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## The Use of Parallel Process in Supervision and Group Counseling to Facilitate Counselor and Client Growth

Janice L. DeLucia  
Vicki E. Bowman  
Robert L. Bowman

*This article presents a model for supervision of group counselors focusing on the parallel process between the supervisory and counseling relationships.*

It is widely acknowledged that parallel process exists in individual counseling and supervision (Doehrman, 1976; Lanning, 1971; Leddick & Bernard, 1980; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987.) Parallel process, as defined by Hora (1957), occurs when the counselor "unconsciously identifies with the patient and involuntarily behaves in such a manner as to elicit in the supervisor those very emotions which he himself experienced while working with the patient but was unable to convey verbally" (p. 770). Definitions vary, but the common element is the reenactment of the counseling relationship within supervision, focusing on impasses, resistances, and other distortions in the counseling relationship.

Parallel process has been recognized as inevitable and is often viewed as a hindrance to the supervision process (Doehrman, 1976). Williams (1987), however, suggests that parallel process may be used in supervision to facilitate counselor development. Specifically, Ekstein and Wallerstein (1958) recommend that supervisors model

how to respond therapeutically to parallel impasses and address the transference(s) and countertransference(s) that occur between the supervision and counseling relationships. As the counselor explores conflicts and blocks, the supervisory relationship itself becomes the source of learning and growth about the counseling relationship, thus facilitating adaptive counselor interactions with clients.

Parallel process becomes more complicated in the supervision of group counselors, due to the increased number and complexity of relationships between clients, counselors, and supervisors. This increased interaction is exemplified by Doehrman's (1976) and Martin, Goodyear, and Newton's (1986) research findings that parallel process extends to the counselor's work with other clients, counselors, supervisors, and with researchers investigating parallel process.

In addition to the parallels between the supervision and group counseling relationships, there are also parallels between the stages of supervision and group counseling. Corey and Corey (1987) and Yalom (1985) identify specific stages of group, while Stoltenberg (1981) and Loganbill, Hardy, and Delworth (1987) delineate specific stages of supervision. Jones, McPherson, Whitaker, Sutherland, Wolton, and Wolf (1971) state that "There is considerable similarity be-

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tween the processes occurring in therapeutic groups with those in supervision sessions" (p. 70). In the family therapy literature, Liddle, Breunlin, Schwartz, and Constantine (1984) note the similarity between supervisory and family interactions: "Pattern, content, affect, and principles of change tend to be replicated at different levels of the training system, and knowledge of this phenomenon of content replication can enhance our functioning at these levels" (p. 141). The implication is that the concerns of counselors and clients parallel each other as supervisory and counseling relationships (individual as well as group) progress.

This article presents a model for supervision of group counselors focusing on the parallel process between the supervisory and counseling relationships. This model is applicable to a variety of supervision modalities: individual, coleader, or group. Our thesis is that stages of group process are parallel to stages of supervision; thus, successful resolution of issues and tasks for the counselor results in heightened ability to help group members resolve similar issues and facilitates movement through the stages of group development. Counselors are able to facilitate resolution of similar tasks in their clients to the extent they have addressed those tasks in the supervisory relationship. A basic premise of this model is that the influence of the parallel process is multidirectional—impacting both the counseling and supervisory relationships, possibly others as well.

### INITIAL STAGE

Establishing and defining the relationship(s) is typically the focus of any new counseling group or supervisory relationship. During the initial stage the group members as well as the counselor in training become oriented to new roles and responsibilities, identify goals, and begin to develop trust. Due to the uncertainty and newness surrounding these tasks, this stage is often characterized by anxiety, a desire to "fit in," and a need to establish an identity within the group/

relationship (Corey & Corey, 1987). The focus in this stage is primarily on self, due to fears and uncertainties regarding the definition of expected behavior (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987).

For the counselor in training, Hess (1987) defines the inception stage as one characterized by role induction and a demystification of the therapy process. A need for structure is clearly evidenced. Counselors may question procedures of supervision such as taping, frequency of meetings, number of clients, and required paperwork as they become oriented to their responsibilities. Assessment of the counselor's basic skills and developmental level focuses on skills and personal issues that may affect the supervisory relationship and the counselor's overall functioning (Borders & Leddick, 1987).

Goal identification provides a necessary structure for counselor and supervisor, fosters commitment to the learning process, and clarifies expectations, which in turn facilitates a cooperative relationship and trust (Borders & Leddick, 1987; Littrell, Lee-Borden, & Lorenz, 1979). An important consideration is the development of a supervision contract "to clarify the nature of supervision and its components (e.g., the goal and subgoals, the focus, the tasks and methods, and the individual and joint responsibilities of each stage of the supervision process)" (Littrell, Lee-Borden, & Lorenz, 1979, p. 131).

To enable the completion of counselor and client tasks, group counselor and supervisor interventions at this stage are parallel. Structuring tasks is one of the first duties of the group counselor(s). This generally involves what Yalom (1985) refers to as "culture building": developing the agenda for the group, explaining the division of responsibility, teaching about and modeling appropriate group behaviors and assisting members in identifying and concretizing individual and group goals. Relationship building—facilitating members getting acquainted with each other and the counselor(s) and the beginnings of trust—is also

one of the counselor's primary tasks in the initial stage.

The supervisor is similarly engaged in "culture building," contracting with the counselor the specific requirements, expectations, and responsibilities of both parties, and the procedures involved with supervision (Borders & Leddick, 1987; Littrell, Lee-Borden, & Lorenz, 1979). Bernard (1979) describes the relationship at this stage as being that of teacher-student. Due to the counselor's dependence on the supervisor in the initial stage, the supervisor instructs, models appropriate behavior, and begins the process of change, according to Lewin's analogy of "unfreezing" (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981).

### TRANSITION STAGE

Following successful completion of tasks of the initial stage, a transition stage consisting of fluctuation, change, and confusion typically follows for the group as well as the supervisory relationship. In the transition stage, members typically begin to exhibit characteristic patterns of behavior. As they are confronted with these patterns, resistance to interacting honestly, facing dysfunctional patterns of behavior, and group counselor intervention typically ensues. Members are struggling for control of the group and with their ambivalent feelings toward authority. They fluctuate between a desire for power and the need for structure (Corey & Corey, 1987). Tasks important to work through at this stage include the ability to express and receive negative feedback and the successful negotiation of conflict with other group members. As this develops, members begin to take more responsibility for their own actions and that of the group.

For the counselor, the transition stage is similarly a time of confusion, characterized by "instability, disorganization, erratic fluctuations, disruption, confusion and conflict" (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982, p. 18). The counselor sees herself or himself

in a vulnerable role, anxious about being evaluated and observed by the supervisor (Borders & Leddick, 1987). The counselor is beginning to examine her or his patterns of behavior, struggling with insight into her or his motivations, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors (Stoltenberg, 1981). Continued counselor self-examination results in further "unfreezing;" old behavior patterns can be discarded leaving room for new learning to take place (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982).

The counselor begins to disagree with the supervisor and struggles with the emotions resulting from her or his newfound autonomy (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982). As the counselor works through these issues of autonomy and identity, she or he gains an increased sense of responsibility for the supervisory relationship and for meeting her or his own needs in supervision.

The transition stage involves teaching and modeling on the part of the group counselor as well as the supervisor. Anger and conflict need to be accepted as inevitable and normal in all human interactions. Instructing and modeling appropriate ways to confront others, give effective feedback, and accept the expression of strong emotion are critical tasks for the group counselor and the supervisor. The counselor must also successfully accept negative feedback and resolve attacks from group members in order to encourage similar behavior among members. It is equally important for the supervisor to recognize his or her contribution to the counselor's confusion and to acknowledge and initiate discussion of how this impacts the supervisory relationship. Open and honest communication during this period of fluctuation will strengthen both group and supervisory relationships.

### WORKING STAGE

Resolving the conflicts of the transition stage results in cohesiveness, universality, and internalization of goals in the working stage for both group members and coun-

selors. Tasks for the group members include taking responsibility for both group and self, specifically by experimenting with new behaviors, working through conflict with others using clear communication and honest feedback, and increasing self-awareness of resistance. Group members are now able to identify what they want and need from each other and give reactions to the group (Corey & Corey, 1987).

For the counselor, the tasks are similar. She or he begins to take more responsibility for the supervisory relationship, with more peer interaction occurring (Stoltenberg, 1981). Supervisors report more of a focus on the relational components of supervision (giving emotional support and helping counselors assess their own strengths) than the mechanics of skills during this stage (Cross & Brown, 1983). Conflicts between counselor and supervisor still exist but are now openly discussed using clear communication and feedback (Stoltenberg, 1981). In this stage, the counselor also experiments with new skills and behaviors in therapy; Hess (1980, 1987) describes this as a time of skill refinement and emergence of the therapist role. The counselor is now able to see his or her own resistance occurring, rather than the supervisor having to point it out. Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth (1982) and Stoltenberg (1981) refer to this stage as integration, when counselors are autonomous, respectful of individual differences, purposeful, and motivated.

For both the group counselor and the supervisor, calling attention to process will assist the members and counselor to accept even more responsibility within their respective relationships. This entails focusing on "here and now" issues and moving toward greater peer interaction. Reinforcing appropriate member interaction ensures that these behaviors will be continued.

Supervisory tasks are also parallel in that supervisors focus on appropriate conflict resolution and use open and honest communication to further develop a trusting supervisory relationship. Their role at this stage is more of a consulting role (Bernard,

1979), where the counselor determines the content and focus of the sessions. Hess (1980) suggests supervisors may take on one or more of several possible roles at the working stage: case review (elder to younger counselor), collegial-peer (equal level counselors), monitor (external evaluator), or therapist (benign supervisor/trusted model).

## TERMINATION STAGE

The termination stage may be arbitrarily determined by time or session limit constraints, but the tasks will be the same. For group members, the ending stage is characterized by separation anxiety ("Can I continue to learn, change, and perform without the support of this relationship?"). Acknowledgment of the group's ending and expression of grief over the loss of the relationship are essential (Corey & Corey, 1987). The tasks of group members consist of consolidation of learning and planning strategies for the future, resolving unfinished business, coping with the loss of the group, and saying good-bye to members.

Similarly, counselors at the final stage of supervision focus on assessment of their goals and skills, their strengths and weaknesses, what they have learned, and what they need to continue to work on. They must accept the ending of the relationship and what that will mean in terms of loss of support and guidance and begin to think about where else they can meet these needs. Counselors at this time also are assessing the supervisory relationship, saying good-bye and resolving any unfinished issues.

Termination is a difficult time for group members, and so it is important for the group counselors to teach and facilitate the grief process (Yalom, 1985). Members may be uncomfortable and unwilling to talk about their distress over the loss of the group or their feelings about endings. Group counselors can help members examine their characteristic patterns of ending relationships and then help group members decide how they want to say good-bye to the group.

Encouraging the expression of previously unexpressed feelings toward other members, resolution of unfinished business, and good-byes to other members are essential in order for group members to achieve closure. Members also need structure and support in assessing how they have met their goals and how they can continue their new behaviors (Corey & Corey, 1987).

Supervisor interventions focusing on evaluation and grief can facilitate the counselor "gaining closure" on the supervisory relationship. Feedback, reality testing, and reinforcement for counselor behavior changes are essential in the evaluation process. Discussion of potential areas of improvement, goals, and experiences to further improve counselor growth are also needed. Corey and Corey (1987) suggest that termination is the most difficult stage for the counselor, and so it is important for the supervisor to facilitate the group counselor's acknowledgment and work through feelings of grief and fears about the ending of the group and the supervisory relationship. Thus, supervisors model resolution of unfinished issues and saying goodbye.

### CASE EXAMPLE

A group counselor in training is leading a process-oriented psychotherapy group consisting of eight college students. During the 10th session, several members discuss their discomfort with silent people in their personal relationships and how anxious they feel not knowing how those people feel about them. Although two members consistently do not participate, no attempt is made by the leader to relate these comments to the current group situation. The leader instead redirects the focus to an issue discussed the previous week, resulting in superficial interaction among members.

The group counselor comes to supervision still angry about feedback that she had received from the supervisor the previous week. She begins, however, to talk about how frustrated she is with her advisor who gives her only minimal positive comments

about her work but frequently points out her mistakes. After allowing her to vent for a few minutes, the supervisor directs her to the topic of what happened in the last group session. The counselor's conceptualization proceeds at a surface level, focusing on overt client behaviors with little attention given to underlying group processes and counselor involvement. The supervisor leaves the session concerned with the counselor's limited willingness to explore the group dynamics and her performance.

### CASE DISCUSSION

When supervisors and counselors are unaware that a parallel exists, the effective working relationships necessary for both group counseling and supervision are hindered, as illustrated above. In both sessions, the unexpressed anger and indirect feedback go unrecognized and thus remain problematic. Developing an awareness of the parallel is the first step toward resolution, enabling counselor and supervisor to address the impasse. The supervisor's disclosure of her experience of the counselor and subsequent confrontation of the dysfunctional behaviors leads to discussion of their relationship. The supervisor can then help the counselor explore her difficulties in interacting more productively, encompassing both intrapsychic and situational factors. Lastly, the supervisor introduces the possibility of a parallel between this relationship and the group, focusing the discussion on possible intervention strategies.

The following discussion of the case example will illustrate the use of the parallel process in the supervision of group counselors. In the case example, as the supervisor reviews a tape of the group session, she notices the counselor's inability to challenge the group members' unexpressed anger. The similarity between the supervision and group sessions becomes evident. She identifies the underlying theme of anger in recent sessions and questions whether the counselor's recent outburst about the advisor was in truth directed at her.



During the next supervisory session, the supervisor discloses that she has been frustrated with recent interactions and confronts the counselor about her indirect expression of anger. The counselor begins to talk about how uncomfortable she is with anger and how she usually avoids direct conflict, choosing more subtle methods of expression. The supervisor relates this avoidance of conflict to the supervisory relationship, enabling the counselor to directly state several instances when she felt hurt and angered by the supervisor's feedback. The supervisor accepts the criticism and models appropriate conflict resolution by discussing how constructive feedback can be given and received.

At this time, the supervisor points out the parallel by asking "Could this be happening in your group?" She notes the specific incident in the group last week when the group counselor did not confront those members who were indirectly giving feedback to silent members. The counselor acknowledges her discomfort over the potential for conflict in that situation. A discussion of possible intervention strategies to promote open communication and conflict resolution ensues.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of parallel process has been documented but little has been written about its existence in group counseling or how to make use of parallels in the supervision of group counselors. Parallel process extends beyond the individual supervisory and counseling relationships to the more general stages of group process and supervision. Similar tasks exist at each stage for counselors and group members and for supervisors and counselors. Initial stage tasks focus on learning the rules and getting acquainted. The transition stage is characterized by conflict, confusion, and gradual awareness of resistance. In the working stage, relationships are examined with conflicts and needs being openly expressed. Tasks of the termination phase include con-

solidation of learning and ending the relationship. Resolution of the stage-specific tasks by the counselor within the supervisory relationship facilitates the resolution of parallel issues within the group.

Parallel process can be used within the supervisory relationship to gain insight into potential problem areas and improve counselor development. Pointing out the parallel(s) alone, however, is not sufficient to result in positive counselor behavior change (Williams, 1987). The elements essential to the use of the parallel process in the supervisory relationship are: (1) awareness of a parallel, (2) supervisor modeling of effective interpersonal skills (e.g., self-disclosure, giving and receiving feedback, immediacy, conflict resolution), (3) making the connection between the two relationships, and (4) discussion of intervention strategies.

This article has identified different foci of supervision based on the present stage of the group and its counselor and the resulting parallel tasks. Future work needs to address the area of how to specifically apply this idea of parallel tasks at different levels taking into consideration different modalities of supervision (individual, dyads and group) and the level of training of the group counselors.

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# What's a Group Meta-phor?

Bud A. McClure

*This article describes the function of group metaphors, lists their uses in group, and briefly explores several approaches for utilizing them as counseling tools. A case example is provided to highlight the discussion.*

The group process, whereby members are able to alleviate anxieties and fears, by indirectly addressing issues of concern that are too risky or threatening to openly address, has been called by many names: the group "theme" (Hobbs, 1951 cited in Davis & Sandoval, 1978), the "group mentality" (Bion, 1961), the "group fantasy" (Bales, 1970; Slater, 1966), and more recently the "group metaphor" (Cobb, 1973; Davis & Sandoval, 1978; Ettin, 1986; Gladding, 1984; McClure, 1987; Owen, 1985). Group metaphors represent words, analogies, non-verbal expressions, and stories in which "thoughts and feelings about an emotionally charged situation have been transferred to an analogical situation that preserves the original dynamics" (Davis & Sandoval, 1978, p. 374). Similarly, Rossel (1981) defined metaphors as analogies that permit group members to substitute "a nonthreatening external subject for a threatening internal one, enabling them to experience affectively charged worlds of meaning from a safe distance" (p. 120).

A primary function of group metaphors is to provide relief from excessive anxiety. Metaphoric language shifts the group's focus from the manifest or conscious level to the latent or unconscious level where the group can work through shared problems and anxieties. This movement from one level to another enables the group to remove the affect from the discussion and to use figurative "as if" language. As anxiety increases

in a group, so does the potential for metaphoric language. It becomes a safety valve for group expression.

The metaphor is used by group members to communicate situational difficulties (Davis & Sandoval, 1978; Rossel, 1981), indicate group resistance (Davis & Sandoval, 1978), confront group leaders (Davis & Sandoval, 1978; McClure, 1987), confront group members (Ettin, 1986; McClure, 1987) reveal personal identities (McClure, 1987; Rossel, 1981), promote insight (Ettin, 1986), and provide future direction for the group (Ettin, 1986; McClure, 1987; Morocco, 1979; Rossel, 1981).

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE A GROUP METAPHOR

Morocco (1979) suggested three characteristics that indicate when group stories are serving as metaphors. First, these stories from outside the group are often distorted to conform with the present group situation. Second, the language used in these stories appears drawn from the current ongoing group. Third, the "characters and plot of the story frequently correspond with events and relationships in the immediate group" (p. 16).

## METHODS FOR UTILIZING A GROUP METAPHOR

Once a metaphor is recognized, the group leader can use it as information, amplify it, illuminate it, or interpret it. First, a metaphor provides information about the group's pro-

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