

---

Theses, Dissertations, and Projects

---

2009

## Understanding the overall ingredients that contribute to satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the field supervisory relationship from the social work student perspective

Emy Fehmi  
*Smith College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fehmi, Emy, "Understanding the overall ingredients that contribute to satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the field supervisory relationship from the social work student perspective" (2009). Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1194>

This Masters Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@smith.edu](mailto:scholarworks@smith.edu).

Emy Fehmi  
Understanding the Overall  
Ingredients that Contribute to  
Satisfaction and  
Dissatisfaction in the Field  
Supervisory Relationship  
from the Social Work Student  
Perspective

## ABSTRACT

This exploratory descriptive study sought to gain an overview of the components of the field supervisory relationship that contribute to satisfaction and dissatisfaction from the social work student perspective. More specifically, this study explored student expectations, overall learning, understanding of positive elements, negative elements, and conflict present in supervisory relationships.

Second year Smith College, Master of Social Work students were interviewed regarding their field placement experiences from the previous year. Qualitative questions explored student expectations of supervisory relationships, difficulties that were encountered, learning that was achieved, and student understanding of their supervisory relationship as they reflect back on their experiences.

The findings indicate that student satisfaction and learning are closely related. The relational component of the relationship has been identified as instrumental in satisfaction and learning ratings. Findings also indicate that issues of communication, power, and boundaries in the supervisory relationship present significant difficulties even for students with high satisfaction ratings. Findings additionally suggest that student use of flexibility and acceptance that may boost satisfaction ratings. Although the majority of

students were satisfied with their supervisory relationships, more orientation about the nature of supervisory relationships could significantly aid in overall student learning.

UNDERSTANDING THE OVERALL INGREDIENTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SATISFACTION  
AND DISSATISFACTION IN THE FIELD SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP FROM THE SOCIAL  
WORK STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

A project based on an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Emy Fehmi  
Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2009

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many people whose contributions are gratefully acknowledged. Firstly, I am grateful to my thesis advisor, Beth Lewis, for her vision, patience, and hard work every step of the way on this project. I am also deeply thankful for the advice, support, and encouragement of my mother, Fern Selzer, through this process. You are amazing.

Thank you especially to my fellow classmates who volunteered to share their experiences with me, and who were open, thoughtful and reflective with their words. I have grown personally through your collective learning and wisdom.

Thank you to my longtime partner in life, Tenolian Bell, for your love and encouragement to continue. And finally, thank you to my friends and family for loyally listening to the daily ups and downs of the process. I appreciate you all from the bottom of my heart.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
III. METHODOLOGY.....	24
IV. FINDINGS.....	31
V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	70
REFERENCES.....	79
APPENDIXES	
Appendix A: Recruitment Email.....	84
Appendix B: Response Email.....	85
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form.....	86
Appendix D: Interview Guide.....	88
Appendix E: Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter.....	89

## LIST OF TABLES

### Table

1.	Student Ratings of Satisfaction and Learning as They Compare to Areas of Difficulties in Their Supervisory Relationship.....	39
2.	Student Expectations of Field Supervisory Relationships.....	42
3.	Students Report Positive Attributes of Supervisory Relationships .....	46
4.	Students Report Negative Attributes of Supervisory Relationships.....	51
5.	Students Report Difficulties in Supervisory Relationships .....	54
6.	Students Report How Difficulties Were Handled .....	60
7.	Students Report Professional Skill Development.....	64

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This exploratory descriptive study sought to gain an overview of the components of the supervisory relationship that contribute to satisfaction and dissatisfaction from the student perspective. More specifically, this study explored student expectations, overall learning, understanding of positive elements, negative elements, and conflict present in supervisory relationships. The following research questions were the focus of this study:

- 1) What factors contribute to student satisfaction in the field supervisory relationship?
- 2) What factors contribute to student learning in the field supervisory relationship?
- 3) How do student expectations compare with their satisfaction in supervisory relationships?
- 4) How do difficulties in the relationship contribute to student self-awareness and growth?
- 5) What skills help students to deal with problems in the supervisory relationship?

The field practicum holds a time-honored place in social work education, playing a central role in student professional learning and providing students critical practice experience through direct work to clients. Supervision is the primary component of the field practicum, offering students a space to discuss and integrate clinical learning and practice. Consequently, understanding the supervisory relationship becomes of major importance in understanding the strides made by students to become their professional selves. Bogo (2005) points out that “researchers have found [the supervisory



relationship] predicts satisfaction with all aspects of the field experience such as learning, the agency, and the overall field experience” (p. 4).

Bogo (1993) also states, “the experience of being a learner, with the self-esteem issues that are engendered by the state of ‘not knowing’ and reliance on the experienced instructor to teach and guide, also results in strong personal reactions” (p.27). As Bogo (1993) goes on to report, “there is insufficient current literature on effective educational approaches to respond to student’s subjective experience in their practice or in their relationship with their field instructors” (p. 27). Still today, there are few studies, which give students the authority to describe in their own words the nature of the supervisory relationship. Consequently, the focus of this study is to explore in greater depth the student’s subjective experience of supervision, adding to our knowledge of the student experience of supervision.

The specific purposes of this study were to 1) assess students’ overall satisfaction and dissatisfaction in supervisory alliances, 2) understand the elements that contribute to this satisfaction/dissatisfaction, 3) learn more about the relationship between perceived difficulties in the supervisor-supervisee relationship and student self-awareness and personal growth, and 4) consider how barriers to positive supervisory relationships may be addressed.

Although research studies surveying students regarding their perceptions of field supervision are many (Barnette, 1999; Barron, 2000; Burke, Goodyear & Guzzurd, 1998; Hacker, 2001; Vonk & Zucrow, 1996), further study is required exploring the relationship of student expectations, learning, and the ways in which difficulties are handled to student overall satisfaction with field supervisory relationships. Such study

provides students an important opportunity to reflect on, and express in their own words, their learning and needs in this important relationship. Lacking in the research are comprehensive qualitative interviews connecting elements of the supervisory relationship together to offer a broader picture of the student experience to supervisors and students alike. This study focused on elements affecting the supervisory relationship including student expectations, learning, self-awareness, how problems are handled and student satisfaction.

It is hoped that the findings from this study will add to the current knowledge of supervision by exploring issues of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction compared to perceived learning, the effect of student expectations on satisfaction, and how difficulties contributed to student learning and/or satisfaction. This information will augment existing data on the student perspective of the field supervisory relationship that can be utilized for further training of both students and supervisors. Results will specifically be important in offering insight into the student experience as related to their expectations, satisfaction levels, self-awareness, and modes of problem solving.

Results uncovered in this study can be used by social work institutions and field placement coordinators to inform the design and content of training opportunities for students and supervisors. As Strozier, Barnett-Queen, and Bennett (2000) state: “Increased knowledge of students’ needs can only help us become better supervisors” (p.37). It is hoped that the findings from this study will further inform efforts leading to improvement and proactive problem solving in the supervisor/supervisee dyad.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the pertinent literature on the subject of MSW fieldwork supervision. The purpose of this review is to create a foundation in the literature from which to explore what contributes to student satisfaction and dissatisfaction in field supervisory relationships. This review will include a brief look at the history of supervision and discussion of the understanding of the importance of the supervisory relationship. Subsequent sections will examine the specific factors that contribute to student satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Finally, it will explicate the basic tenets of learning and attachment theory and their usefulness as a lens through which findings will be viewed and discussed.

#### *Social Work Supervision: An Introduction*

The development of clinical social work has been a complex journey since the latter half of the nineteenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, as the need for professional social workers was increasing, training programs were being established and social workers began receiving training in organized programs (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Supervision is one major way that social work students integrate what they have learned in school with the practical needs of their clients (Vayda & Bogo, 1991). As social work became an established profession, the importance of the supervisory process came to light and the literature on social work supervision began to develop (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

Virginia Robinson wrote the first book on clinical social work supervision with her 1936 text *Supervision in Social Casework* (Robinson, 1936). Robinson (1936) describes supervision as “an educational process in which a person with a certain equipment of knowledge and skill, takes responsibility for training a person with less equipment” (p. 53). Even though this early perception of supervision was primarily a means to teach theory and practice, her view of social work training was expanding to include the development of relationship skills. Robinson looked at the clinical relationship as well as the supervisor-supervisee relationship based on the personality theory developed by Otto Rank. Otto Rank was an early psychoanalyst who differed from Freud by emphasizing the importance of individual will and the here-and-now in therapeutic relationships. Robinson, along with Jessie Taft, was a pioneer of the “Rankian functional approach” in social work which emphasized empowerment of the individual will of the client toward personal growth, as opposed to the more traditional Freudian Approach, the Diagnostic School which emphasized Freudian theory and saw the power as residing in the “helper” rather than the client. According to the functional approach, the present helping relationship is what can empower the client to realize their individual growth and change while staying connected (Timms, 1997).

Annette Garrett (1954) another early author on the topic of supervision, came from the Diagnostic School, which borrowed from Freudian personality theory, but had a practical approach to integrating the theory while maintaining focus on the teaching aims of social work education. In Garrett’s view, effective social work education included academic learning, field work, and an integration of the two, accomplished by supervision. From this diagnostic approach, the therapist had the primary responsibility

for successful treatment by developing an understanding of the diagnosis, etiology, and effective interventions. From Garrett's perspective, the supervisory relationship is at the core of clinical learning (Garrett, 1954).

These early developers of social work education from the functional and diagnostic schools, looked at healing differently, one process evolving from the client's understanding of the problem (functional school) and the other deriving from the therapist's valid understanding and leadership of the healing process (diagnostic school). However, in both schools, the healing can only occur in the context of the therapeutic relationship and, in social work education, the supervisory relationship had a substantial role (Dore, 1990).

In more contemporary approaches, the prevalent conceptualization of the process of supervision has been the model developed by Alfred Kadushin, in *Supervision in Social Work* (Shulman, 2008). In Kadushin's conceptualization, the process of supervision includes three functions: administrative, teaching, and support (Kadushin, 1992). In this view, (1) *administrative* functions include adherence to agency goals and policies, (2) *teaching* focuses on directing the supervisee to learn the clinical skills needed to understand the client, the clinical relationship, and make appropriate interventions and (3) *support* functions include the development of confidence and independence, as well as reducing stress and promoting harmony. In Kadushin's model, the supervisor implements these three functions within the framework of a positive supervisor-supervisee relationship. Kadushin also sees the supervisory process as having a beginning, middle, and end, with different developmental challenges at different points in the learning process (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

### *The Supervisory Relationship*

In a historical review tracing the development of supervision, Janine Bernard (2005) states that in the question of supervision, most attention was focused on developing skills of the trainee and little reflection was made upon the importance of the quality of the supervisor-supervisee relationship until the 1960's and 70's. Since that time, there has been greater focus in the literature on examining the relationship. In Bernard's paradigm, the variables that affect the supervisory process include: (1) relationship processes, including working alliance, attachment, anxiety, interpersonal triangles, and transference/countertransference; and (2) individual differences, including cognitive style, theoretical approach, and cultural characteristics. Other contemporary contributors to the literature on social work supervision also recognize the supervisory relationship to be a primary factor in the creation of an environment conducive to learning the skills needed for social work. These authors discuss the important elements provided by and affecting the supervisory relationship, including empathy, positive learning environment, ethics modeling, parallel process, dealing with difficulties, along with other factors (Shulman, 2005; Kadushin, 1992; Munson, 2002; Bernard, 2005; Bogo, 2005.) Important elements of the supervisory relationship will be discussed in greater detail below, specifically in the areas of (1) positive working relationship, (2) learning to create relationship, and (3) relationship difficulties.

#### *Positive working relationship.*

Kadushin and Harkness (2002) articulate the positive supervisory relationship as critical to learning social work, stating "Supervisor and supervisees establish a small, interlocking social system that at its best is cooperative, democratic, participatory,

mutual, respectful, and open” (p.22). Shulman emphasizes the importance of the working alliance, which he conceptualizes as including the variables of rapport, trust, and caring which develop over the course of the supervisory relationship (Shulman, 2005).

In *The Handbook of Clinical Social Work Supervision* (2002), Munson states:

Supervision cannot proceed in a climate of mistrust...Supervision must be viewed as a safe place to share and struggle with concerns, weaknesses, failures, and gaps in skill. The supervisor must work to establish a trusting climate and be diligent to avoid using the information learned in the supervisory process against the supervisee (p.12)

One important element in developing a positive working relationship is the empathetic connection present with their supervisors (Barron, 2000). Barron explains, when “students perceive their supervisors as warm, approachable and empathetic, they were more likely to feel a connection with them and to have a more open level of communication” (p. 63).

Gard and Lewis (2008) analyze and enumerate the factors that go into developing a positive supervisory relationship. They recommend that the supervisor take a compassionate stance, using a style of “gentle inquiry”, to establish an atmosphere of curiosity, respect, and excitement about the learning process, explore and normalize the supervisee’s feelings of insecurity and anxiety, communicate that the supervisee’s feeling reactions are not wrong, but part of the exploratory process, and to highlight strengths, progress and areas for growth. The supervisor should also be tracking the progress of the supervisory relationship by evaluating and communicating feedback.

*Learning to create relationship.*

Shulman (2005) states “a parallel process is inherent in the supervisory relationship, meaning the way in which the clinical supervisor interacts with the supervisee models what the supervisor believes is at the core of any helping relationship” (p. 26). Some of the relationship skills which can be developed in supervision which will enable the social worker to be more effective in their therapeutic relationships with their clients include (1) empathic listening, (2) noticing indirect communications which may reflect on the relationship quality (e.g., being late) or trusting authority (e.g., questioning experience), (3) responding directly, genuinely, and empathically to such indirect cues and communications, (4) learning from “mistakes” and handling them in an honest and helpful way, (5) sharing feelings and disclosing appropriately and (6) finding a personal and authentic style (Shulman, 2005).

Bogo (1993) explains that the supervisory relationship provides the opportunity to work on relationship competence skills necessary to cultivate in social work practitioners, including: “(1) understanding the necessary ingredients to produce a positive working relationship, (2) practice skills to enact this, (3) self-awareness so that workers can examine, in an open non-defensive manner, their subjective responses and critical reactions which can contribute to rifts in alliance building, (4) understanding of and skill and processes needed to respond productively to relationship difficulties so that problems can be addressed” (p. 26). In his view, the supervisory relationship offers an opportunity for developing knowledge and skill in these areas (Bogo, 1993).

Herron and Teitelbaum (2001) discuss the “paradigm shift in supervision from a traditional to an intersubjective approach” (p. 1). The traditional role is defined as one in



which the supervisor is considered “expert” and supervisee is considered “learner”. A more contemporary intersubjective model of supervision consists of a dialog between both individuals to define the relationship (Herron & Teitelbaum, 2001).

Sarnat (1992) explores the “teach or treat controversy”, through examination of arguments made both for and against the supervisor making use of supervisee personal issues in their work with supervisees, creating a parallel process between supervision and work with clients. Arguments in favor of using this material in supervision view this as important information, which used responsibly, can create an effective teaching opportunity.

#### *Relationship difficulties.*

Bogo (1993) states, “the experience of being a learner, with the self-esteem issues that are engendered by the state of ‘not knowing’ and reliance on the experienced instructor to teach and guide, also results in strong personal reactions” (p.27). Authors Kadushin and Harkness also point out that the relationship can be a source of stress, as well as a source of support, and that a main factor in effective amelioration of problems in the supervisory relationship is empathy (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

Again looking at the supervisory relationship as a parallel process with the therapeutic relationship, Shulman (2005) states “a defensive supervisee, at times, may be indirectly (and unconsciously) saying to the supervisor: ‘Show me how to deal with a defensive client by dealing effectively with me’” (p.26).

#### *Learning in the Supervisory Relationship*

Since one primary function of supervision is the education of social workers, it is important to look at the factors in supervision which are conducive to learning (Kadushin

& Harkness, 2002). Research in the area of learning supports the fact that each individual possesses a unique process that they go through in order to learn. Fox and Guild (1987) assert that each student has a different way that they “perceive and gain knowledge”, “process knowledge”, “value, judge and react to information and ideas”, and “behave” (p. 72). The authors go on to discuss these differences in terms of cognition, conceptualization, affect and behavior (Fox & Guild, 1987). These dimensions describing how a person learns are referred to as learning style. In their paper, Fox and Guild (1987) discuss the relevance of learning style as way to facilitate effective clinical supervision by allowing supervisors to “start where the supervisee is”.

#### *Research Associated to Student Satisfaction*

This section will focus on research in the area of student satisfaction with field supervision, as the current study will look at possible associations between student satisfaction and learning in the supervisory relationship. Student satisfaction is an indication of student’s investment in their learning, and safety in their educational relationships (Fortune & Abramson, 1993). In one study that explored the importance of studying student satisfaction, Fortune and Abramson (1993) note “student satisfaction with fieldwork is likely to influence student learning and may even be a necessary condition for learning” (p. 95). Since the major goal of social work education is learning, this makes the examination of student satisfaction an important subject of inquiry.

The extant research in the area of student satisfaction evaluates both students’ levels of satisfaction as well as the elements positively influencing high satisfaction ratings. Several studies support the findings of Strozier et al (2000) showing the “majority of social work students express satisfaction with supervision” (p. 34; Kadushin,

1992). In their quantitative study of 142 first year social works students, Fortune and Abramson (1993) found the most powerful predictors of student satisfaction were “trust, support, openness, and availability”, “involvement in active learning, including participation in designing experiences, independence, and encouragement to express ideas”, and opportunities for “critical feedback, connections with the next steps of learning, and role modeling” (p. 106). Additionally, the important role teaching plays in the supervision process has been shown by researchers and theorists alike (Strozier et al., 2000; Munson, 2002). Four additional areas of research associated with student satisfaction are discussed below: demographics, expectations & anxiety, power & boundaries, and problems.

#### *The Effect of Demographics*

While multiple studies explore the role of individual differences between students and supervisors and their influence on student’s perception of their supervisory relationships, there have been inconsistent conclusions on the subject. In the case of gender, multiple studies find that there is some tendency for higher satisfaction ratings for same sex dyads. For example, Worthington and Stern (1985) found a closer supervisor/supervisee relationship in male-male dyads, and Behling, Curtis, and Foster (1982) found a closer relationship in female/female dyads. Although in their quantitative study of 78 female MSW students, Vonk and Zucrow (1996) found relationships between women were slightly favored, the authors also found that in one of the four categories studied - “attractiveness”, referring to interactive style of working together - the female supervisee to male supervisor relationship was favored. The authors suggest that the

findings “support a gender-neutral policy with regard to placing students with field instructors” (p. 418).

Additionally, gender has been found to affect the way that supervisors and supervisees relate to each other (Granello, 2003; Crespi, 1995; Hartman & Brieger, 1992) including an effect on intervention decisions (Crespi, 1995). Crespi (1995) notes that the fact that men and women express themselves and communicate differently supports the notion that the supervisory relationship is affected by the gender of the participants. In a study evaluating 42 supervisory dyads, Granello (2003) found that male supervisees were three times more likely to give opinions than female supervisees (Granello, 2003). Additionally, male supervisors were three times more likely to accept and build upon the ideas of female supervisees, and to demonstrate a tendency to be more receptive towards female supervisees (Granello, 2003).

Sexuality adds another level of information on the supervisory relationship. Hartman and Brieger (1992) discuss the effect of sexuality on heterosexual cross-gender supervisory dyads. The authors state “extreme behavioral interactions are observed such as anxiety, rigidity, pulling back from the field instructor, or seductiveness and flirtatiousness to gain approval or to avoid other issues” (p. 80). Goodyear and Bernard (1998) conclude “gender likely affects the quality of the supervisory relationship, although the particular patterns of these effects are not yet fully understood” (p. 5).

Research exploring the effect of age on student satisfaction with field instructors has yielded conflicting data. A study conducted by Fortune, Feathers and Rook (1985) found no correlation between age and satisfaction, while Fortune, McCarthy, and Abramson (2001) found that older students tended to be “slightly“ more satisfied than

younger students, reporting a belief that they were receiving better instruction from their field instructors.

Another descriptive characteristic described in the literature as affecting a student's experience of a supervisory relationship is sexual orientation. Satterly and Dyson (2008) ran a supervision group for students who identified as being members of a sexual minority group and had a supervisor with a sexual majority status. The researchers state "it is clear that sexual minority clinical trainees face issues in their development that differ from many of their non-sexual minority peers" (p. 34). Newman, Bogo and Daley (2008) explored self-disclosure in a qualitative study of lesbian, gay and bisexual students in their placement settings. According to these authors, self-disclosure of their identities in the training environment offers sexual minority students the opportunity to explore personal and professional aspects of their identities in order to accomplish social work training goals of self-awareness and integration (Newman et al., 2008). Students identified feeling 'relief', more 'honest', and that the 'agency became safer' upon disclosure of their sexual identities, all having implications for supervisory relationships. Another finding of the study was that often students stated that the subject of sexual identity was not brought up, and discussion was not encouraged by their field instructors. Additionally students reported that they would first seek to learn how "open", "accepting of diversity", and how heteronormative their field instructor and settings were in making decisions about whether or not to disclose their sexual identities. Newman et al (2008) identify two overarching themes from their research relevant to this review: "the benefits of LGB student self-disclosure to learning" and "the responsibility

of the field instructor to create a facilitating environment for student self- disclosure” (p. 230).

Much interest has been paid to studying the effect of race and ethnicity on the supervisory dyad (Hilton, Russell, & Salmi, 1995; Cook & Helms, 1988; Leong & Wagner, 1994). Hilton et al (1995) found that the supervisor’s race did not predict supervisee’s anxiety level or perceived supervisory support. Cook and Helms (1988) report findings that satisfaction ratings went up for racial and ethnic minority supervisees if they felt their supervisor of another race “liked them”.

Research has shown that the frequency and depth in which cultural factors are discussed are more consistently relevant to the satisfaction level of supervisees. Gatmon, Jackson, Koshkarian, Martos-Perry, Molina, and Patel (2001) report “Disregarding the impact of cultural factors on the supervisory relationship can heighten conflict in the process of supervision” (p. 102). Additionally, talking about cultural factors significantly increased the supervisee satisfaction with the supervisory relationship (Gatmon et al., 2001). As Hird, Tao and Gloria (2004) state “conversations about culture encourage rapport between the supervisor and supervisee” (p. 109). In their study, Hird et al (2004) conclude that racial and ethnic minority supervisors were more likely to speak with supervisees about cultural factors than were Caucasian supervisors. However, Caucasian supervisors were more prone to speaking about cultural factors when paired with a supervisee of a racial or ethnic minority group (Hird et al., 2004).

### *Expectations & Anxiety*

How well students understand what is expected from supervision is an attribute that has also been found to affect satisfaction in the supervisory relationship. Bahrlick,

Russell and Salmi (1991) found that beginning supervisees, over time, had a gradually lowering rating of the process of supervision if they received no specific information on what to expect from supervision. On the other hand, after listening to a 10-minute audiotape which educated them on what to expect from the process of supervision, the same supervisees had a higher opinion of the supervision process and their supervisor, and were more willing to express needs and concerns to their supervisor.

Anxiety is a factor affecting students' experience in the field and therefore indirectly impacting their satisfaction. The results of a study requiring student self-reporting of anxiety contradicted earlier findings on the subject. In a study exploring anxiety and concerns of 61 foundation year MSW students Gelman (2004) found that 46% of students self-reported that they were "moderately anxious or higher." Specifically, students noted anxiety about their lack of skills, experience, and preparedness. The majority of students, however, reported that they did not believe that anxiety level would interfere with learning. These findings were not supported by Towle (1963), who earlier wrote that students "gain insight as anxieties are lowered" (p. 415).

Hacker (2001) recommends that more discussion of the supervisory relationship *take place* prior to the start of the placement to manage intern expectations and anxiety. The author also notes that students were very eager to speak about their experiences with their supervisor, and this could be utilized for further learning in social work courses (Hacker, 2001).

### *Power & Boundaries in the Supervisory Relationship*

In any supervisory relationship the supervisor inherently holds more power than the supervisee. Power and boundaries are areas of study for a number of authors on the

subject. A study by Lillian Hawthorne (1975) describes some of the ways supervisors wield their power. The author identifies four primary “games” supervisors play to maintain their power in the supervisory dynamic including: “remember who’s boss”, in which supervisor maintains ultimate power, “I’ll tell on you”, in which supervisor maintains power through threat of using outside power, “father/mother knows best”, in which control is obtained through the guise of parental wisdom and experience, and “I’m only trying to help you”, assumes the dependence of the supervisee on supervisor help (Hawthorne, 1975).

Boundaries are part of the working relationship between a supervisor and supervisee. Boundaries in the supervisory relationship can be confusing to both parties (Jacobs, 1991). The “dual relationship” between the supervisor and supervisee can blur the boundaries making it difficult to maintain a professional relationship (Bonosky, 1995). Supervisees are in a lesser power position than their supervisors, interfering with students’ ability to give their consent. This power differential gives supervisors with weak boundaries an unencumbered opening to perpetrate violations. The two main types of boundary violations are the sexual and the counseling relationship between supervisors and supervisees (Jacobs, 1991). Since supervisors are in a teaching role, one particular hazard of these types of violations is that supervisees are likely to question themselves as opposed to questioning the interaction with their supervisor. Jacobs (1991) reports that a “supervisor should not be using the patient or student relationship to meet his or her own needs” (p. 132).

Jacobs also writes on transference/counter-transference reactions as an inherent part of the supervisory relationship. According to the author, intense emotions can



emerge for students in their relationships with their supervisor, either consciously or unconsciously. Students are not always encouraged to discuss intense reactions that are coming up for them in supervisory relationships because such feelings could resemble a therapeutic situation. However, the author reports that such decisions could actually be protecting the supervisor not the supervisee. Jacobs (1991) notes “disclosure is a critical step of the healing process; healing cannot proceed in isolation” (p. 133). The author concludes that one way to empower students is to share this understanding with them in an accessible way. Otherwise students may be left alone with confusing feelings interfering with educational objectives (Jacobs, 1991).

#### *Problems in the Supervisory Relationship*

Problems are an inevitable part of any relationship and only if they are successfully handled will there be continued growth in the relationship (Mueller & Kell, 1971). Many authors have explored problems in the supervisory relationship. In their study examining student and field instructor problems, Giddings, Vodde, and Cleveland (2003) identify four types of problems that occur: “(1) A lack of supervision or deficit supervision; (2) a harsh and unyielding supervisory style; (3) unprofessional behavior on the part of the field instructor; and (4) extreme violations of supervisory compoment” (p. 203). Additionally, the authors report that some problems fit in more than one category (Giddings et al., 2003).

Four types of “objectionable” supervisory styles were perceived by students in Rosenblatt and Mayer’s (1975) article including “constrictive supervision”, when students were not given enough independence, “amorphous supervision”, in which students were given too much independence, “unsupportive supervision”, in which

supervisors were perceived as critical and unsupportive, and “therapeutic supervision”, in which supervisors believed that there was something wrong with students that needed to be fixed. Therapeutic supervision was the form of objectionable supervision that disturbed students the most because it called into question students’ ability to perform job duties required of them. These students were most likely to question their decision to pursue the profession of social work or began to mistrust their own feelings, the opposite of what is needed to be an effective social worker (Rosenblatt & Mayer’s, 1975).

Authors Burke, Goodyear, and Guzzard (1998) addressed problems in their study looking at “weakenings and repairs” in supervisory alliances. “Weakenings” were defined as problems that took place in the context of the relationship, regardless of whether or not these events were acknowledged openly. “Repairs” were defined as resolutions or attempts to resolve a problem. Ten dyads volunteered to be audio-taped during supervisory sessions and evaluations. Findings revealed professional development and experience level of the trainees as most closely associated with problems in the relationship. The authors report that, “The perceived power of the supervisor in the role of evaluator also directly contributed to the weakening of alliances” (p. 461). Thus, the perception of the power differential was influential on perceived satisfaction by students. Additionally, the authors concluded that the “weakening-repair” process is central to therapeutic and supervisory relationships (Burke et al., 1998). Problems as reported by students were caused by discussion of evaluations, disagreement about treatment of clients, and perceived power of the supervisor causing inhibitions in students. The study additionally found experience level to affect the student’s ability to tolerate problems in the relationship (Burke et al., 1998). Additionally, these authors found “when weakenings

occurred, in nearly all instances it was the trainee who initiated repair activities” (p. 456). Based on their findings, the authors suggest that supervisees, would be more inclined to push for a “repair” because they are generally more vulnerable and dependent on the relationship. The experience level of the trainee also impacted the way that the relationship played out. The more experienced supervisees tended to view the input of supervisors as “suggestions” and be more likely to disagree about treatment issues (Burke et al., 1998).

### *Learning Theory*

A helpful perspective to view the role of the supervisory relationship is to consider how it impacts clinical skill development. In contemporary educational learning theory, Illeris (2004) has proposed that learning includes emotional, cognitive, and environmental aspects. The purpose of the supervisory experience is to provide new learning enabling the supervisee to develop clinical skills. In applying this theory to the supervisory situation, we can posit that in order for learning and mastery to occur we should optimize the cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors. We can further postulate that these emotional, cognitive and environmental factors also play a role in creating student satisfaction.

Illeris reports, “learning always includes three dimensions – the cognitive dimension of knowledge and skill, the emotional dimension of feeling and motivation, and the social dimension of communication and cooperation” (p. 82). In a table depicting the three dimensions as corners of an equilateral triangle, Illeris describes the interconnectivity of each of the three dimensions. The overlapping nature of the dimensions, thus cause a relationship and tension between them. Similarly, as a student

acquires new clinical skills from their field instructor, the student is simultaneously integrating emotional responses and communicating what he/she has learned or grasped. It is only when the three elements are integrated together that there is mastery of the experience (Illeris, 2004).

Additionally, Illeris discusses the internal vs. external struggle that takes place in the process of learning. The external process, Illeris maintains, takes place in the interaction between the learner and external elements including social, cultural, and environmental factors. The internal process consists of the ability to connect new content to existing learning. When applying these concepts to the context of field supervision, the student's ability to absorb clinical information and integrate it into their varying degrees of prior knowledge is the learner's internal process. The external process exists in the social relationship between student and their field instructor. The existing variability in both the internal and external processes in this complex learning situation make up the wide range of elements in this field of study (Illeris, 2004).

#### *Attachment Theory*

It is helpful to use attachment theory as a lens through which to view the supervisory relationship (Bennett & Saks, 2006). Similar to the attachment patterns of infants in relationship to their early caregivers (Bowlby, 1969, 1988), adult relationships have also been found to have attachment patterns (Fonagy, 2003). Each student comes into supervision with a preexisting attachment style from childhood, and similarly, so does each supervisor. These respective attachment patterns are at play within the supervisory relationship (Bennett & Saks, 2006).

Bowlby (1969, 1988) describes the security and support provided by caregivers as a “secure base” for the child. Bennett and Saks (2006) explain, “it is the supervisor’s responsibility to provide a ‘secure base’ for the student’s learning, and in such an environment, the student becomes free to explore the professional world” (p. 671). The authors further describe the correlation between the supervisor’s ability to create safety in the relationship and the student’s development (Bennett & Saks, 2006).

Bennett and Saks (2006) draw a parallel between the needs of the adult social work student and that which Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman and Powell (2002) refer to as the child’s “exploratory needs” and “safe haven needs”. Bennett and Saks (2006) posit that in a best case scenario supervisors will be able to identify the student’s need for support or safe haven. These authors go on to describe supervision as “an interactional and subjective process, because both student and supervisor are sending relational cues to one another” (p. 672). As does a baby with its primary caregiver, the student instinctively assesses how secure he or she feels and evaluates if needs are being met in their supervisory relationship. This understanding of attachment patterns can help us to further understand the factors which contribute to student satisfaction.

### *Summary*

Supervision is a keystone in the foundation of social work education. Although supervision must meet complex demands of the agency, and the educational and emotional needs of the student, the supervision literature reviewed here reveals a longstanding history of acknowledgment of the importance of the supervisory relationship in the pathway to professional growth for a social work student. It is understood that student satisfaction in the supervisory relationship is reliant on many

different elements including: the quality of the empathetic connection between supervisor and student, characteristics of the supervisor, individual student attributes such as race, age, gender and sexual orientation, and how problems are handled in the relationship. This study will shed further light on existing literature and the findings will be analyzed through the lens of learning and attachment theories.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study sought to gain an understanding of the major factors contributing to satisfaction and dissatisfaction identified in field supervisory relationships from the perspective of the MSW students. This study specifically explores student expectations of the supervisory relationship prior to beginning in the field, and how and whether these expectations were met. It further examines student perceptions of the role played by components of the supervisory relationship – including how problems in that relationship are addressed and dealt with – in contributing to student satisfaction, skill development, and overall learning in the field. The study also explores the effect of external factors, such as agency requirements and culture, client population, unavoidable personal events (for example, losses or pregnancy) on the supervisory relationship and overall field experience from the student’s viewpoint. Additionally, student perceptions of the impact of difference in student/supervisor characteristics (age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation) on satisfaction and field learning are examined.

An exploratory design, using flexible methods, is appropriate for this study since the goals are to identify and further understand trends in the supervisory experiences of students. The data gathered in this study is qualitative in nature in the interest of eliciting the full richness of participants’ views, toward an increased understanding of the supervisory experience as seen by students. Anastas and MacDonald (1994) describe the emphasis of qualitative research, “is on the discovery of new phenomena or on the

redefinition of phenomena that remains close to the experience of the research participants themselves” (p. 57).

### *Study Design and Sampling*

As this study sought to explore, retrospectively, the field experiences of 1<sup>st</sup> year MSW students, the sampling frame was 2<sup>nd</sup> year Master of Social Work (MSW) students at Smith School for Social Work. Although one year removed from their first year experience, the influence of future social work practice on their perceptions of their first placements was limited and participants’ memory of their experience was still relatively fresh in their minds. Characteristics of the Smith College MSW field placement also include full-time hours in the field agency, lack of classroom time during field, and often new geographic locations, all contributing to a unique field experience. Given this common range of experience, study findings are particularly relevant to this group.

The sampling frame consisted of 115 students. Demographic data on this set of students was gathered by Smith College School for Social Work in the spring of 2008 for a different study. Of the 103 students who replied to that survey, 90% identified as female, 10% as male, and 2% identified as transgender or other. Seventy six percent of the respondents self-reported as Caucasian, 6% identify as African American, 7% as Asian American or Pacific Islander, 3% as Latino, 1% as Native American and 7 % identify as ‘other’. The mean age was 30; the median age was 27; and the mode age was 25. Data on student sexual orientation were not gathered.

An official request was be made to the Smith College School for Social Work for permission to pre-screen the second year MSW Smith College student community in order to find a sample. After necessary permissions were obtained, all students in the



current second year class (class of '09) were contacted via email with an explanation of the purpose of the study and a request for their participation (Appendix A). This email was sent through Laura Wyman, the administrative assistant for the research sequence. In the email, members of the sampling frame were informed that a final sample of 12-15 individuals were being sought and that participants would be selected on a first-come, first-served basis to allow for the greatest possible diversity in the final sample in terms of age, gender identity, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation.

The respondents interested in participating were asked to complete and return to the researcher a screening instrument that included their name, e-mail address, age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, preferred time and telephone number (Appendix A). The selection of the final sample strived towards the following demographic representation: At least three out of the 12 to 15 participants should be students of color; at least three should be members of a sexual minority group; at least three should be men; and at least three should be over age 40. These representations strived to be met by counting participants who possess more than one of these characteristics, in multiple categories. Individuals participating in preliminary conversations with the writer were excluded from the sample to ensure against any contamination of the data gathered. Friends and close associates were also excluded from the sample group.

Seventeen responses were received within the first week after sending out the request for participation. Of those, three were excluded due to their close relationship to the writer. Upon examination of the responses from interested parties, the first twelve responses received reflected a diversity in the sample, based on the proportions of

demographic characteristics under study, including race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age. In the final sample, all demographic category representations were achieved with exception of 'at least 3 should be men'. In fact, only 2 of the participants were male, due to lack of response from additional male participants. All other demographic categories were represented as proposed above. All those who indicated interest in participation in the study, but who were not selected due to the process of selection, were notified by e-mail to this effect (Appendix B). These individuals were informed that they may be contacted in the future should there be a need for additional participants.

#### *Data Collection*

Participants selected as the final sample group were contacted by e-mail and requested to print out, sign an attached informed consent form (Appendix C) and mail or fax the form back to the researcher. Participants were also instructed to print and save a copy of the consent form for their records. Participants were then contacted by phone in order to set up an interview time that would accommodate their schedule.

Interviews were conducted over the phone and ranged in length from approximately ½ to one hour. Interview questions were created by the researcher and influenced by previous research exploring expectations and satisfaction in supervisory relationships, including Fortune and Abramson (1993), Bahrck et al (1991), and previous informal conversations with MSW students. Interview guide is attached (Appendix D). Participants were asked to focus on one supervisory experience in their first year MSW program practicum. Qualitative questions explored student expectations of supervisory relationships, difficulties that were encountered, learning that was achieved, and student

understanding of this complex relationship as they reflect back on their experiences. These questions explored student expectations, positive and negative attributes, and difficulties in supervisory relationships and reflections and understanding of relationships as perceived by students. Additionally, interview questions allowed space for elaboration and additional responses not present in the literature or anticipated by the researcher. Participants were informed in the consent form (Appendix C) and at the time of the interview that conversations were being audio-taped for transcription purposes.

During the interviews, questions were asked verbatim from the interview guide. Relevant notes were taken on arising themes, and follow-up questions were asked with the intention of further elucidating themes and ultimately understanding respondent's experience in order to more clearly answer research questions. The researcher maintained a neutral stance by limiting any responses that may have influenced respondents in one direction or another. At the end of the interviews, each respondent was asked if there was anything they wished to add. This gave participants an additional opportunity to offer any pertinent information that may have been left uncovered during the interview process.

The writer transcribed all interviews verbatim in order to preserve confidentiality and the integrity of the subject's responses. All identifying information was omitted from transcriptions and audio files. All data, once submitted, has been stored securely, following ethical guidelines. Names have been removed from tapes and any transcription documents and each document has been coded numerically. Informed consent documents are kept separately from tapes and transcription documents.

Steps have been taken to preserve confidentiality of participants. The researcher has consulted with research advisor and others, as needed, to ensure effectiveness of the

instrument used, and that appropriate steps have been taken to protect the confidentiality of participants. The informed consent form clarified that every attempt would be made to adequately disguise the interview data, however, given the small size of the community of participants, it would not be possible to guarantee that participants will not be identified.

All data will be stored safely in a locked box. Electronic data will be secured by password protection. All data and tapes from the study will be kept secure for three years as required by federal regulations. After that time, they will be securely kept for as long as they are needed and then destroyed.

#### *Sample Characteristics*

Twelve second-year Smith College MSW students, all having completed one year of field placement training, were interviewed between March and April 2009. After responding to the demographic questionnaire (Appendix A), nine of the participants identified as female, two identified as male and one identified as queer. Six study participants were under the age of 40, and six were over 40 years old. The range of ages of the participants was wide, with a 22 year difference between the oldest and youngest participant. The median age of the final sample was 37 years old; the mean was 39; and the mode was 37. In terms of sexual orientation, four participants identified with a sexual minority status (lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer), six identified as heterosexual and 2 declined to state. Five participants identified as a 'person of color', identifying with a non-white racial category. Participant's identities are collapsed into 'person of color' in an effort to protect the identities of these participants. Seven of the subjects identified as Caucasian.

### *Data Analysis*

Analysis of the data has been made in an attempt to best address the research questions of this exploratory study. Coding of specific responses has been used to identify emerging themes relating to participant's experiences in their supervisory relationships. The process of data analysis began by separating the data into categories based on interview questions. These categories included: expectations, positive characteristics, negative characteristics, difficulties, and what could have helped the relationship. From these initial categories themes emerged suggesting recurring patterns in the experiences of the participants. Themes were examined which emerged from the data gathered and in light of those noted in the existing literature.

This study has several limitations. The small sample size is not large enough to generalize data to reflect a wider student population. The use of Smith MSW students only, also limits the ability to generalize to students from other schools. Although a diverse sample concerning race/ethnicity, age, gender, and sexual orientation was attained, there is no guarantee that responses are representative of students in general. In addition, participants in this study have been asked to reflect on their first year internships from the vantage point of their second year internships. Taking this perspective on their experiences has an unknown effect on participant's responses. As a result, findings of this study reflect the subjective responses of twelve specific students in a given moment in time.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This study explores the factors that contribute to student satisfaction and dissatisfaction in their field supervisory relationships. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix D) inviting discussion of expectations, positive and negative aspects, problems and learning in their supervisory relationships. The findings from a study of second-year MSW students (N=12) regarding their perceptions of the supervisory relationship will be presented in the following nine sections. The first section will present demographic findings, including the characteristics of the participants and their supervisors and student perceptions of the effect that these characteristics had on the supervisory relationship and overall field experience. The remainder of the findings will be presented under eight headings that mirror the actual interview questions: 1) Learning and satisfaction; 2) Expectations; 3) Positive attributes of the supervisory relationship; 4) Negative attributes of the supervisory relationship; 5) Difficulties; 6) What could have made the relationship more satisfying; 7) Learning; and 8) Other influences.

Specific components of the supervisory relationship related to “Expectations”, and “Positive and negative attributes” (as above) that were identified on a recurring basis by participants have been grouped into four broad categories that will be presented as follows: 1) Structural (elements that contribute to the structure of the supervisory relationship and general field requirements, e.g. consistency of supervisory meetings, use

of tools such as process recordings, etc.); 2) Concrete knowledge (specific skills and learning taking place in the field placement as facilitated by the supervisor, e.g. application of theory, information pertinent to specific client population, etc.); 3) Supervisor qualities (positive or negative personality traits, e.g. openness, honesty, harshness, etc.); and 4) Relational qualities (how supervisors related to supervisees, e.g. sensitivity towards, encouragement, or criticism of the student). Each of these categories and the corresponding themes contained within each, will be discussed in relation to the interview questions posed.

Generally speaking, all twelve participants reported difficulties in at least one of the categories described above, and often difficulties were presented in multiple categories. According to the findings, the number of categories in which students report difficulties directly corresponds indirectly to their satisfaction with field (see table. 4.1). That is, the higher the number of categories where difficulties are reported, the lower are the ratings for satisfaction. Particularly notable, as well, is the finding that participants with the lowest satisfaction ratings reported at least some difficulties with relational qualities within the supervisory relationships.

### *Demographic Data*

#### *Participant Demographics*

The sampling frame consisted of 115 students comprising the second year MSW class at Smith College School for Social Work. Demographic data on a large subset of this group of students was gathered in another survey carried out by Smith College School for Social Work in spring 2008. Of the 103 students who replied to that survey, 90% identified as female, 10% as male, and 2% as transgender or “other”. Seventy six

percent of the respondents identify as Caucasian, 6% as African American, 7% as Asian American or Pacific Islander, 3% as Latino, 1% as Native American and 7% as 'other'. The range of ages of the respondents was between 22 and 56 years old. The mean age was 30; the median age was 27; and the mode age was 25. Data on student sexual orientation were not gathered.

This study used a sample of 12 second-year Smith College MSW students, all having completed one year of field placement training. Nine of the participants identified as female, two identified as male and one identified as neither male nor female. Six study participants were under the age of 40, and six were over 40 years old. The specific age range of participants will not be given here in order to protect the identity of the participants. However, the range of ages of the participants was wide, with a 22 year difference between the oldest and youngest participant. The mean age of the final sample was 39 years old; the median was 37; and the mode was 37.

Participants had been asked to indicate their race and sexual orientation in response to open-ended questions contained in the pre-interview screen sent via e-mail to the entire sampling frame. Four participants indicated their identity as "lesbian", "bisexual", or neither male nor female, six individuals described themselves as "heterosexual" or "straight", and two participants declined to state. Seven of the participants identified as "Caucasian" or "white" and five participants identified as: "African American", "Black" or "Asian." Given the demographics of the sampling frame, for purposes of confidentiality and to protect their identities, the researcher will use the terms "person of color", or "people of color" to describe the latter group of five participants when referencing their statements in the presentation of findings that follows.



Throughout the chapter, where quotes are attributed to individual participants, participant and supervisor characteristics will be reported generally, rather than specifically, to assure confidentiality and to protect participant/supervisor identity.

### *Supervisor Demographics*

In an effort to learn about demographic characteristic differences in the supervisor-supervisee dyad as a possible factor in student satisfaction and learning experiences, students were asked to report the gender identities and race/ethnicities of their supervisors. This yielded limited demographic data on the respective field supervisors of participants in their first year in the field. Nine of the 12 supervisors were reported as female and three were male. Eleven supervisors were described as Caucasian. One additional supervisor will be described as a ‘person of color’ in order to protect the identities of both the supervisor and supervisee.

Of the 12 supervisory dyads, only two were of mixed genders. All remaining 10 participants were paired with a supervisor of their same gender, including two male students with male field instructors and eight female students with female field instructors.

### *Effect of Demographics on the Relationship*

One participant stated that she learned in her supervisory relationship that “racism, classism, sexism, homophobia still exists. I had a really good first example that that exists in the field.” However, none of the participants made any specific mention of the role that gender played on their satisfaction with supervisory relationships. On the other hand, although specific data on participant report of supervisor age was not collected, six of the participants noted in their responses an acknowledgment that age

plays a role in the relationship. Two of those reported that being older than their supervisors may have been a source of some problems in their relationship, for example one participant reported, “I assumed it was my age. Honestly that was what I assumed. I assumed that because I was ... years older than [the supervisor], that [the supervisor] had some bias and felt unable to talk to me.” Another participant was concerned about how they would be treated because of their age, “And, because I am older too, I didn’t want [the supervisor] to treat me like somebody that just graduated from college and came to [the supervisor].” Another two participants commented on the difference between the schooling their supervisors had received and their own education due to their supervisor being older than they were. One participant said, “When we look at things like [difficulty in the relationship] we look at [the supervisor] who’s from another school of thought. [The supervisor] is ... [years old] and the way [the supervisor] was taught and the way we are taught now are totally different.” Yet another participant noted that a student’s concerns are different depending on their age, stating “I think it makes a difference too how old people are. Like if you have been out in the work world of if you haven’t. I think you have a different set of concerns if you are 24 as if you are 40 or something.”

Three of the students who identified with a sexual minority status discussed their orientations in relationship with their supervisors. One participant reported noticing the presence of homophobia in their supervisor and in their placement agency, both of which negatively impacted the relationship. One of these participants described anxiety about whether or not to be open about their sexual minority status at the agency and to the supervisor, stating “One thing I definitely gave some thought to in advance was about like if I would be out to my supervisor as [sexual orientation] and how it would happen

and I discussed it with someone before, with people who had been through the experience and that was definitely a concern of mine.”

Three students brought up the issue of race in their experience with their supervisors. The issue of how race plays into the relationship is two-fold. The first is how it plays out in the room between the student and supervisor. And the second involves the level of comfort the student feels in the agency. One participant reported difficulties with their supervisor arising out of the supervisor’s attitudes towards the student’s race, of which they felt their supervisor was not completely aware. When asked how they had dealt with this issue, the participant described their process of accepting their supervisor, “For me it was around realizing who [the supervisor] is as a person, just based on what I know in our relationship, that it couldn’t be more than it was. And it wasn’t going to be what I wanted”. This participant went on to say, “I had to reframe a lot of things too for myself and realize that the way that [the supervisor] saw me wasn’t the way that I really am.”

Another participant reported how a lack of opportunity to discuss race affected the student’s comfort in the agency, as follows: “I think if we’d had a better opportunity with my supervisor to talk about that [race], it would have calmed me down a little bit, because a lot, we had events and things where I was the only [person of color] there, and you know a lot of times I felt like I was invisible”. This student went on to describe their supervisor’s belief that race was not a major issue in the therapeutic relationship between student and client and, although the student described the supervisory relationship as a good one, disappointment was also expressed that the supervisor did not share an interest in exploring the role race plays in relationships with clients. A third participant noted

appreciation for working with a supervisor who identified as a person of color, “I really did appreciate just in a professional sense, the professional identity sense, that [the supervisor] was a [person] of color and identified that way.”

### *Satisfaction and Learning*

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the supervisory relationship and overall learning during their placement using a 7-point scale, 7 representing the highest rating and 1 representing the lowest (see Table 1). The majority of the respondents were highly satisfied with their supervisory relationship, with nine participants reporting at least a 5 on the scale, including two participants reporting a 7. The remaining three participants were at least somewhat dissatisfied in their relationship with their supervisors. More specifically, one person gave a 3.5 rating, one person gave a 2 rating, and one person rated their relationship as 1, the lowest rating possible.

Participants were also asked to rate their overall learning in the supervisory relationship using the same 7-point scale described above, 7 representing the highest rating and 1 representing the lowest. In terms of overall learning, the majority (N=8) of the participants chose a rating of at least 5, indicating their perception that they learned a large amount during their internships, including three of those who rated their experience a 7, the highest possible rating on this scale. One person chose 4.5 to represent the amount they had learned for the year. Three participants gave a rating of 4 or below, including a rating of 4, a rating of 3, and a rating of 1, one being the lowest possible choice.

Five of the participants' responses were the same for satisfaction and learning, (e.g., giving a rating of 5 for satisfaction as well as for overall learning), including those

at the lower, mid-range, and higher ends of the scale. An additional five participants gave ratings within one point of the other for satisfaction and learning, for instance rating satisfaction a 6 and overall learning a 5. The additional two responses had a wider spread in the ratings, indicating a 2 and 2.5 point increase on their overall learning rating, for instance rating satisfaction as a 2 and overall learning as a 4.5, indicating that although these participants were less satisfied with their supervisory relationships they were able to learn a considerable amount through their overall experience. Table 1, below, illustrates the range in combinations of student ratings of satisfaction and learning in field supervision.

*Table 1: Student Ratings of Satisfaction and Learning as They Compare to Areas of Difficulties in their Supervisory Relationship (7 point scale: 1= Least satisfied or amount learned; 7 = Most satisfied or amount learned)*

Rating 1 to 7: Satisfaction in the Supervisory Relationship	Rating 1 to 7: Overall Learning	Difficulties: Structural	Difficulties: Concrete Knowledge	Difficulties: Supervisor Qualities	Difficulties: Relational Difficulties
1	1	X	X	X	X
2	4.5	X	X	X	X
3.5	3	X		X	X
5	4	X	X		X
5	5	X			X
5	7	X			
5.5	5	X			
6	6	X	X		
6	6	X		X	
6	7			X	
7	6	X			
7	7	X			

### *Expectations*

Respondents were asked to identify what expectations they had for their supervisory relationships. Five participants reported that they did not know what to expect from their supervisory relationships. One participant said,

I was pretty open and naïve and I had never had clinical supervision, so I didn't know what to expect and I was very open and I didn't feel like Smith really said 'this is what it is going to be like with a supervisor' and I honestly didn't know.

Another participant stated, “I had no idea what to expect going in.” Another participant reported not recognizing what their expectations were until later, stating “I actually was not aware of my expectations until I felt at times that certain needs were not being met.”

The expectations that participants reported have been sorted into four major categories as discussed in detail above: 1) Structural; 2) Concrete knowledge; 3) Supervisor qualities; and 4) Relational qualities (see Table 2). These categories were derived from analysis of the entire sample. Analysis within the categories revealed some salient themes that matter to students and that taken together create an overall level of satisfaction with the field experience. Themes within each category will be described in detail below.

### *Structural*

The responses within the structural category have been divided into three main themes: meeting school requirements, consistency, and availability. One theme that was observed in participants’ responses was the expectation that general school requirements would be met in the supervision. Three students reported expectations to receive “clinical supervision.” Consistency was also a theme, with responses indicating expectations that their supervisor provide a structured environment, keep time commitments, and provide uninterrupted supervision. One participant said, “I believe that going into the internship I expected a structured environment that would cater to an intern.” Another participant said, “Most importantly to me was the time commitment, that I would get my two hours a week of uninterrupted supervision. That was my first expectation. Secondly was that I would be getting clinical supervision.” Additionally, availability of the supervisor was also expressed as an expectation.

### *Concrete Knowledge*

Within the concrete knowledge category, two themes emerged: facilitation of general learning and specific therapeutic skills. A distinction has been made about the types of learning that students were expecting between general learning and more specific therapeutic learning (see Table 2). Many of the responses include elements of both of these themes within them. One participant stated, “I wanted someone to really teach me some things and show me how to do this kind of work and kind of model things for me and show me theory.” Another participant reported expectations that “I would get to apply psychodynamic theory and dynamics” and “clear delineation of my role in the agency, that I was really seeking some guidance on what I’m supposed to be doing, how I am supposed to use supervision, how I’m supposed to use the agency, what the placements about, what the agency’s about...just that sort of concrete stuff.” A third participant described “an expectation that we would talk about theory more and formulations. I had a greater expectation that we would get a psychodynamic understanding of the patients.” Yet another student stated, “I wanted suggestions on how to work with [the client population]...I wanted suggestions on how to help [the clients] move to the next level...how to understand it, how to deal with it.”



Table 2: Student Expectations of Field Supervisory Relationships: Illustration of Categories of Structural, Concrete Knowledge, Supervisor and Relational Qualities

Structural	Concrete Knowledge	Supervisor Qualities	Relational Qualities
<p><u>Meeting School Requirements:</u> provide clinical supervision (3)</p> <p><u>Consistency:</u> provide structured environment, Keep time commitment, uninterrupted supervision</p> <p><u>Availability:</u> be available</p>	<p><u>Facilitation of general learning:</u> answer my questions (4), provide educational experience</p> <p><u>Specific therapeutic skills:</u> learn to be helpful to a person through my words (2), theory (2), ways of intervening, how to sit with a client and be helpful, treatment planning, learn to engage the clients, learn about clinical and psychodynamic therapeutic relationship, prioritize issues with people with dual diagnoses</p>	<p><u>Beliefs:</u> be committed to anti-racism (2)</p> <p><u>Personal Attributes:</u> be friendly, be smarter and sharper, be willing to explore, be open, be honest, be professional</p>	<p><u>Ways supervisor related to the student:</u></p> <p><i>Listen:</i> listen to my concerns (2), listen to me (2), be open to who I am as a person, ask me questions, allow me to share my opinion, discuss counter transference issues(2), understand my perspective (2)</p> <p><i>Respect:</i> respect my ideas, treat me as a fellow human being, treat me as equal in intelligence, treat me with respect</p> <p><i>Caring/Helping:</i> be concerned about my counter-transference issues, help me out if I am stuck</p> <p><i>Validate:</i> be supportive of me (2), validate me</p> <p><i>Challenge:</i> challenge me, say things even if it is hard</p>

### *Supervisor Qualities*

Responses regarding students' expectations of their field supervisory relationships contained comments about the qualities their supervisors should possess. Among these are beliefs the supervisor should hold and personal attributes that are desired (see Table 2). Two students reported expecting that their supervisors would hold an anti-racism commitment. More commonly students would discuss desirable personal characteristics in their supervisors, including friendliness, intelligence and openness. One student reported, "I expected [the supervisor] would be more friendly... I expected [the supervisor] to be smarter or sharper." Another student reported, "I expected [the supervisor] to be professional." Yet another participant reported an expectation that the supervisor would "be willing to explore" and "be open and honest".

### *Relational Qualities*

Five themes emerged in this category that participants expressed as being important to them. Students expected supervisors to: listen, respect, care/help, validate and challenge them (see Table 2). One participant describes expectations as follows, "I was really hoping that she would be someone who would understand my perspective." Another participant reports, "I was expecting [the supervisor] to treat me as a fellow human being, equal in intelligence...I expected [the supervisor] to treat me with respect." A third participant reports, "I expected her to respect me. I expected her to listen to me, to be open to who I was a person and to respect my ideas and thoughts."

### *Positive Attributes of Supervisory Relationships*

Participants were asked to describe specific positive aspects of their supervisory relationships and their supervisors as people. The positive attributes of the supervisory

relationship participant responses were grouped into the same four major categories (structural, concrete knowledge, supervisor qualities, and relational qualities as above, and were also comprised of recurring themes. Specific themes in the responses will be described below.

### *Structural*

When describing their perceptions of positive attributes of their supervisory relationships, two participants described their supervisor as being available to them and another student described that their supervisor was very consistent. It is interesting to note that structural issues in the quality of the supervisory relationship were infrequently reported in positive terms in participant responses.

### *Concrete Knowledge*

A majority of participants spoke positively about concrete knowledge and skills that they were able to gain from their supervisory relationship (see Table 3). Two themes emerged in the responses in this area, including facilitation of general learning and specific general therapeutic skills. Students described how their supervisor: offered guidance, answered questions, facilitated learning, and helped [the student] find answers. Most commonly student discussed specific therapeutic skills learned from the supervisor. For example, one student described what they learned from their supervisor in the following way: [The supervisor] "...helped me to self-reflect before I would ask question. [The supervisor] helped me with my sitting with a client for 45 minutes." This student also states, [the supervisor] "...helped me sit and be engaged no matter what was going on in the relationship and a lot of those tools I bring with me now." Another student described concrete knowledge they attained,

I think [the supervisor] was helpful in terms of helping me understand how to best approach a patient and work with them in the limited time we had and what types of questions I might ask someone, for instance helping them develop a plan for sobriety after they left. I thought [the supervisor] was very very helpful in terms of helping me plan for someone's discharge and aftercare.

### *Supervisor Qualities*

Three themes came up for participants in the category of supervisor qualities, including beliefs (e.g. commitment to antiracism), personal traits (e.g. honest, intelligent, and professional), and habits (e.g. involved in my everyday learning & always pleasant). The most common qualities referred to in positive terms were supervisors' personal traits, as students described characteristics that they appreciated in their supervisors. One student stated, for example, that the supervisor:

... definitely was open and honest about communication and [the supervisor] was willing to answer any questions and if I had questions [the supervisor] didn't know the answer to [the supervisor] was willing to help me find the answers and also help me look at where my own stuff was getting in the way and be gentle about it.

*Table 3: Student Report of Positive Attributes of Supervisory Relationships: Illustration of Categories of Structural, Concrete Knowledge, Supervisor and Relational Qualities*

Structural	Concrete Knowledge	Supervisor Qualities	Relational Qualities
<p><u>Consistency:</u> consistency</p> <p><u>Availability:</u> available (2)</p>	<p><u>Facilitation of general learning:</u> offered guidance, answered questions, facilitated learning, helped me find answers</p> <p><u>Specific therapeutic skills:</u> helped me self-reflect, helped me learn to sit with a client, helped me be engaged with clients that were not that interesting, improved skill development, modeled positive conflict resolution, gave me materials (articles, community resources, and programs), very good at helping me learn to manage cases, helped me understand how to best approach patients and work with them in limited amount of time, helped me plan for someone's discharge and aftercare</p>	<p><u>Beliefs:</u> commitment to social justice and anti-racism</p> <p><u>Personal attributes:</u> respectful (6), patient(4), friendly (3), open (2), honest (2), good teacher (2), good sense of humor (2), gentle, consistent, intelligent, personable, authentic, diplomatic, skilled, knowledgeable, passionate, flexible, experienced, ability to quickly size people up, genuinely wanted to help me, very similar in the way we see the world, we had things in common, father figure, mentor</p> <p><u>Habits:</u> involved everyday in my learning, always pleasant, never seemed angry</p>	<p><u>Qualities present in the relationship:</u> good relationship (5), good communication (2), not much conflict,</p> <p><u>Ways supervisor related to the student:</u></p> <p><i>Listen:</i> attended to my counter transference issues with clients (2), asked me questions, picked my brain, asked about my supervisory experience, listened,</p> <p><i>Respect:</i> respected my learning style (3), respected my learning curve (2)</p> <p><i>Caring/ Accepting /Helping:</i> concerned about what was going on with me, took into account what I was bringing with me, did not make me feel stupid for not knowing things, let me grow on my own terms, let me work on my own uncertainties and insecurities, checked in with me, gave me space to do my own thing, invested in me as a person, valued making a relationship with me, took my perspective into account, did not complain about my work, positive about my professional development</p> <p><i>Validate:</i> offered encouragement (2), supported me (3), validated my experience</p> <p><i>Challenging:</i> challenged me (5), did not push me too hard</p> <p><u>Ways student felt because of the relationship:</u> I felt cared for, I felt special, I felt comfortable with supervisor, I felt safe to express frustration, confusion, or that I was overwhelmed.</p>

### *Relational Qualities*

The qualities most commonly spoken of in positive terms were relational, that is, those that had to do with how the supervisor related to the student. Within the category of relational qualities, three sub-types of relational qualities emerged in participant responses, including: qualities present in the relationship; the way the supervisor related to the student; and the way the student felt because of the relationship. Of these three sub-types, the most commonly described in positive terms was the way in which the supervisor related to the student. These responses were divided into five sub-themes: listen; respect; caring/accepting/helping; validate; and challenge. These came forward as being important factors for students in their relationships with their supervisors. One participant states, “I think the positive thing about it is because [the supervisor] didn’t make me feel like I was stupid for not knowing things. [The supervisor] was patient with me. [The supervisor] let me grow on my own terms. [The supervisor] pushed me enough but not to the point that I feel uncomfortable.” Another student states that the supervisor

... really listened to me. [The supervisor] validated my experience. [The supervisor] attended to my counter transference issues with clients. Also when it came to our relationship [the supervisor] would ask how it was going, if I was getting what I needed from the supervisory experience. And [the supervisor] took into account what I was bringing in with me and that I had had a recent loss and that I was still struggling with it.

A third participant states, “I did feel [the supervisor’s] support. [The supervisor’s] support was very positive. But I think that also goes a long way with how it worked out as well.”

### *Negative Attributes of Supervisory Relationships*

Participants were asked to describe specific negative aspects of their supervisory relationships. As with expectations and positive attributes, the negative attributes of the supervisory relationship participants reported have been sorted into the same four major categories: 1) structural, 2) concrete knowledge, 3) supervisor qualities, and 4) relational qualities (see Table 4). Each category will be described in detail below.

#### *Structural*

Structural issues became more of an issue in the awareness of students when asked what was negative in comparison to what was positive about their supervisory relationships. Seven out of the twelve participants reported some type of structural issue in their relationship. As above, the discussion by participants of structural issues fell into three major themes, including consistency, availability and school requirements.

The most common structural problem was missed or interrupted supervision times. This problem crosses all of the themes including consistency, availability and school requirements. One student, who highly rated their satisfaction with the relationship, giving it a 5.5 describes, “We were supposed to have two hours of supervision per week. I got one. And even that one wasn’t always available because [the supervisor] was an extremely busy man.” Another participant reports, “I’d walk in and be like, ‘oh yeah’ we’re not seeing each other today.” A third student said the supervisor “...didn’t have time for me. So we didn’t have the bare bones basic time to work together and our relationship was not a priority to [the supervisor]. Our relationship was secondary to the work we had to do for the patients.” Additionally, “agency context” was reported as influencing the supervisor’s ability to provide their supervisees with weekly

uninterrupted supervision time. Agency context and its effect on student satisfaction and learning in the field is discussed in greater length in a subsequent section of this chapter

Five participants expressed disappointment that supervisors either did not put enough time or emphasis on process recordings or did not request them at all. One participant reports a conflicted feeling about this,

In the whole 8 months I wrote perhaps 7 maybe 8 two page process recordings, half of those [the supervisor] returned perhaps...so in a sense the supervision wasn't rigorous and [the supervisor] wasn't demanding of my time or my energy, put towards supervision because [the supervisor] was too busy working as a social worker as opposed to a supervisor. And on one hand that bothered me and I felt like I was getting short changed, on the other hand, I wasn't able to get what I wanted in the first place and I didn't place it as great a priority.

Another student states,

I got kind of vague ideas I guess what the process recording was for, but in retrospect I realize how important the process recording is, going over with the supervisor, because you record, I mean you feel like a tape recorder, because you record and you write down what you were thinking at the time and then you try to go and analyze what happened or what ails your client. But that's only your feelings and that's how it went and without feedback, line by line, how would you know, how would you know you should be doing differently. Which direction could have been better. So that's what I missed, that's what I didn't get.

A third participant described disappointment that the supervisor "...did not request process recordings...and when I did give them to [the supervisor] we would never discuss what she had written, she would just hand them back to me. Sometimes [the supervisor] didn't hand them back to me."

As mentioned earlier, structural issues in the relationship were mostly reported in negative terms. Seven participants mentioned negative reports regarding structural issues, while only three participants mentioned structural issues in positive terms. Interestingly, however, although participants reported structural issues mostly in the negative, this



category of problem did not necessarily detract from their overall (positive) evaluation of the supervisory relationship or field experience. Out of the seven participants who reported a structural problem, three of those gave a low rating (below 5) associated with their satisfaction of the relationship and four gave high ratings (5 or above).

### *Concrete Knowledge*

Negative perceptions in this area involved participants feeling that they did not have their expectations met in terms of what they had hoped to learn in the relationship. Responses in this category are contained within two themes, facilitation of general learning and specific therapeutic skills. Under the theme of facilitation of general learning two students reported that they felt they didn't receive enough instruction from their supervisors. Another student stated that they had not received the information they needed. Also reported was desire for more specific therapeutic knowledge on the part of participants. Five participants described their disappointment that they had not learned more about theory. For example, one student stated, "I do wish [the supervisor] would have been a little more theoretically oriented and kind of have more to teach me in terms of theory."

Table 4: Student Report of Negative Attributes of Supervisory Relationships: Categories of Structural, Concrete Knowledge, Supervisor and Relational Qualities

Structural	Concrete Knowledge	Supervisor Qualities	Relational Qualities
<p><u>Consistency:</u> boundaries were unclear (2), expectations were unclear, supervision was interrupted</p> <p><u>Availability:</u> not meeting enough (2), not available</p> <p><u>Meeting School Requirements:</u> supervisor did not request process recordings (2), didn't discuss process recordings (2), missed supervisory times (2)</p>	<p><u>Facilitation of general learning:</u> not getting enough instruction (2), didn't give me the information I needed</p> <p><u>Specific Therapeutic Skills:</u> did not discuss theory enough (2), no counter transference discussion (2)</p>	<p><u>Beliefs:</u> racist, homophobic</p> <p><u>Personal Attributes:</u> too concrete (2), distant, harsh, disrespectful, unprofessional, did not let guard down</p> <p><u>Habits:</u> talked too much, "othered" people with their words, considered supervision a distraction from real work, easily angered, liked to gossip</p>	<p><u>Qualities Present in the Relationship:</u> lack of safety (2)</p> <p><u>Ways Supervisor related to the student:</u>  <i>Listen:</i> supervisor didn't listen (2), uncomfortable talking about counter-transference,  <i>Respect:</i> harsh, disrespectful, passive aggressive, yelled at me in front of other people, analyzed me,  <i>Caring/accepting/helping:</i> expectations were too high, supervisor thought they told me things when they had not, used personal information against me, would not answer questions,  <i>Challenging:</i> not enough constructive feedback</p>

### *Supervisor Qualities*

“Supervisor qualities” was another theme that emerged in the participants’ responses regarding what was negative about the relationship. Themes uncovered here were similar to those uncovered in the area of positive qualities, including beliefs, personal traits, and habits. Within the theme of beliefs, one student, who had given the relationship a very low rating, remarked on their perception of racism and homophobia in their supervisor, indicating that the supervisor was “...a nice person and stuff, but I definitely felt some underlying issues that [the supervisor’s] probably not aware of around racism and homophobia.” This student went on to discuss personal traits their supervisor possessed. The participant stated that their supervisor “...definitely didn’t respect who I was as a person. [The supervisor] would be fine as a friend but not as a supervisor. I mean [the supervisor] was really unprofessional in that way.” Another student discussed their supervisor’s personal traits, indicating that their supervisor’s “...style was pretty harsh and that was hard.” Students also described habits of their supervisors which they experienced as having negative effects on the relationship, including, talked too much, “othered” people with their words, and liked to gossip.

### *Relational Qualities*

Five participants reported negative relational supervisory relationship qualities that participants most commonly spoke about in negative terms were relational ones. Within this category, two overarching themes presented themselves, that is, qualities present in the relationship and ways the supervisor related to the student. Two people reported a lack of safety present in the relationship. Most of the issues in this category, however, were in the area of ways the supervisor related to students. These were coded

into four sub-themes, describing areas in which students reported needs that were not met in the relationship. These needs were to listen, respect, care/accept/help, and challenge the student. One participant states:

I didn't always feel like there was a lot of room for me to talk. At times I felt like my supervisor was a big talker and I tend to be more of a quiet person and need to sometimes be more assertive with speaking up but I had also had ideas that [the supervisor] might pick up on that and give me a little bit more space or a little bit more room to figure things out as opposed to just kind of letting me know what [the supervisor] thinks and then that is the answer.

This student discussed what it was like to talk about counter-transference issues in supervision, "it felt like [the supervisor] set really rigid boundaries around what I could disclose and not disclose [during supervision time]." Another student notes,

I think at heart [the supervisor] was not sure of the boundary between [the supervisor] and me in terms of how personal do we allow the relationship to get. Whether it's a kind of friendship or whether it becomes more personally intimate in terms of discussing some of my difficulties with certain clients based on a personal level.

One student described their desire to be challenged by their supervisor, indicating that the supervisor "...was so supportive of me that sometimes I was looking for a little bit more constructive feedback than what [the supervisor] was able to give me..."

### *Difficulties*

This section will describe participant's responses to being asked specifically to describe "difficulties" in their supervisory relationships. Some of the responses overlap with the previous section's responses. Overall, however, responses appearing in this category are more concrete than in the previous section describing negative attributes of participant's supervisory relationships. Participants were reluctant to include some aspects in this category that they freely described as negative in the previous section.

Additionally, participants’ emotions present themselves in this section, being described as difficulties. Responses describing difficulties in their relationships have been divided into two categories as follows: 1) Concrete problems; and 2) Supervisee physical and emotional reactions (see Table 5). Within the category of concrete problems, structural, communication and “power and boundaries” have been identified as themes within the difficulties emerging from participants’ responses. These themes will be discussed in further detail below.

*Table 5: Student Report of Difficulties in Supervisory Relationships: Concrete Problems and Supervisee Physical and Emotional Reactions*

Concrete Problems	Supervisee Physical & Emotional Reactions
<p><u>Structural</u> Did not understand how to use supervision, not enough time for process recordings, being over-worked, absent supervisor, unresponsive supervisor, supervisor acted like a boss, supervisor’s expectations were too high</p>	<p>Disappointment in the relationship (3), feeling isolated or alone (2), anxiety (2), being over-whelmed, taking things personally, somatic symptoms, student acting rebellious, pulling away from supervisory relationship</p>
<p><u>Power &amp; boundaries</u> Intimidated by their supervisor (3), knowledge of too much supervisor personal information (3), weak boundaries (2), feeling unsafe in the relationship (2), testing supervisor</p>	
<p><u>Communication</u> Difficulty discussing counter-transference due to rigid ideas about not sharing personal material in supervision (2), supervisor not understanding student, supervisor disagreed that race was an important issue to discuss</p>	

### *Concrete Problems*

These concrete issues regarding difficulties mirror those in the negative attributes section, particularly those listed under the structural category (see Table 5). The other two themes are: Communication; and Power and boundaries. These themes are described in detail below.

#### *Structural.*

Participants' additionally described structural problems in this section, as discussed in detail in the previous section. These were concrete problems identical to those in the negative attributes section.

#### *Communication.*

Issues in communication emerged as a central theme in the area of difficulties experienced in the supervisory relationship. Communication between the student and their field instructor was handled differently in each dyad. In their interviews students discussed thoughts and feelings that came up for them when considering whether or not to bring up a difficulty with their supervisor. This participant's statement speaks to the importance of communication in problem-solving in relationships and reflects the student's decision-making process in determining whether to bring something up,

[The problems] that were worked out were the ones I was able to talk about. And anything I wasn't able to talk about wasn't worked out except through personal compromise, to adapt to the environment basically. I feel in most situations, in most relationships, we just need to choose our battles, there's always going to be something.

Eight participants expressed anxiety in bringing up issues with their supervisors.

The group of participants quoted in this section gave ratings of 5 or above in satisfaction

of their supervisory relationships. One participant describes what got in the way of communication with their supervisor,

Sometimes I felt like if I had a problem, that it wasn't appropriate to tell [the supervisor]. I was really cognizant of, you know, I'm going to need to use this agency for networking when I graduate so I don't want to be a burden and I don't want to complain and so I felt like I had to hold my tongue a lot which was difficult because, as opposed to advocating for myself, I think sometimes I ended up not saying anything and then getting more frustrated as opposed to if I had just said something from the beginning. So I think that was the main difficulty, just really worrying about the future...

Another student reflected on their difficulty being open with their supervisor,

I felt like I couldn't talk to [the supervisor] about my concern with how [the supervisor] was handling the situation. It was easier for us to both talk together about [the situation] than for me to bring into the room some of the concerns about how [the supervisor] was handling the situation and you know I think part of it was me, my own...I didn't want to displace some of my anger [about the situation] and I wanted to maintain our relationship and be professional but I guess I just noticed that I wasn't able to talk to [the supervisor], almost at all, about any concerns I had with [the supervisor]... about any concerns I had with our relationship and that seems like a little bit of a problem.

Another participant discussed their discomfort and process of deciding whether or not to bring up a problem,

I think there were some [difficulties] that I just dealt with and moved on from and figured I'm taking stuff personally or this is how [the supervisor] is and I just need to get over it and then the other stuff if I felt like there was something sufficient enough to bring up, then I would do that. And it was uncomfortable.

An additional participant identified their lack of awareness that there was a difficulty in the relationship, as the reason they did not discuss it with their supervisor, "I didn't particularly address them, because I didn't know it was a challenge". This student went on to explain, "It was only a difficulty that I was able to pinpoint when it was over. While I was in the midst of it, I wouldn't have even raised it as a difficulty."

*Power and boundaries in the supervisory relationship.*

Although one student described appreciation of their supervisor's ability to boundary set in this way,

We didn't have a friendship, we didn't have any relationship outside of our supervision basically and that for me kind of helped me, just that clarity. I never expected anything from [the supervisor] other than what I consistently got.

the majority of discussion concerning boundaries primarily presented difficulties for students. The student went on to say,

It showed me a sense of [the supervisor's] professional boundaries as a supervisor and I know that not every supervisor would be like that but it was a good lesson for me in the way in which you could have a supervisor and go to them for things, but you're not exactly going to be close.

Other participants described the role that power and boundaries played in their supervisory relationships as difficulties. However they did not necessarily use these terms in describing this issue. Student perceptions of a power differential was sometimes expressed by participants in terms of noting differences between themselves and their supervisors, including in their educational level, knowledge base, work experience, and age. Three of the participants commented specifically on this dynamic. One student stated, "I was just so intimidated by [the supervisor's advanced academic degree] that I didn't want to really challenge [the supervisor] on anything even though sometimes I really did know the answer." Another participant spoke to this dynamic as well, "I felt intimidated as an intern and [the supervisor] being... you know, [the supervisor had] worked there for 18 years."

Another emerging theme from participant responses is boundaries. The following examples describe students' struggles with boundaries and lack of safety in the



relationship associated with this. A student described their perception of how the power differential contributed to their difficulty holding their boundaries in their supervisory relationship as follows:

Its just like this person who is more like an authority figure trying to go to places that are inappropriate for me...like with asking questions that [the supervisor] didn't have the right to know. But then me being a student and someone who doesn't have a lot of power or who doesn't think I have a lot of power, especially as a first year...I was like a deer in the headlights ...so I didn't realize that I didn't have to answer certain questions that [the supervisor] asked...

This participant indicated feeling more like a client than an intern: “[the supervisor] almost treated me as though I was a client of [theirs]...analyzing me and stuff.” This participant went on to explain that the supervisor,

...was definitely pushing boundaries...and I had to learn to keep those boundaries up and not answer [the supervisor's] questions just because [they were] my supervisor...so [the supervisor] definitely was inappropriate at times...like I said, with asking me questions about my childhood or assuming [the supervisor] knows what's best for me.

For this student quoted above, the lack of clear boundaries in the relationship led to a lack of safety in the relationship. The participant also stated:

....so that was how [the supervisor] was pushing my triggers...that whole authority and power thing...and [the supervisor] using that in a way that wasn't beneficial to our relationship. I don't think [the supervisor] realized that, but that was what [the supervisor] was doing. So I did not feel safe with [the supervisor]. So for me that was definitely pushing triggers around authority, power, control.

This student indicated a low satisfaction rating for the relationship, giving a 2, and a higher overall learning rating, giving a 4.5.

Another student also reported a need for clearer boundaries in their supervisory relationship, “I had an expectation of a more boundaried relationship and my supervisor, that wasn't much of a priority for [them], I think.” This participant also experienced a lack of safety in their supervisory relationship, “I think she was asking a lot of me and it

wasn't really feeling real safe for me in some ways but I did it anyways and then kind of resented it too and that feeling of unsafety. We needed to talk about it and we never did.” Even though this participant reported struggling with boundary and safety issues in the relationship, they still indicated a high satisfaction rating, giving a rating of 5 for the relationship, and a lower overall learning rating, of 4.

Another boundary issue in the supervisory relationship appeared when students became privy to their supervisor's personal issues. Students reported this brought up concerns for them about how much the supervisor could handle. One student described their emotional reaction after their supervisor disclosed personal issues in the context of the supervisory relationship.

So I think just between knowing [the supervisor's] history ..... and then also being worried about how, I guess, emotionally stable [the supervisor] was in the present and how much [the supervisor] would be able to take care of [themselves], I worried about how my bringing stuff to [the supervisor] might impact [the supervisor's] health.

Additionally, three other participants described the effect that having knowledge of their supervisor's personal or professional difficulties had on their relationships with their supervisors. This knowledge tended to cause students to be more aware of the supervisor's experience and therefore more likely to withhold their thoughts and feelings about their work in the agency in consideration of their supervisor circumstances. For one of these students, this knowledge made it not only harder to discuss difficulties in the relationship, but also made it harder for the student to reach out for help outside the relationship, not wanting to disclose supervisor's personal information and possibly damage their reputation. The participant stated, “so I didn't feel like I could say anything. Because if you find out that your supervisor has [a legal issue] and is [experiencing a personal problem], you know it's not something that you wanna discuss with everybody.

#### *Supervisee Physical & Emotional Reactions*

Difficulties occurring in this area involve internal perceptions of situations in the supervisory relationship and the feelings and behaviors arising therein. In many cases

concrete problems seemed to lead to emotional reactions, leading to a two-fold problem, the concrete compounded with the reaction. The participant quoted in the power and boundaries section described how issues of power and boundaries led to the student feeling unsafe in the relationship. Their supervisor holding unrealistic expectations invoked feelings in another student. The student stated that the supervisor "...seemed to have a lot of confidence in me and I felt at times, a little too much, just given the learning curve." The student went on to note, "I had to exert some energy to not get too frustrated by that. I had to process my disappointment in a way that wouldn't interfere with my work." Additionally, two participants also reported feeling uncomfortable contacting the field placement office and/or their faculty field advisors regarding difficulties with their supervisors.

#### How Difficulties Were Handled

Participants were asked how they handled difficulties in their supervisory relationships. Responses to this question have been grouped into two categories: 1) external strategies and 2) internal strategies (see Table 6). Both categories will be discussed in more detail below.

*Table 6: Student Report of How They Handled Difficulties in Supervisory Relationships: Internal and External Strategies*

External Strategies	Internal Strategies
Communicating their feelings about problems (11), get support and/or information from others (5), non-verbal communication, physical activity	Not taking things personally (6), acceptance, flexibility, compromise, trust supervisor's advice, revise expectations, gain insight, spirituality

### *External Strategies*

For the most part, participants reported being able to discuss difficulties within the context of the relationship. Eleven participants reported communicating their feelings about problems with their supervisors as a tactic they used to address problems in the relationship; the remaining participant reported being unaware of any difficulties during the relationship. These same participants also reported using other external sources of support for dealing with difficulties, outside of communication in the relationship. Five participants reported getting support and/or information from others. Non-verbal communication and physical activity were also cited as strategies used.

### *Internal Strategies*

Six participants indicated that they dealt with difficulties in the relationship, in part, by not taking things personally. Participants also reported using a range of other internal strategies, including: acceptance, compromise, trust supervisor's advice, revise expectations, gain insight, and spirituality.

### *What Could Have Made the Relationship More Satisfying?*

In an effort to learn what students identify as factors that might have contributed to improvement in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, participants were asked what they wish they had done differently, and what could have made their supervisory relationships more satisfying. These questions, by their nature, in effect ask participants to apply current year learning and experience to last year's supervisory relationships. The responses fell into three general areas: Differences in self, differences in supervisor, and differences in the field placement selection and assignment process.

### *Differences in Self*

Participants identified some things that they wished they had done differently within themselves, including: been more mature, been more open, been less guarded, learned what was expected faster, challenged themselves to look at clinical dynamics, and communicated more. Within the theme of communication, in general, students wished that they had spoken up more and been more open about what their needs were in the supervisory relationship. Seven of the participants expressed their wish that they had communicated more honestly with their supervisors about problems they were having in the field. Of these, two participants reported that they wished they had discussed the supervisory relationship more explicitly with their supervisor. Other responses indicate a desire for increased communication, including a desire to have: been more insistent about what they needed; asked to be challenged; asked for process recordings to be a bigger priority; asked for more clinical supervision, including in the areas of dynamics, theory, counter-transference, and transference issues.

### *Differences in Supervisor*

Next, there were responses that indicated a desire for a change in how the supervisor had been, including a wish that their supervisor: had more reasonable expectations, were more self-reflective, more professional, more clinical, had more experience, had more time and attention for process recordings, had made the relationship more of a priority, had more time for the student, were able to meet more regularly, and had provided uninterrupted supervision time. Additionally, one participant thought it would be helpful for both student and supervisor to talk about expectations in more detail from the beginning of the relationship.

### *Differences in the Field Placement Selection and Assignment Process*

Finally are the comments about issues that the social work school has the power to change. A participant under age 40 noted that there is “no screening process for supervisors” and added that this lack is a “systemic issue”. One additional participant discussed the “innocuous” nature of the “anti-racism task force” and wondered if it might have been able to help them with difficulties with their supervisor and agency regarding racism and homophobia. This participant also described a need for an “anti-oppression field committee” which could help students in the field.

### *Learning*

A couple of themes emerged with regard to learning. Major themes are professional skill development and flexibility & acceptance. This section will first present findings in the area of learning in terms of student’s professional skill development, followed by a presentation of the two closely related themes of flexibility and acceptance.

#### *Professional Skill Development*

Participants were asked to talk about how their supervisory relationships positively or negatively contributed to their professional skill development. Participants named skills that they developed during their time with their supervisors. Most reported that the relationship positively affected their skill development in the following areas: 1) professionalism, 2) concrete skills, and 3) process-oriented skills. The table below illustrates skills developed by students, as facilitated by supervisory relationships.

*Table 7: Student Report of Professional Skill Development in Field Supervisory Relationships: Themes of Professionalism and Concrete and Process-Oriented Skills*

Professionalism	Concrete Skills	Process-Oriented Skills
Professionalism (2), working in a team (2), how to talk to other therapists	Concrete knowledge (3), ability to listen to themes, be a advocate for self and others (2), be assertive, ability to apply basic theory, ability to communicate clearly, ability to sit with people importance of treating people equally, ability to deal with emergency situations, hold a realistic view of authority, comfort in being in a learner role	Flexibility (6), confidence (3), process of continual learning in the profession(2), developing curiosity (2), examination of counter-transference issues, self-care

Additionally, two of the participants who gave their supervisory relationships low ratings had something different to say on the topic of skill development. One stated that the supervisory relationship “...absolutely inhibited my professional skill development in the area of clinical psychotherapy with [the specific population].” Another student reported, “In the end, I don’t think [the supervisory relationship] impacted [student’s professional skill development] that much and I will say that because in the end I was able to learn from so many people on the unit.” This student went on to describe, “It’s like a kid who realizes he can learn a lot from other students and that the teacher is nice to have but not as necessary as they might have thought. Ultimately it was a loss.”

*Flexibility and Acceptance*

Two major themes in the area of learning are flexibility and acceptance. Flexibility was the most common skill employed to enable student learning in supervisory relationships, as reported by participants. More specifically, five participants

reported that the more they developed an ability to become flexible in their expectations, needs, attitudes and/or understanding, the more they were able to learn from their relationships. For example:

I think after the first 3 or 4 months I came around and I realized that yeah the [type of placement] wasn't exactly a good match for me but I could still take a lot from it and I could take a lot from my supervisor and that I think that is when things started to change as far as the difficulties in our relationship and what I could actually take from the experience.

This student went on to say, "I wasn't that happy at the internship because I wasn't learning what I thought I wanted to learn and simply realized that I've got to make the best of it and take everything I can from it. And so I revised my expectations."

Another participant described their ability to be flexible in their learning process as well, "I was constantly adjusting my attitudes about what social work supervision is throughout my internship."

Another participant discussed the use of flexibility and acceptance in dealing with a difficulty encountered regarding the supervisor's harshness in the context of a learning relationship. The participant noticed, however that the supervisor was also harsh with others as well. This participant stated, "Well. This is [the supervisor]. This isn't me necessarily and so it was a little easier to try to not take it so personally." The student went on the express, "I had to try to respect what [the supervisor] was teaching me; [the supervisor] had been doing it for a while." The theme of not taking things personally simultaneously facilitates learning through flexibility, as shown here, and as a tool used in order to address difficulties internally, as shown in the handling difficulties section of this chapter.



Another function of developing the skill of flexibility was to help the student cope with disappointment in their supervisory relationship. The following participant reported having to become more flexible about concrete needs, when their supervisor would have to cancel or reschedule supervision times,

I had to learn to handle it.... because supervision was.... I looked forward to it, because I got so much from it, that in my mind I had to say okay, it might not happen right now. And know that [the supervisor] would always get back to me but, just kinda not set myself up for feeling like, I have that place to take this all, and then it not happen. And so I kinda just had to learn to not put so much, like, importance on the time, or look forward to a certain time during the week, but be flexible.

Another participant described using flexibility as a way to cope with their disappointment as well, “At the end of the day I had to let it go and realize that I wasn’t going to get more out of the relationship.” In letting go of existing expectations, another skill is employed as well: acceptance. None of the participants brought up “acceptance” as a learned skill per se, but much of what has been discussed in this section also reflects the development of acceptance for situations and in relationships. One participant discussed an interaction with their supervisor in which the participant had expressed a difficulty they were having, “I think that we talked about that and we both accepted the differences and were able to make the best of it.” Another participant cited the use of acceptance with a difficulty with their supervisor’s busy schedule and in not being available for the student, saying, “Actually, I accepted it, I accepted that [the supervisor] was doing the best that [the supervisor] could.”

## *Other Influences*

### *Agency Context*

When asked the question, “What, if any, were outside elements that significantly affected the supervisory relationship?” eight of the participants brought up the context of the agency as a factor that played a role in their supervisory relationships. One participant discussed turmoil at the agency that affected the supervisor’s mood, stating “the agency itself was going through a lot of turmoil with budget cuts and everything. So that influenced my supervisor’s mood about [their] job and there was a lot of uncertainty going on all around.” Two of the participants described their agencies as unsupportive of their supervision time, for example

The big outside element of the relationship would be the agency, because we were not supported in our effort, for example, to schedule supervision time. We would try to schedule it but, we could be in the middle of it and then, all of a sudden, we could be interrupted or they would just schedule something in its place.

Two other participants reported the climate of their agencies was not equally supportive of social justice issues, for example

It was kind of, like the director of the agency was a real kind of more conservative, more like ‘do it my way or get out of the program’. I don’t know...pro-gun. I don’t know, not even that relevant, but more of a hard line and I would say in some ways kind of a masculinist type of person and that kind of seeped down into the program.

When dealing with an agency which was not fully committed to social justice, two participants reported feeling like they became an ally with their supervisors against the agency. One student reports, “I mean, I guess I’m just thinking there was a way where it kind of became like me and [the supervisor] against the agency”.

Alternatively, two other students felt that their agency contexts contributed to their feeling of being a strong part of a team environment, “The particulars of the agency and the population and outside elements were also the extremely collaborative, supportive work environment that I got to shadow and observe other clinicians. I got to talk to other clinicians very freely and be part of teams.” Another participant described that the supervisor had so much power, being the director of the agency, that they, as the supervisee, were able to easily meet educational goals and have access to opportunities that they might not otherwise have had.

#### *Timing of Interviews*

It is noteworthy that four of the participants commented on how the timing of the interview, that is, taking place near the end of their second year placement, may have affected their responses on the subject. Two participants expressed difficulty in recalling the answers to the questions I was asking. One participant responded to the question exploring how their experiences compared with expectations by saying, “I’m sorry! I am digging it up from the past. It is hard to remember!” Another stated, “I’m trying so hard cuz I remember this year so much better than last year.”

Three participants reported believing that their responses to interview questions would have been different had they taken place directly after their first year internship. Participants remarked that putting their experience in context with current year’s internship changes their opinion of the experience. One participant stated that they believed they would have reported being less satisfied had they done the interview earlier,

I want to put a disclaimer on this conversation we're having right now because I think I might have answered differently last year, just comparing last year's relationship to this year's relationship. Now I would say that it was a very positive relationship and [the supervisor] was very supportive of me and it was also [the supervisor's] first time being a supervisor so we were both sort of novices in the whole experiment.

Two other participants, however, reported feeling that they were more critical of the relationship as they have had more time to reflect, for example

It's hard not to bring this year in, you know, cause if you gave me the survey last year it would have been like "oh, it's great, it's great!" you know what... So I think it's great timing that you do it now, because we have a second year of supervision, that although we're not directly contrasting our responses to it you can't help but have grown in what your needs and what your experience is of the whole relationship, you know?

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This study's objective was to explore student perceptions of the factors that contribute to student satisfaction and dissatisfaction in field supervisory relationships. The study also involved exploring the impact of student perceptions regarding expectations, difficulties and learning, as well as their understanding about what could have made their relationships better. The discussion chapter will explore how major findings relate to previous studies and theories presented in the literature review.

#### *Major Findings*

The results indicate the field supervisory relationship is a resilient and complex multi-layered relationship existing on many levels. All participants identified their supervisory relationships to be significant in their satisfaction and learning in the field placement environment. It is helpful for the Smith College School for Social Work community to understand the categories and themes which comprise student satisfaction for purposes of education and preparation of students and supervisors alike.

#### *Effect of demographics on the relationship*

No specific conclusions can be made regarding the effect of gender on supervisory relationships. In part, this is because of the high incidence of same sex dyads in the sample. The writer is surprised that none of the participants commented on gender at all in terms of communication or dynamics with their supervisors.

Contrary to the study conducted by Fortune et al (1985), in which older students were found to be slightly more satisfied with supervisory relationships than younger students, in this study the three lowest scores for supervisory satisfaction were widely spread out in terms of age in that one participant was in their 30's, one was in their 40's and one was in their 50's. However, there was no participant from their twenties in the sample that was dissatisfied with their supervisory relationship. Therefore findings for the current study contradict the findings in the Fortune et al (1985) study. Additionally older students did demonstrate a tendency to think that age may have played a factor in difficulties that took place in the relationship, when they were older than their supervisors. Whether or not age was a factor, simply the perception that their age was a possible source of conflict points to a potential vulnerability for older students. Among the dyads in which supervisors were considerably older than their supervisees, two students commented on this difference in age resulting in a difference in schooling and values. In both cases students in this situation were able to accept this as a shortcoming of the supervisor and were still able to learn from them. On the other hand the older students, if they perceived that the problem was located in themselves, had a harder time having a good enough relationship with their supervisors to have a positive experience.

Along with age, findings show that race and sexual orientation can be issues impacting student satisfaction. Findings support the Newman et al (2008) study exploring self-disclosure for students identifying with a sexual minority status, indicating that students do want to reveal their identities and work on integration of their social identities in their work. In this way, race also impacted participant's experience of their supervisory relationships. Also supported by the findings were Cook and Helms (1988)

conclusion that satisfaction ratings went up for racial and ethnic minority supervisees if they felt their supervisor of another race “liked them.” These demographic differences in the field indicate the presence of an extra layer for students to navigate and attend to in their relationships. As consistent with the findings of Gatmon et al (2001), the degree and depth of discussion regarding cultural differences between supervisors and supervisees increase satisfaction with the field supervisory relationships. Additionally results from this limited study suggest that discussion of other demographic differences also indicate higher satisfaction ratings for students.

### *Satisfaction & Learning*

The majority of the participants were satisfied with their supervisory relationships. This finding supports the work of Strozier, Barnett-Queen and Bennett (2000) showing the “majority of social work students express satisfaction with supervision” (p.34; Kadushin, 1992). The connection between satisfaction and learning is clear in the results as well, as learning and satisfaction ratings were closely tied to each other, showing only one or two point differences between them. This finding supports Fortune and Abramson (1993) study, in which the authors state their conclusion that satisfaction has a clear impact on learning.

Analysis indicates positive and negative attributes of the relationship fell into distinct categories that the author labeled “structural”, “concrete knowledge”, “supervisory qualities”, and “relational qualities”. Findings indicate when negative descriptions were present in all four categories, satisfaction and learning ratings were significantly low. This data suggests that although the supervisory relationship is a resilient one, there are limits to the challenges this relationship can withstand. Relational

qualities have been found to be the most predictive of satisfaction for participants, and lack of negative responses in this category helped to balance out sometimes very significant difficulties in the other areas.

Satisfaction was additionally linked to the number of categories in which the student identified difficulties, or negative descriptions, in their relationship. Specifically connected to satisfaction ratings were reports about the relational qualities present in the relationship, including communication or expression of the five themes identified: Listen, Respect, Caring/Accepting/Helping, Validate and Challenge. These findings are similar to the quantitative study conducted by Fortune and Abramson (1993) in which findings concluded the most powerful predictors of student satisfaction were: “trust, support, openness, and availability”; “involvement in active learning, including participation in designing experiences, independence, and encouragement to express ideas”; and opportunities for “critical feedback, connections with the next steps of learning, and role modeling” (p. 106). This finding appears particularly meaningful in supporting the conclusion that the relational component of the supervisory relationship is the most predictive in student satisfaction and thereby on learning as well. This finding provides evidence for increased emphasis on the relational aspect of supervisory relationships in supervisor training programs, and in student preparation for the field. In this regard, understanding the importance supervisors place on the relational component of their supervisory relationships would be a fruitful area for further study.

*Difficulties: Anxiety, Communication, Power and Boundaries*

Difficulties were reported by participants specifically in areas of anxiety, communication, power, and boundaries. Although participants were not specifically



asked about their anxiety levels, many responses indicated high levels of anxiety particularly around communication and conflict resolution with their supervisor. Results of this study support the position of Hacker (2001) stating that more training and discussion should take place before the placement begins to decrease anxiety levels and promote more realistic expectations.

Additionally, since nearly all participants involved in the study reported communication with their supervisors as an important factor in their relationships, students could benefit from more information and preparation for how to approach communication in their supervisory relationships, including any problems that might rise. Overall, issues were worked out which were openly discussed with supervisors. Additionally many participants never brought up problems that were on their minds to supervisors. This suggests that further training and education on this topic may be helpful, enabling students to use such education to better resolve issues with their supervisors in the field, reduce stigma of open dialog in these areas and encourage vulnerability, thus strengthening relationships.

The findings support the writings of Jacobs (1991) regarding power and boundary violations. The power differential was an area of concern and anxiety for students. Additionally, boundaries came up in reports of several students indicating that students have a difficult time holding their boundaries when supervisors are crossing lines that feel uncomfortable for them. In this way the power differential lends itself to boundary violations in some cases. Acknowledgement of this area of anxiety can open up an opportunity for supervisors and agencies to openly address issues of power differential to better understand students' reactions to authority and encourage communication on this

subject, the lack of which leads to student discomfort and perception of lack of safety in the relationship.

#### *Handling Difficulties: Flexibility and Acceptance*

Flexibility in handling difficulties in the field was one of the most widely reported tactics utilized by students. Students described being able to use flexibility to modify their needs, attitudes, expectations and understanding. Participants' use of acceptance was equally interesting. These skills facilitated the ability for students to get as much as they could from supervisory relationships. Additionally, not taking things personally seemed to support students' effort to be flexible and ultimately accept the sometimes difficult situations which with they were presented. Study aimed at understanding more completely what allows students to access and apply these skills may yield findings that would be helpful in furthering student development in the ability to learn.

#### *Attachment and Learning Theory*

Attachment patterns present themselves in students' relationships with their supervisor. In fact, each participant in the relationship, including the student and the supervisor, come with their preexisting attachment style established from experiences in earlier life. This informs the development of the supervisory relationship, and raises possible difficulties in the dyads, if the attachment styles do not match up. Looking through this lens, it is clear that participants are in fact reacting to more than just the present moment in supervisory relationships, and in effect are bringing their whole life histories of relationships with them. It is helpful to apply the knowledge derived from this theoretical base to the findings as presented, particularly as they illustrate the uniqueness of each individual's response to the supervisory relationship.

Additionally, learning theory can be applied to the emerging themes found in students' responses describing attributes of supervisory relationships. Specifically, emotional aspects of learning can be seen in the relational category describing how the supervisor and the supervisee relate to each other and how supported the student felt in the relationship. Cognitive aspects of learning can be seen in the themes of concrete knowledge, describing what the student learned or desired to learn. The environmental aspect of learning can be seen in responses involving the role that the agency context played in their experience of the relationship. Learning theory is helpful in viewing the responses in a varied way including a multilayered context and view of all the elements involved in learning.

#### *Research Implications*

This study was exploratory in nature with the hope that it may guide future research on the topic. Further exploration into specific skills of flexibility and acceptance and their use in field learning are indicated and would deepen the understanding of next steps toward the facilitation of learning in the field. Further research into problems of communication, anxiety, power and boundaries in the field is also indicated.

#### *Social Work Implications*

The group of MSW students interviewed for this study reported that communication, anxiety, power and boundaries were all areas difficulty in their supervisory relationships. These themes should be taken into account in planning for curriculum addressing student preparation for field placement. Additionally an understanding of the use of flexibility and acceptance in field learning can be helpful for students to have in their tool belts as they prepare to enter the field. Further education and

orientation to the skills needed and goals of the supervisory relationship could considerably increase student's ability to cope and take best advantage of their training opportunities.

### *Limitations*

There were several limitations to this study. In terms of generalizability, this study utilized a small sample, drawing from a sampling frame of one class year at Smith College School for Social Work. Although the strength of the sample was in its overrepresentation of people of color (compared to the sampling frame from which it was drawn), nevertheless, the small size of the sample places limits on its generalizability to the larger population of social work students. Furthermore, because respondents self-selected to be part of the study, there may be additional reasons participants stepped forward to participate, thus biasing the data in unknown and unanticipated ways.

Another limitation is in the fact that the researcher is also a Smith School for Social Work student, also receiving supervision. Although every attempt was made to remain neutral, the analysis and interpretation of the data is influenced by the writer's perspective on the subject of supervision.

### *Conclusion*

The findings from interviews with 12 Masters in Social Work students regarding their supervisory relationships indicate that student satisfaction and learning are closely related. The relational component of the relationship has been identified as most instrumental in satisfaction and learning ratings. Results also identify communication, power and boundaries as significant difficulties for students even with high satisfaction ratings. Findings additionally suggest that student use of flexibility and acceptance are

factors that may boost satisfaction ratings. Although the majority of students were satisfied with their supervisory relationships, more orientation about the nature of supervisory relationships is indicated and could significantly aid in overall student learning. It is hoped that the findings from this study will further inform efforts leading to improvement and proactive problem-solving in the supervisor/supervisee dyad.

## References

- Anastas, J. W., & MacDonald, M. L. (1994). *Research design for social work and the human services*. New York: Lexington Books; Toronto; New York: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; Maxwell Macmillan International.
- Bahrlick, A. S., Russell, R. K., & Salmi, S. W. (1991). The effects of role induction on trainees' perceptions of supervision. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 69*, 434-438.
- Barnette, V. (1999). *Majority and minority supervisees' perceptions of clinical supervision*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.
- Barron, C. S. (2000). *Intersubjectivity in the context of the supervisory relationship and its impact on students' professional identity development: Implications for clinical social work education: A project based upon an independent investigation*. Unpublished master's thesis, Smith College School for Social Work, Northampton, Massachusetts.
- Behling, J., Curlis, C., & Foster, S. A. (1982). Impact of sex-role combinations on student performance in field instruction. *Journal of Education for Social Work, 18*(2), 93-97.
- Bennett, S., & Saks, L. (2006). A conceptual application of attachment theory and research to the social work student-field instructor supervisory relationship. *Journal of Social Work Education, 42*(3), 669-682.
- Bernard, J. M. (2005). Tracing the development of clinical supervision. *Clinical Supervisor, 24*(1), 3-21.
- Bogo, M. (1993). The student/field instructor relationship: The critical factor in field education. *Clinical Supervisor, 11*(2), 23-36.
- Bogo, M. (2005). Field instruction in social work: A review of the research literature. *Clinical Supervisor, 24*(1), 163-193.
- Bonosky, N. (1995). Boundary violations in social work supervision: Clinical, educational and legal implications. *The Clinical Supervisor, 13*(2), 79-95.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. New York: Basic Books.

- Burke, W. R., Goodyear, R. K., & Guzzard, C. R. (1998). Weakenings and repairs in supervisory alliances: A multiple-case study. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 52(4), 450-462.
- Cook, D. A., & Helms, J. E. (1988). Visible racial/ethnic group supervisees' satisfaction with cross-cultural supervision as predicted by relationship characteristics. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 35(3), 268-274.
- Crespi, T. (1995). Gender sensitive supervision: Exploring feminist perspectives for male and female supervisors. *Clinical Supervisor*, 13(2), 19-29.
- Dore, M. M. (1990). Functional theory: Its history and influence on contemporary social work practice. *Social Service Review*, 64(3), 358-374.
- Fonagy, P. (2003). The development of psychopathology from infancy to adulthood: The mysterious unfolding of disturbance in time. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 24(3), 212-239.
- Fortune, A., & Abramson, J. (1993). Predictors of satisfaction with field practicum among social work students. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 11(1), 95-210.
- Fortune, A., Feathers, C., & Rook, S. (1985). Student satisfaction with field placement. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 21(3), 92-104.
- Fortune, A., McCarthy, M., & Abramson, J. (2001). Student learning processes in field education: Relationship of learning activities to quality of field instruction, satisfaction, and performance among MSW students. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 37(1), 111-126.
- Fox, R., & Guild, P. (1987). Learning styles: Their relevance to clinical supervision. *Clinical Supervisor*, 5(3), 65-77.
- Gard, D., & Lewis, J. (2008). Building the supervisory alliance with beginning therapists. *Clinical Supervisor*, 27(1), 39-60.
- Garrett, A. M. (1954). *Learning through supervision*. Northampton: Mass., Smith College School of Social Work.
- Gatmon, D., Jackson, D., Koshkarian, L., Martos-Perry, N., Molina, A., Patel, N. (2001). Exploring ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation variables in supervision: Do they really matter? *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 29(2), 102-113.
- Gelman, C. (2004). Anxiety experienced by foundation-year MSW students entering field placement: Implications for admissions, curriculum, and field education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 40(1), 39-54.

- Giddings, M., Vodde, R., & Cleveland, P. (2003). Examining student-field instructor problems in practicum: Beyond student satisfaction measures. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 22(2), 191-214.
- Goodyear, R. K., & Bernard, J. M. (1998). Clinical supervision: Lessons from the literature. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 38(1), 6-22.
- Granello, D. H. (2003). Influence strategies in the supervisory dyad: An investigation into the effects of gender and age. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 42(3), 189-202.
- Hacker, T. S. (2001). *Exploratory study of MSW students' perspectives on the impact of supervision on their training experience, sense of professional identity, and clinical ability: A project based upon independent investigation*. Unpublished masters thesis, Smith College School for Social Work, Northampton, Massachusetts.
- Hartman, C., & Brieger, K. (1992). Cross-gender supervision and sexuality. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 10(1), 71-81.
- Hawthorne, L. (1975). Games supervisors play. *Social Work*, 20(3), 179-183.
- Herron, W. G., & Teitelbaum, S. (2001). Traditional and intersubjective supervision. *Clinical Supervisor*, 20(1), 145-159.
- Hilton, D. B., Russell, R. K., & Salmi, S. W. (1995). The effects of supervisor's race and level of support on perceptions of supervision. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, J(73), 559-563.
- Hird, J. S., Tao, K. W., & Gloria, A. M. (2004). Examining supervisors' multicultural competence in racially similar and different supervision dyads. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 23(2), 107-122.
- Illeris, K. (2004). Transformative learning in the perspective of a comprehensive learning theory. *Journal of Transformative Education*, (2), 79.
- Jacobs, C. (1991). Violations of the supervisory relationship: An ethical and educational blind spot. *Social Work*, 36(2), 130-135.
- Kadushin, A. (1992). *Supervision in social work* (3rd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kadushin, A., & Harkness, D. (2002). *Supervision in social work* (4th ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.



- Leong, F. T., & Wagner, N. S. (1994). Cross-cultural counseling supervision: What do we know? what do we need to know? *Counselor Education and Supervision, 34*, 117-131.
- Marvin, R., Cooper, G., Hoffman, K., & Powell, B. (2002). The circle of security project: Attachment-based intervention with caregiver-pre-school child dyads. *Attachment & Human Development, 4*(1), 107-124.
- Mueller, W. J., & Kell, B. L., (1971). *Coping with conflict; supervising counselors and psychotherapists*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Munson, C. E. (2002). *Handbook of clinical social work supervision* (3rd ed.). Binghamton, NY: Haworth Social Work Practice.
- Newman, P. A., Bogo, M., & Daley, A. D. (2008). Self-disclosure of sexual orientation in social work field education: Field instructor and lesbian and gay student perspectives. *The Clinical Supervisor, 27*(2), 215-237.
- Robinson, V. (1936). *Supervision in social casework*. Chapel Hill: University of N.C. Press.
- Rosenblatt, A., & Mayer, J. E. (1975). Objectionable supervisory styles: Students' views. *Social Work, 20*(3), 184-189.
- Sarnat, J. E. (1992). Supervision in relationship: Resolving the teach-treat controversy in psychoanalytic supervision. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 9*(3), 387-403.
- Satterly, B. A., & Dyson, D. (2008). Sexual minority supervision. *The Clinical Supervisor, 27*(1), 17-38.
- Shulman, L. (2008). Supervision. In *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (e-reference edition ed.). Oxford University Press: National Association of Social Workers and Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Shulman, L. (2005). The clinical supervisor-practitioner working alliance: A parallel process. *Clinical Supervisor, 24*(1), 23-47.
- Strozier, A., Barnett-Queen, T., & Bennett, C. (2000). Supervision: Critical process and outcome variables. *Clinical Supervisor, 19*(1), 21-39.
- Timms, N. (1997). Taking social work seriously: The contribution of the functional school. *British Journal of Social Work, 27*, 723-737.
- Towle, C. (1963). The place of help in supervision. *Social Service Review, 37*(4), 403-415.

- Towle, C. (1954). *The learner in education for the professions, as seen in education for social work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vayda, E., & Bogo, M. (1991). A teaching model to unite classroom and field. *Journal of Social Work Education, 27*, 271-278.
- Vonk, M. E., & Zucrow, E. (1996). Female MSW students' satisfaction with practicum supervision: The effect of supervisor gender. *Journal of Social Work Education, 32*(3), 415-420.
- Worthington, E., & Stern (1985). Effects of supervisor and supervisee degree level and gender on the supervisory relationship. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 32*(2), 252-262.

## Appendix A

### Recruitment Email

Dear Fellow Smith MSW 2<sup>nd</sup> year students,

I have received permission from the Smith School for Social Work to contact you in order to request your participation in this study. I am doing my thesis on the supervisory relationship from the student perspective. In this study, participants will be asked to reflect on their previous year's supervisory relationship. The study will be qualitative, conducted by telephone, and will last about an hour in duration. The interview questions will explore student expectations, learning, professional development and factors leading to satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the supervisory relationship. This study will increase understanding of this important educational relationship.

I am writing to inquire if you would be interested in participating in the project. Ultimately I need to select 12 to 15 subjects. I will build a diverse sample on a first come first serve basis in terms of age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. I will be gathering demographic information in order to study the effects of this information on student's experience within the supervisory relationship. All interested participants will be informed if their participation will be required based on the number of responses received.

Please respond by email if you would be willing to participate in this study. All responses will be kept confidential. In your response please include the following information:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Gender Identity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Preferred Time for Telephone Interview: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Thanks for your consideration,  
Emy Fehmi, A'09

## Appendix B

### Response Email

Thank-you for your response, and for expressing your willingness to participate in my study regarding the supervisory relationship. Participants have been selected on a first come first basis while keeping in mind individual characteristics of age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Because I have received a lot of responses and am only able to interview 12 to 15 participants, your participation will not be required at this time. However, you may be contacted in the future should there be a need for additional participants.

Thank you again for your response,  
Emy Fehmi, A'09

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent Form

March , 2009

Dear Study Participant,

My name is Emy Fehmi and I am a fellow student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study exploring the student perspectives on the supervisory experiences during their MSW field placements. A further understanding of specific experiences of students taking place in the field will aid in the comprehension of needs of this group and will help refine and strengthen social work practice. . This project is being conducted for the purposes of thesis, presentation, and publication.

Participants have been mailed this consent form and are being asked to sign and return the form in the envelope provided, prior to their interview. Participants may be contacted by email as a reminder, if consent forms are not returned in a timely manner.

You are being asked to participate in a study with other second year social work students at Smith School of Social Work. Participants will include second year students from the Smith College School for Social Work who have completed one year of internship. Participants have been selected on a first come first serve basis among the group of students who responded to a pre-screening questionnaire to ensure the greatest possible diversity in the sample.

You will be asked to participate in a phone interview lasting roughly one hour in length. This interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy. You will be asked to reflect on your supervisory relationship from the previous year's internship in the areas of student expectations, learning, professional development and factors leading to satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the supervisory relationship. Demographic data for participants, and supervisors will also be collected. All data, once submitted, will be stored securely, following ethical guidelines.

Minimal risk from participation is expected. It is possible that reflection on responses to some questions may be emotionally difficult for some participants. However all survey questions will be kept within the boundaries of accepted learning and content in a professional social work program. All information will be held in confidence.

By participating in this study you may gain new insight on your experience as you are asked to explain your perspective of your relationship with your supervisor. Your participation will additionally be helpful to MSW supervisors and supervisees. The data collected by your answers will contribute to our understanding of the components that may be related to the general success of the field placement experience and future needs

regarding MSW training experiences. You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

All personal information from your survey will be kept confidential. When using this data for presentation purposes, all possible identifiers will be omitted. All quotes will be disguised to minimize the chance that others will be able to identify participants, but considering this is such a small population, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw your information at any time before April 1, 2009. If you withdraw from the study, all materials relating to you will be immediately destroyed. Should you have any concerns about the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact me at the email or phone number listed below, or the chair of the SSW HSR Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Contact:**  
Emy Fehmi  
xxxx xxxxxxxx Ave.  
Los Angeles, Ca. 90029  
xxxxxx@email.smith.edu  
(xxx) xxx - xxxx

Please keep a copy of this consent for your records.

Appendix D

Interview Guide

**Supervisor Demographics**

Race/ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender Identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall was your supervisory relationship satisfactory or unsatisfactory? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
(1 = very dissatisfied, 7 = very satisfied)

Overall how much did you learn? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
(1 = very dissatisfied, 7 = very satisfied)

**What were your expectations of your supervisory relationship?**

**How did your supervisory relationship compare with your expectations?**

**How did your supervisory relationship work out or not work out?**

**What was positive about the relationship?**

**What was negative about the relationship?**

**If there were difficulties, what were they?**

**How did you handle difficulties in your supervisory relationship?**

**Were these difficulties worked out? If so, how?**

**What do you wish you had done differently?**

**How did your relationship positively or negatively effect your professional skill development?**

**What, if any, were outside elements that significantly affected the supervisory relationship?**

**Is there anything that could have helped the relationship be more satisfying?**

## Appendix E

### Human Subjects Review Approval Letter

March 7 2009

Emy Fehmi

Dear Emy,

Your revised materials have been reviewed and you have done a great job. All is now in order and we are pleased to give final approval to your study.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,  
Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Beth Lewis, Research Advisor