenged and supported (e.g., the master's student was having difficulty with anxiety, as noted in their reflection, the doctoral student supervisor discussed with the supervisee anxiety as an area that was impeding their clinical relationship but then provided support through additional reading, role playing, and/or recommending personal counseling). Throughout the process, all doctoral supervisors received supervision by a faculty member to ensure that the elements of the DPE process were applied with fidelity. The supervisors recorded each supervision session, which was reviewed weekly by their faculty supervisors. In addition to individual supervision by doctoral students, all practicum-level master's students received one hour of supervision from a “site supervisor” and two-and-a-half hours of group supervision lead by doctoral students each week.

### **Data Collection**

The researchers conducted interviews using a standardized open-ended interview guide which involved asking each participant the same fixed questions. The interviews ranged in length from 45–60 minutes. The interview guide consisted of six open-ended questions with sub-questions designed for further elaboration. Example questions included:

- What were your expectations of doctoral supervision?
- Tell me about your experience with your individual supervisor.
- Tell me what you thought about the doctoral supervision process.

Each researcher conducted interviews with three research participants using this interview guide. While conducting the interviews, the researchers used member checking to verify participants' perceptions of their experiences of supervision. Due to a significant time limitation, one researcher conducted a second interview with one participant to ensure they achieved a thick description of the participant's supervision experience. While the second interview utilized the same interview

protocol, the researcher focused on participant gathering specific personal examples regarding the experiences and providing more detail in their initial responses.

The researchers conducted the face-to-face interviews and received training in interviewing and using qualitative methods from a qualitative research expert with over 20 years of experience. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed by the research team. Lastly, the researchers compiled field notes on their emotional responses and thoughts regarding the interviews to triangulate the data and document individual differences (e.g., differences in vocal cues, unique responses; Glesne, 2006).

### **Data Analysis**

Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological research process guided the data analysis process of this study. The transcendental phenomenological process encompasses four criteria: (a) *epoche*, bracketing the everyday judgments and understandings; (b) *phenomenological reduction*, describing the phenomenon in its entirety, deriving a textual description of the meaning and essence of the phenomenon; (c) *imaginative variation*, presenting a picture of the conditions that make up an experience; and (d) *synthesis of meanings and essence*, developing a unified statement of the essence of the phenomenon as a whole.

Specifically, the data analysis process consisted of five steps. First, the research team engaged in the *epoche* process, where they bracketed of their biases, judgments, and feelings related to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researchers discussed personal values and interactions concerning their experiences as clinical supervisors during the time they were doctoral students as well as their experiences in individual supervision with master's students. For example, the researchers discussed the challenges they experienced as supervisors during their doctoral programs in the individual supervision process as well as the successes gleaned from the experiences.

Next, to identify the thematic content, the researchers used van Kaam's (1966) three step method for analysis, which included: (a) preliminary grouping through horizontalization, in which the researchers specifically listed every expression related to the participants' experiences with a corresponding code in an excel document; (b) reduction and elimination, which involved the researchers going back through the data listed in the horizontalization document, comparing codes, and making changes to ensure initial codes reflected the ideas expressed by participants; and then (c) systematically developing categories to form explanations of phenomena by group codes based on similarities. The research team members then grouped categories into themes (Moustakas, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Third, the team discussed inconsistencies in the categories and themes. Although the research team had very few inconsistencies (i.e., clusters and themes identified by each individual researcher were consistent with the other researchers), when inconsistencies did arise, the team reviewed the transcripts again and consulted with one another until they reached a consensus. Fourth, collaboratively the research team determined exemplifications (i.e., content that exemplified the identified themes; Husserl, 1999). Lastly, a peer debriefer was used to review the coded data, categories, and themes.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is critical to assuring the credibility of qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2011). The researchers ensured trustworthiness of the findings using two levels of member checking, reflexive journaling, bracketing, prolonged engagement, and a peer debriefer. During the interviews and after the completion of the interviews, the research team engaged in member checking with participants (Glesne, 2006). For example, the team shared interview summaries and transcripts with participants to ensure the participants' experiences were accurate. Additionally, the team continued to reflect on data and data collection in reflexive journals in which they noted

their thoughts, initial reactions, and how they made decisions throughout the research process. The focus of the trustworthiness process was gathering thick descriptions from the participants.

The research team also connected with the participants through prolonged engagement and persistent observation of the population for over three years. As previous students in the university's counseling department, the research team had a consistent presence. Therefore, they studied a population that they were not only familiar with but also developed a thorough knowledge as they served in their roles as teaching assistants, graduate assistants, supervisors, supervisees, and other formal and informal roles. Finally, the team used peer debriefing to ensure similar coding strategies for interviews analysis. The team used the peer debriefer to manage researchers' biases so as to help ensure the codes and themes were consistent with the team's findings. The peer debriefer had over 20 years of qualitative research experience and was identified as an expert in the field by colleagues. The research team met with the peer debriefer bi-weekly.

### **Findings**

As the participants reflected on their supervision experiences with doctoral students who used DPE processes, they perceived that their individual university-based supervision process provided a supportive environment, cultivated counselor identity development, encouraged personal growth, and offered a space for concurrent development of both supervisors and supervisees. These themes illuminate the key elements of the DPE process. The research team describe each of these themes in narrative form to provide a rich description of the participants' experiences.

#### **Provided a Supportive Environment**

Both the supervisors' actions and attitudes created an environment where participants felt supported, understood, and challenged. For example, one participant shared that supervision was

a place to “steady myself for a totally new experience,” and another participant noted, “The fact that it was structured, in that I knew I was going to see her every week really helped.” These descriptions indicate that supervisees perceived the environment created by their supervisors as stable and reassuring. Throughout the study, participants consistently reported descriptions of a supportive environment that included an encouraging relationship, comfort, and an accommodating supervisor demeanor. The participants also expressed appreciation for their supervisors’ openness, relational skills, and ability to go beyond their role expectations. As one participant described, “She was open in that she was okay to talk... even though... it wasn’t technically in her job description as doctoral supervisor.” Furthermore, participants reported feeling comforted by their supervisors’ abilities to “normalize” their experiences, concerns, insecurity, and “reduce anxiety” while understanding their perspective. As one participant stated, “Being encouraged that feeling uncomfortable and feeling unsure, was a normal part of what I was doing and that I could do it.” Similarly, another participant shared, “if I had something that was bothering me, I knew I could compartmentalize it until that session and knowing it was going to be there and that she was going to be available.”

The participants also described how their supervisors’ demeanors fostered a comforting environment for exploration and understanding. The participants described how elements of their supervisors’ demeanors such as their “availability,” “character,” “attitude,” and “flexibility” created an atmosphere that promoted trust and enabled challenges to be unthreatening. Many of the participants appreciated the feeling of security that resulted from the supervisor’s “nonjudgmental” availability as a stable figure in times of crisis and through an ongoing relationship. For example, one participant shared, “the doc student [was]... so much farther along... they [were] just going to be able to show me where I’m, where I’ve got these deficits, and show me where I can grow exactly.” Similarly, the participants noted the supervisors’ abilities to

flex to the changing demands and needs of the participants as demonstrated by their supportive demeanor. Furthermore, the participants acknowledged feeling “supported” when the supervisor focused on the questions and concerns, they presented in the supervision sessions, rather than focusing on a “predetermined agenda.”

### **Cultivated Counselor Identity Development**

Participants indicated that through “personal learning” experiences and exploring “counseling theories and techniques” during the doctoral supervision process, they started developing a counselor identity. They expressed that the supervisor “added a layer of processing, where they were able to learn about [themselves] and counseling in general,” as well as explore their “theoretical orientation.” For example, one participant shared that the supervision experience helped her “with techniques.” She further described that exploring theories “was one of the things [she] expected” and would “continue [to build] upon that since [she] had just come out of theories class and techniques classes.”

An additional byproduct of the doctoral supervision experience was an increase of the supervisees’ confidence as a counselor. Some participants expressed that the supervision process “increased their security” and “facilitated confidence” either during or after the supervision experience. As one participant stated, “When I first started my practicum experience, I was really insecure about my abilities, about what I could potentially do, but by working through the experiences at practicum,” she developed as a professional.

Not only did the participants experience an increase in confidence, but they also experienced growth as professionals. One participant explained that her supervisor “was able to explain [to her] that there is a process of developing into a competent counselor and feeling that you are knowledgeable and able to help the clients.” Another participant noted, “I remember that final evaluation being so positive and encouraging and telling me how far [I had] come.”

Participants also indicated that becoming more self-aware enhanced their professional identity. For example, one participant shared how they “[became] more aware...supervision allowed me to check my biases, where [biases] come from in terms of discovering things about ourselves, and exploring why the research team members may have some perspectives and how they impact my professional identity.”

### **Encouraged Personal Growth**

Participants not only perceived doctoral supervision as a place to develop their professional identity, but also a place where they “experienced personal growth.” For example, one participant commented, “I would say she let me direct my growth, and she had some impact and influence on my growth also. Because, I know for me it was a huge transition and I had a range of thoughts as I’ve gone through the program.” Similarly, another participant described their personal growth process with the statement that “[In] your first year in this program, you learn a lot about yourself and some of those issues are related to counseling and some of them are not and some of them are really hard to deal with.”

At times, the supervisors’ roles appeared to shift as the supervisors integrated counseling skills into their supervision sessions. During these times, several of the participants described the supervision process as a model for the therapy process. One commented that supervision “was sort of like being counseled for a semester. Looking back, I can kind of see the counseling process that happened.”

In further discussion of the supervisor in the role of counselor, participants reported they were able to process “personal emotional” experiences with their supervisors. One participant viewed her doctoral supervision sessions as a “time to talk” about the effect of “difficult experiences” in her life and described the act of sharing these intensely personal experiences as

their “most memorable moments” of the doctoral supervision process. For example, one participant recalled,

I had a really tough day at my site ... we started talking about the incident and I just started crying ... and my doc student, that process really helped me because I think if I had gone home that night without going through that ... that emotional upset would have come out some other way.

Finally, the participants described that doctoral supervision provided a “space to process” their counseling experiences, which helped to minimize the impact their counseling experiences had on their personal lives. One participant shared, “I worked 40 hours a week during my practicum. I worked overnight, so during my practicum, I had a like 15 weeks of the semester and once a week I had to stay up for like 34 hours, so... so it was difficult, and having a doc supervisor helped in processing it all.” The participants repeatedly reflected that they found it “important” that the “supervisor balanced the roles” of processing their practicum experience, concurrent emotional reactions, and personal concerns.

### **Offered a Space for Concurrent Development**

During the doctoral supervision process, both the supervisor and supervisees learned and gained experience because “both [were] really invested in the process.” Participants viewed doctoral supervision as a process in which they were “able to learn how to be a counselor” through a parallel process. In this relationship, the participants shared that their supervisors were “invested in helping” them become a “proficient,” “aware,” and “comfortable counselor.” At the same time, the participants were aware that they were also “instruments” to help the supervisors learn skills to be better supervisors in the future.

Many participants indicated that the “doctoral supervision process was different” from supervision experiences “with professors.” One participant described, “My [supervisor] wasn’t Dr.



\_\_\_\_\_ or somebody like that. He was not a peer either. He was, a step above..., and that peer level made me more comfortable. A professor might have more experience, [but] it was beneficial to speak to somebody who was still fresh but had a little more experience.” Another participant noted, “it was great to see [the doctoral student] growing in their role as we were growing as counselors, it made me feel like it was a safe environment for me to be vulnerable and share more of the things I was struggling with.”

Participants also discussed their collaborative working relationships saying, “I kind of looked at it as a give and take process for both of us. I mean he acted as a colleague and a counselor... they are there with you, I felt like we were working together.” Another participant simply stated, “I provided the issues and we worked on that stuff, versus her forcing anything down my throat.” The participants actively guided the supervision process, and as a result, they benefited professionally and emotionally from the experience.

### **Discussion**

By attempting to take on a new role during the practicum or internship experience, master's-level counseling students inevitably experienced challenges from fulfilling new role responsibilities and additional learning requirements in an unfamiliar setting. These challenges brought necessary discomfort to enhance the developmental growth for counselor competency. However, developmental growth required more than skill acquisition by the supervisee to assimilate the role-taking experience. Supervisees also had to grow in personal awareness to facilitate new methods of cognitive processing for abstract thought that enables perspective-taking, flexing to client needs in the moment, and adequate conceptualizing of clients (Cummings, Hallberg, Martin, Slemon, & Hiebert, 1990; Sprinthall, 1994). Therefore, supervisors learned how to respond appropriately by engaging in growth-facilitating conditions within the supervisory relationship.

Similar to other developmental models (Hunt, 1971; Stoltenberg, 2008), the DPE supervision process in the current study adhered to the need for supervisors to assess beyond skill acquisition, create growth facilitating supervisory interventions, and intentionally cultivate the personal development of the supervisee within the supervisory relationship. The supervisors used a DPE supervision process to assess the level of structure needed by the supervisee as well as specific DPE elements that guide the supervisor's ability to responsively match supervisees with the necessary challenge and support for disequilibrium that precedes supervisees moving to higher developmental stages. The DPE supervision process facilitated by the supervisors also matches other DPE instructional formats with the inclusion of five specific DPE elements previously used with counseling students (Kaiser & Ancellotti, 2003; Lambie & Sias, 2009). The DPE elements included (a) role-taking experience, (b) reflection, (c) balance, (d) continuity, (e) support and challenge. Moreover, the findings of the current study provide rich examples highlighting how master's student supervisees experience the above DPE elements in a supervision relationship with doctoral-student supervisors.

While consistencies are clear between this study and other scholars' assertions, this study is one of the first qualitative studies to specifically explore the DPE process in counselor education individual supervision experiences. It provided the first articulation of how a program's students perceive their experience with these processes. Consequently, the following section highlighted several unique examples of the DPE elements that are illuminated in the findings. First, during the role-taking experience (i.e., beginning practicum) the participants reported common developmental cognitions of supervisees such as insecurities and anxiety (Tangen & Borders, 2016) and the doctoral student supervisors providing the matching level of support by normalizing the experience and discussing the process. An example of the supervisors adequately implementing the DPE element of guided reflection included a participant describing the doctoral student

supervisor processing the counseling experiences and other participants describing the valued reflection of personal emotions with the doctoral student supervisors throughout the experience. Similarly, multiple participants described the supervision experience as reassuring and stable with the provided weekly meetings with the university-based supervisor, thus demonstrating the university-based supervisors adhering to the DPE element of consistency within the DPE supervision process.

The data collected in this study suggest doctoral student supervisors using a DPE process with master's student supervisees enhance psychological growth in supervision by facilitating a supportive environment and supervision as a place for personal and professional growth. The consistent description of a supportive environment in the participants' statements indicates that the doctoral student supervisors' use of a DPE process cultivated a safe environment necessary for master's student supervisees to experience appropriate disequilibrium by providing appropriate structure for support, challenge, and reflection. The findings also support the notion that doctoral student supervisors using a DPE process in supervision may increase master's student supervisees reported self-efficacy and perceived quality of the supervisory relationship, regardless of the doctoral student supervisors experiencing the concurrent developmental process of adapting to the new role of supervisor as well as having limited developmental knowledge compared to faculty supervisors. Additionally, by using a DPE process in supervision, doctoral student supervisors were able to incorporate and relay knowledge about the developmental process with supervisees as described in participants' statements surrounding the emerged theme of cultivated counselor identity development.

The discussed themes and participants' rich descriptions emphasizing the importance of a supportive environment further validates previous findings of supervisees who describe feeling supported and encouraged as being better able to grow and develop as counselors (Gazzola &

Theriault, 2007). Also, the current research team's findings support past findings that an effective supervisory relationship involves the creation of a safe environment with unconditional support, normalization of struggles, and supervisees' comfort with sharing mistakes (Baum, 2011; Lizzio, Wilson, & Que, 2009). Furthermore, this current study confirms previous findings that a relationship established through trust, and guidance through expertise may enable changes in the supervisee's conceptualization of counseling (Tangen & Borders, 2016). The findings also show the need for student's ability to address personal concerns in the supervisory relationship. The utility and effectiveness of a DPE process with supervisor and supervisee dyads also support previous findings on the cross-cultural validity of CDT (Sprinthall, 1975) and DPE (Cannon & Frank, 2009; Joe & Foster, 2017).

### **Limitations**

The qualitative methodology dictated several limitations of this study. First, the study relied on a small sample size, and data was collected over a limited time. The result of this limitation was a large amount of data from a limited number of perspectives. As a result, some of the information may not be indicative of other students' perceptions of doctoral supervision. This limitation does not adhere to the goal of providing a detailed description of the perception of supervision as a lived experience. Next, all participants were enrolled in the same master's program, although they were in different program tracks (School, Clinical Mental Health, and Family Counseling). The variation in course requirements may have influenced the participants' experiences in supervision because each track has different focuses. Because of this difference, some supervisors may have focused on personal growth while others focused on professional development.

## **Implications**

The researchers suggested that the obtained themes indicate the efficacy of doctoral student supervisors with master's student supervisees and the implementation of DPE in counselor education and supervision programs. The experiences reported by the participants can inform doctoral student and faculty supervisors on the importance of creating intentional environmental conditions within the supervisory context consistent with DPE (i.e., action, reflection, support, balance) as well as potential training areas to emphasize for future supervisors. For example, supervisor training should focus on the themes and tenets of CDT stressed by the participants such as collaboration and support (Kaiser & Ancellotti, 2003; Lambie & Sias, 2009).

Furthermore, the components of DPE used by the supervisors (i.e., role-taking, reflection, balance, continuity, and support and challenge) can provide a framework for doctoral student supervisors that maintains flexibility to meet the supervisees' needs and potentially incorporates the preferred theoretical tenets of the supervisors. For example, supervisors may integrate feminist theoretical tenets with reflection strategies that guide supervisees to examine their position of power and privilege in a journal entry followed by systematic feedback from the supervisor.

The participants' reports of experiencing a space for concurrent development of the supervisors and supervisee also indicates that master's-level supervisees' positive view of the parallel process occurring with doctoral student supervisors may not depend on the supervisor's knowledge, but rather the supervisor's ability to provide a supportive and balanced supervisory experience using a developmental supervision approach. Furthermore, many counseling programs use a similar model concerning supervision with master's students receiving supervision from both a faculty supervisor and a doctoral student supervisor that the current participants reported, which may aid to the transferability of the reported findings.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

For future studies, merging research interviews with observations of videotaped supervision sessions may provide greater depth and clarity as well as enable researchers to ascertain if participants' perceptions are congruent with what takes place in the sessions. Combining this research with a quantitative element that assesses cognitive development and personality may be advantageous as well in developing a clearer picture of supervisees. In a subsequent study, inquiring about a supervisor's theoretical model for supervision could also be beneficial. For example, an investigation of the relationship between the supervision model and the supervisee's perceptions of the experience could increase transferability to supervisors who use the specified theoretical model.

A quantitative study using random selection could validate the dependability of the current study's results. In addition, future researchers should conduct qualitative studies immediately following the doctoral supervision experience to increase the richness of the participants' descriptions and increase the transferability of the results found in the current study. The current study reported participants' recollection of their supervision experience from the previous year, which resulted in several participants' inability to remember some details of their supervision experiences. Better-timed interviews may reduce the level of contamination from additional experiences with the individual supervisor, site supervisor, and faculty supervisor, as well as experiences in the counseling field. Interviews conducted with the participants' supervisors could also enhance the current research findings. Data on supervisors' perceptions would enable a comparison for similarities and help to determine if the supervisors felt they provided the same level of support described by the participants. Also, supervisor interviews may indicate the supervisor's awareness of their supervisee's internal process and their actual influence on the supervisee.

## **Conclusion**

The data described in this qualitative research study of the experiences of master's students with supervisors who use a cognitive developmental supervision process reveals a rich view of the participants' experiences. The relational nature of the two themes: supportive environment and personal and professional growth demonstrate that each master's student supervisee constructs their perceptions and meaning of the supervision process experience differently. However, the use of the DPE process within the supervision model may not only provide an environment where support and challenge can be implemented but also serve as a guide for enhancing the cognitive complexity of master's students, which has been associated with improved client and counselor interactions, increased self-awareness, and improved cultural responsiveness.

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