Similarities and Differences Between Thesis Supervision and Counselling

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Abstract

Thesis supervison can bring to light unresolved and new psychological issues for both supervisors and students. What makes thesis supervision especially difficult is that supervisors have no official mandate to deal with disruptive psychological processes. In fact, there are prohibitions against such interpersonal involvement. Those supervisors who move beyond the borders of traditional, rationally based, problem solving are engaging in a bootleg activity. The similarities and differences between the contexts of thesis supervision and counselling are discussed with a view to highlighting this problem and with particular reference to transference phenomena.

Résumé

La direction de thèses peut révéler—pour les étudiants et les directeurs—de nouvelles questions psychologiques non résolues. L'absence de mandat officiel pour résoudre les processus psychologiques nuisibles peut rendre la tâche du directeur difficile. En fait, il est interdit au directeur d'intervenir d'une façon personnelle. Les directeurs dépassant le cadre traditionnel et rationnel de la résolution de problèmes le font à leurs risques et périls. Afin d'attirer l'attention sur ce problème lié notamment aux phénomènes de transfert, les similarités et différences des contextes de direction de thèses et de counseling sont examinées.

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to some interpersonal difficulties endemic to academic thesis supervision regardless of the area of specialization. I plan to identify some similarities and differences between counsellor's relationships with their clients and thesis supervisor's relationships with their students. The central issue of interest in this paper is the ambiguity of the role of thesis supervisor when it comes to recognizing and successfully coping with the disruptive manifestations of intrapsychic processes on both sides of the supervisory relationship. What sometimes makes thesis supervision difficult is that supervisors, unlike counsellors, have no official mandate to directly address or ameliorate psychological problems that can undermine a working relationship. There is a grey area between generally accepted rational problem solving and the type of intervention that is normally considered more appropriate for a formal counselling setting. The discussion of this issue will proceed by means of comparison and contrast between the two contexts of counselling and thesis supervision with particular attention to phenomena that are often associated with a power struggle, namely transference and countertransference. There are many other interpersonal phenomena that can appear within the context of a supervisory relationship but I have chosen the above as one example.

This paper discusses some of the difficulties of thesis supervision but should not be interpreted as a denial of the many positives arising out of

the supervisory relationship. Although a clear statement of the goals and mutual expectations of a supervisory relationship may lessen misunderstandings and conflicts in the working relationship, my primary concern is with the unanticipated, unpredictable and often unconscious interpersonal difficulties that surface within the relationship. I feel obliged to acknowledge that this article is written primarily from my side of the supervisor/student relationship and that a student would have a different perspective. Nonetheless, I shall attempt to recognize at least some of what academics may contribute to shared problems.

Although more enlightened educators at least pay lip service to the psychotherapeutic dimension of pedagogy, others believe that an educator's job is to educate and that therapy is best left to therapists (Bernard,1992). Jurisdictional and ethical reasons are often given for educators not venturing into the dangerous waters of "things personal." Differing views on the relevance of the personal psychotherapeutic dimension of an educative process and its ethical propriety, prompt the question of whether it is possible to exclude such a dimension from pedagogical practice.

Pedagogy means more than the one way transmission of knowledge or skills from teacher to student. The distinction between education in the broad sense and training in the more specific sense is relevant. In its fullest sense pedagogy is an interpersonal contextual encounter of whole persons. The human learner is more than an aggregate of cognitive, affective, and other functions. The more encompassing nature of a holistic approach to education can lead to interpersonal problems which require some psychotherapeutic sensitivity. Neglect of the psychotherapeutic dimension of education may lead to academic dependency rather than intellectual maturity.

Although some counsellors or thesis supervisors may wish to limit the extent of their personal involvement in the contexts of counselling or supervision, complete withdrawal of the expression of personality is impossible. The kinds of persons we are, and especially how we relate to others, is a crucial determinant of our ultimate success or failure both personally and professionally. We cannot exclude the presence of psychological factors from human interactions, but we can make choices about how explicitly we wish to acknowledge and or engage such factors (Gordon, 1974). The research literature on the efficacy of psychotherapy (Luborsky, Crits-Cristoph, Mintz & Auerback, 1988) suggests that the quality of the relationship between therapist and client is the most important variable in that context. It seems reasonable to assume that this may be the case in the thesis supervisor-student relationship also.

Professional associations such as the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association (Schulz, 1994) and the Canadian Psychological Association (*Canadian code of ethics for psychologists*, 1991) prohibit some, but not

all, "dual relationships." The Ethical Standards of Psychologists for the College of Psychologists of British Columbia (1985, p. 7) states that: "Psychologists make every effort to avoid dual relationships which could impair their professional judgment or increase the risk of exploitation." For example, academics (who may be professionally trained counsellors) should not provide therapy for students who are in their classes. Although not a dual relationship in the above sense, the fact that some thesis supervisors also teach supervisees in other settings is not likely to be a problem unless there is no alternative for the student. A good or bad relationship in one setting is likely to transfer to the other setting. For example, students commonly choose to work with a supervisor after meeting in a course.

Explicit acknowledgment and discussion of the obvious and not so obvious psychotherapeutic aspects of a supervisory relationship with a view to ameliorating or eliminating difficulties in that relationship is surely a benign objective and not in conflict with the intent of the above ethical principle, as long as the process avoids deep and protracted intrusions into personal lives of either party. This kind of process can be cathartic and therapeutic without broaching the ethical sanctions against dual relationships. The prohibition or avoidance of such circum-scribed procedures may result in the continuance of interpersonal con-flicts (covert or overt) that diminish the effectiveness of a supervisory relationship. For example, would it be wise for a supervisor to ignore passive-aggressive behaviour on the part of a supervisee who shows continued reluctance in making suggested revisions? Finally, the super-visor needs to keep in mind that the resolution of supervisory problems, involving issues of personality and interpersonal processes, must be circumscribed by the academic goal of successful thesis completion. My point here is that the prohibition of "dual relationship" is not intended to justify a "head in the sand approach" to the psychological difficulties that sometimes occur in supervisory relationships.

The risks of intimate personal contact have been clearly recognized in psychotherapy practice and training as well as the likelihood that close social contact is unavoidable if professionals effectively fulfill their roles (e.g., Edelwich & Brodsky, 1991; Glaser & Thorpe, 1986; Heyward, 1993; Holroyd & Brodsky, 1977; Peterson, 1992; Pope, Levenson & Schover, 1979; Strean, 1993). The interpersonal problems discussed in this litera-ture have focused mainly on intimate contact between clients and thera-pists on the one hand and trainee clinicians and their supervisors on the other.

There has been limited acknowledgment and little discussion of the psychotherapeutic dimension of academic supervision. For example, although Phillips (1979) considers the professor-student relationship to be "intimate in every sense of the word" (p. 339), he takes a "conserva-

tive" view of the relationship and shies away from exploring the types of interpersonal situations to be described here. Some of the aspects of the graduate student-thesis supervisor relationship that have been investigated are interpersonal attraction (Dodenhoff, 1981), expectations for the mentoring relationship from students and academics (Stein, 1981), theoretical orientations and perceptions of influence within the mentoring relationship, and the importance of mentoring (Sammons & Gravitz, 1990; Wright & Wright, 1987). Knox and McGovern (1988) surveyed graduate students' opinions on what they considered to be the most important characteristics of an academic mentor. Four of the six most important characteristics can be interpreted as being relevant to the present article's emphasis upon the importance of psychotherapeutic aspects of the graduate student-thesis supervisor relationship (honest, willing to allow growth, willing to give positive and critical feedback, and direct in dealings). The above studies have touched upon but have not fully addressed the issues to be discussed here.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN COUNSELLORS AND THESIS SUPERVISORS

Although the goals of counselling and thesis supervision may be different there are similarities in terms of interpersonal process that are open to exploration by counsellors but not thesis supervisors. In order to appreciate this critical difference it is helpful to look first at the similarities.

For both counselling and thesis supervision the distribution of power between professionals and their clients or students runs the gamut from minimal to maximal direction by the counsellor or supervisor. My purpose here is not to debate the merits of the various views on how much self or other-direction is best for the client or student but simply to notice that the distribution of power in both contexts can vary markedly so that power struggles are not unexpected. In the context of thesis supervision the question of "who knows best?" may lead to conflict and a power struggle. Rhetorical questions mark the polarities: Do students have a natural wisdom that should prevail in these circumstances? Or does the all-knowing supervisor need to be obeyed?

Gender issues are also significant. Different opinions on gender issues among counsellors and their clients and thesis supervisors and their supervisees can be a potent source of conflict. This may be expressed either covertly or overtly. In a counselling setting clients can choose the gender of their counsellor, and in the case of women, elect to see a feminist counsellor. However, the choice of thesis supervisor is limited by the size of an academic department and its gender composition. Female professors, who are often a minority, can be overloaded with supervisees as a result of female students looking for a female supervisor. On the other hand some male professors are reluctant to supervise female

students because they find gender issues to be a minefield that they would rather avoid. So called "gender wars" have produced increased tension in the supervisory relationship.

Students, like clients, have the option to disengage if they find the relationship not to their liking. Thesis supervisors also have the same option. However, this option can be prejudiced by the prevailing zeitgeist concerning such relationships. Thesis supervisors, like counsellors, can lose clients (students) if they deviate too far from the current societal expectation that education and health services are intended to serve rather than to direct consumers. This may reinforce the tendency to carry on even when an aversive working relationship prevails.

Authenticity can enhance the relationship between professionals and their clients/students in both contexts when it is integrated with professional knowledge and skill. The dilemma is always a matter of how much to hold back or reveal. Being fully present and being fully human in the moment is important in both contexts. Respecting personal boundaries in a working relationship, especially in terms of what the other person is able to receive, requires discernment that cannot be generally specified. For example, a supervisor's sharing of an experience of setback or discouragement may help a supervisee to overcome a feeling of being overwhelmed as long as the context of the experience is academically relevant.

Counsellors and supervisors share the risk of identifying too closely with their clients or students. Nonetheless, their efficacy will inevitably be affected by the ways in which, and the degree to which, they respond to the personal needs of their clients or students. Both need to retain a certain distance as a way of maintaining some measure of objectivity. Such a distance would be reflected in the distinction between gullibility and empathy or personal identification or cold detachment. In both contexts "active" listening can lead to trust and feelings of safety.

If academic supervisors become too identified with the relationship they may court disaster (e.g., sexual harassment, codependency) but if they remain aloof and perform like competent mechanisms they may incur student disapproval for being emotionally distant and failing to appreciate a student's point of view. The reasonable middle ground between these two extremes is harder to find than one might expect. Many of us who are trying to find such ground may suddenly find ourselves embroiled in unexpected psychological difficulties. Such difficulties clearly suggest the possibility of the academic supervisor's role changing to one of counsellor.

How much intimacy should each professional allow in relationships with clients or students? Humanistic counsellors and educators favour neither of the extremes of distance nor excessive intimacy. Both professional relationships compared here are paradoxical. The relationship

might best be close but not too close. Supervisors, more so than counsellors, are likely to remain emotionally distant because of the cultivation of rationality as part of their intellectual background. There might be a tendency for those who have been reinforced for their intellectual prowess to eschew the emotional components of working relationships.

I now want to focus on the power struggle that can arise between thesis supervisor and supervisee. There are a variety of ways of interpreting such a conflict, but I shall present only two ways because what is important is the phenomenon rather than its etiology, especially in a supervisory context where "deep therapy" is inappropriate. From the psychoanalytic perspective power struggles can often be explained in terms of the phenomena of transference and countertransference. Transference is experienced as the psychic displacement of emotions from their original object (Pipes & Davenport, 1990). Often these transferred feelings might seem to be unjustified or inappropriate to the recipient. Most people carry such unresolved feelings from previous experiences. If this is so, the counsellor or supervisor can become a representative of some person or situation from the client or student's past around which there is conflicted affect (e.g., a tyrannical parent or teacher). Needless to say, not all power struggles are a function of transference.

Countertransference can be an emotionally based reaction to transference or simply prompted by the needs of the person who experiences it (Pipes & Davenport, 1990). There is something in the relationship that evokes emotional reactions from one or both parties (e.g., the thesis supervisor begins to feel angry and determined that this recalcitrant student has to be "straightened out"). Both these phenomena can be positive or negative (e.g., feelings arising from experiences with parents). Student or client dependency may evoke rescuing by the supervisor or therapist. Passive-aggression of the student or client towards the suggestions of the supervisor or therapist may evoke the anger of a parent towards a disobedient child. Neither counsellors nor supervisors may have done anything deliberate to evoke transference. The above descriptions depict situations where the supervisee initiates the transference-countertransference interaction, however, these two reciprocating phenomena could be triggered by the counsellor or thesis supervisor. The present discussion focuses on the scenario of initiation of transference by the client or student.

Regardless of whether counsellors or supervisors are circumspect, or more self-disclosing, transference may occur. When counsellors or supervisors experience very strong positive or negative emotions it is usually an indication of countertransference. The ways in which transference occurs for clients or students is influenced by the behaviour of their

counsellors and supervisors—the phenomenon is coconstituted by professionals and their clients or students. I would like to emphasize at this point that we can talk about these two phenomena, using the terms transference and countertransference as labels, without necessarily accepting the psychoanalytic theory of their origins as exclusive. Dollard and Miller (1950) have shown that these same phenomena can be explained in terms of social learning theory. We can, however, observe consistent associative patterns of relationships between peoples' experiences and their later behaviours. The phenomena, discussed above, can be illustrated in the following context. When thesis supervisors consider the choice of thesis topic to be inappropriate, a power struggle may ensue that jeopardizes the entire supervisor-supervisee relationship. Supervisors may suddenly find themselves facing passive aggression rather than outright defiance towards their advice. Unresolved conflicts with authority figures may start to be expressed by students. Supervisors may find themselves caught in a transference situation and possible countertransference. Student resistance may evoke undesirable memories, feelings, and behaviours in supervisors (e.g., prior difficult students, pulling rank, anger) which they neither expected nor wanted. Both counsellors and thesis supervisors are authority figures who are rife for transference in the form of dependency or rebellion. Both can fall back into the countertransference role of the all-knowing therapist or supervisor. Such a role may exacerbate rebelliousness towards authority. Both can deal with transference through countertransference by being bored, being nice, rescuing or being authoritarian.

Within the context of thesis supervision, a supervisor can unwittingly become a parent dealing with a rebellious child. The resulting tug-o-war can pervade the entire execution of the thesis. Suggestions and advice can be ignored or sabotaged with the process dragging both combatants towards frustration and exhaustion. After insisting that they do it their way, students may later ask to be rescued from undesirable results of this insistence. However, as in therapy there is a need to avoid rescuing students if they are to become responsible for their own decisions. To rescue students may sustain dependency and disempowerment.

Relationships between counsellors and their clients or thesis supervisors and their students are not reciprocal. Counsellors and supervisors are usually more important to their clients or students than those clients or students are to them. The former are often working with other clients and students and may give no special significance to a particular individual. However, professional detachment can be lost when transference or countertransference phenomena become intense. Awareness of these different perspectives upon the relationship can moderate the ways in which both professionals interact with their clients or students.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUNSELLING AND THESIS SUPERVISION

The critical difference is that counsellors have a mandate to join their clients in an exploration and explication of the client's experiences. No such mandate exists for thesis supervisors. Setting priorities in therapy focuses upon client's personal needs whereas in thesis supervision the production of a successful thesis takes priority.

Nonetheless, as indicated earlier, personal issues are an integral part of the supervisory relationship, as they are with any personal relationship, and have a powerful influence upon its outcome. The dilemma for thesis supervisors is that ignoring the psychotherapeutic dimension of the relationship may have adverse effects upon the supervisory process, and yet there is no specific mandate to work with the sorts of psychological problems that can arise within that relationship. Some supervisors put themselves potentially at risk by trying to acknowledge and work with such problems as a kind of bootleg activity. They realize that, although therapy is not their mandate, appropriate and sensitive actions on their part can facilitate a successful supervisory relationship. Thesis supervisors do not probe deeply into student's personal lives because thesis completion is their chief aim and responsibility. Yet sometimes what is happening in the personal lives of students and supervisors is strongly reflected in the working relationship (e.g., a student who has recently experienced marital breakdown is depressed and unable to keep deadlines. However, she is reluctant to reveal this to her supervisor because missing deadlines is "out of character" for her).

There may be some thesis supervisors who, because of the premium placed upon rationality in academia, are less willing to recognize the role of emotional processes such as transference and try to proceed in a predominantly rational mode, remaining unaware of, or ignoring, possible emotional difficulties. Although such a course is understandable, it may not be wise.

A counsellor should not evoke transference conflicts at the beginning of a relationship (Pipes & Davenport, 1990) whereas a supervisor may attempt to uncover the potential for such issues so as to identify possible difficulties and consider the option of withdrawing from the relationship. This might be done by a discussion of past experiences of power relationships and independence/dependence (e.g., a strongly directive supervisor might be wise to decline working with a student who is passionate about "following his bliss" if he detects an unwillingness to research the topic according to acceptable academic criteria). The influence of postmodernism has challenged traditional notions of what constitutes acceptable thesis requirements (e.g., is personal process narrative acceptable?). The decision to enter a working relationship is complicated by the fact that positive and negative transfer are usually associated with each other. Positive initial transfer can be followed by

negative transfer so that initial positive transference can be misleading (e.g., what starts as a harmonious working relationship can quickly sour). Transference is part of first impressions. There is a good possibility of false positives. However, unlike therapists, thesis supervisors do not have a mandate to help students discriminate between the past and the present events in terms of transference phenomena.

Thesis supervisors are usually expected to "get the students through" in spite of the psychological difficulties discussed above. Such an expectation tacitly ignores the psychological dimension of the supervisor-supervisee relationship and ignores the possibility of personal harm no matter how well the thesis might ultimately be regarded. This expectation also primes supervisors for countertransference because the evaluation of their performance is involved.

Most counsellors understand the importance of allowing clients to take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. Learning to accept responsibility for one's behaviour is a crucial aspect of human development and also of successful therapy. Failure can be a positive experience if it leads to greater personal responsibility. However, in the academic situation if we allow our students to be self-directed to the point where they go awry, they do not necessarily accept responsibility for the aftermath. Some have sued their professors and universities for wasting their time and money (sometimes this action is justified). In this situation, thesis supervisors seem to be, in a double bind: over-direction inhibits the development of student individuality and responsibility, while a laissez-faire attitude may lead to failure and blame, or to the "rubber stamping" of incompetence.

Thesis supervision is a context where there may be more likelihood of codependency developing between supervisor and supervisee than counsellor and client. Thesis supervisors sometimes reinforce student dependency because administrators can blame supervisors rather than students for procrastination and avoidance of thesis work. The numbers of students supervised and graduated can be a criterion used in the evaluation of a supervisor's performance. Consequently, student problems may become supervisor's problems, thus reinforcing codependency and lack of personal student responsibility. However, sometimes a little help from the supervisor can break the inertia of a student being stalled (e.g., jointly working through page after page of textual content analysis until the student feels less overwhelmed by an unfamiliar mode of data analysis).

Although both counsellors and thesis supervisors are subject to community and professional expectations, as well as ethical standards, there are important differences. Therapy tends to be less constrained by a time line. Failure to adhere to thesis time lines may result in program termination or administrative reprimands directed at both supervisor and super-

visee (e.g., "Why has Dr. X allowed this student to procrastinate"?). In therapy, the course of events can be more often directed by the client in a relatively open-ended way. There is a considerable tolerance for the duration of the therapeutic process due to the lack of imposed time lines. However, there are sometimes time constraints in therapy (e.g., health insurance plan limits in regard to the number of sessions). The outcome of therapy is often not conceptualized in terms of carefully specified criteria to which a thesis is subject. There are well established criteria for thesis form and content within academic disciplines with the ultimate evaluation of the product. In short, most therapy contexts are more flexible and deliberately ambiguous than the academic context of thesis supervision. Thesis supervisors, while dealing with interpersonal difficulties similar to those that arise in therapy, are subject to the constraints that govern such an academic exercise. The situation for both students and supervisors can be highly stressful.

The working relationship in therapy and thesis supervision should be governed by shared goals so that both parties are working with a common interest and thereby avoiding unnecessary power struggles. The relationship should not be one based upon domination and submission but upon mutuality. Nonetheless, the fact remains that within the context of thesis supervision power resides mainly with the supervisor, although students can utilize complaint and appeal procedures.

In the context of supervision, deviations from the initial goal that may be permissible and even desirable in the context of counselling, are less tolerable. There is more pressure to fulfill the original purpose of the approved research proposal and consequently for the supervisor to police adherence to that goal. The situation is implicitly contractual and explicitly evaluative in terms of the final product. Thesis supervisors are more likely to direct the course of events in response to the external criteria for evaluation of a thesis and therefore more likely to experience conflict when the student veers off course. For example, students who hold the fantasy that, despite their inexperience, their thesis will be a masterpiece, are often in conflict with their supervisors. This type of wish fulfillment is occasionally accompanied by ego inflation. There is also the phenomenon of "crusadism" whereby a student may be preoccupied with pushing an "ism" or cause at every opportunity (e.g., sexual abuse, men's issues, women's issues, gay rights). Personal interest is allowed to outweigh the satisfaction of the criteria for the attainment of satisfactory thesis completion. A common result of such a monocular view, if allowed to go unchecked, is frustration resulting from the inability to achieve unrealistic goals. On the other hand, supervisors need to be aware of the danger of forcing students into doing theses which, although they satisfy academic requirements, produce side effects that negate the educative value of the project. Those students who excel as the result of aversive

teaching tend not to pursue their interest in the field (e.g., people who seldom play the piano after having been coerced into attaining a high level of technical competence).

The thesis supervisor's role may be to facilitate a more realistic view of the scholarly task at hand by suggesting the need to formulate realistic objectives that satisfy scholarly requirements while still incorporating a student's interest. Sometimes, unrealistic aspirations are a function of personal needs, such as the need to "make my mark," suggesting the possibility of unresolved issues relating to self-esteem. A common manifestation of this problem is a research question that is far too broad and needs to be narrowed in order to achieve a more realistic objective. The personal agenda that underlies an unrealistic thesis topic may be extremely valuable and significant for a student, especially in the context of counselling or personal growth, but inappropriate for a thesis.

CONCLUSION

If the supervisor can recognize the signs of the phenomena of transference and countertransference, there is a better chance of avoiding their destructive effects. Understanding that interpersonal conflicts are sometimes the result of unconscious projections based on past experiences might help supervisors to avoid seeing such problems as malicious and so enable them to address possible solutions sympathetically rather than antagonistically.

Supervisors can detect signs of transference and countertransference by reflecting upon how they feel about various types of students, looking for the presence of extreme emotions, or noticing a lack of progress in the working alliance. Supervisors can observe the feelings that seem to preoccupy them in their relations with supervisees as a possible sign of countertransference. Feelings of hurt and anger may mean loss of control and thus the need to control. Which emotions cause us the most difficulty? Sometimes it is useful to ponder: "how like me is the student?"

Resistance can be reduced when the student is allowed to express feelings and needs which were previously denied. Resistance is often fear-based when it accompanies personal exploration and change. If supervisors have a vested interest in compliance and control, resistance is more likely to occur. Explaining why some things are necessary, when reluctance is sensed, can alleviate problems. Resistance can also be a function of not knowing what is expected and the need for clearer communication and goal setting in terms of concrete responsibilities. It may be helpful to discuss a means of conflict resolution early in the collaboration. Academic departments could recognize the reality of difficulties in student-supervisor relationships by setting up an Ombudsperson with the credibility and power to make recommendations and appropriate interventions. Some academic departments have

no mechanism for the discreet and no-fault dissolution of unworkable supervisory relationships. The ombudsperson's mandate might even include the possibility of suggesting counselling for either one or both parties. Such a remedy should be readily available without prejudice. Unfortunately, even when such mechanisms exist some students are reluctant to use them for fear of academic reprisals. This fear needs to be acknowledged and allayed if possible. Professors might also be reluctant to acknowledge that a problem exists lest they be judged adversely by colleagues.

The idea that thesis supervisors can confine themselves to their designated professional role of academic and not find themselves with at least one foot on the turf of the counsellor is untenable. An approach to thesis supervision based upon this idea is bound to have a negative impact upon interpersonal relations and ultimately the academic performance of student and supervisor.

Unfortunately, there is little explicit recognition of the psychotherapeutic dimension of supervisory relationships. Thesis supervisors are allowed to fend for themselves and unless they have been alerted to this dimension they may stumble into severe interpersonal difficulties which could be ameliorated, if not avoided, by increased awareness of some of the issues raised here. There seems to be no apparent solution to the problem facing aware sensitive academics who recognize the psychotherapeutic dimension of relationships but are constrained by a professional mandate that ignores this tacit dimension. If supervisors go beyond their mandate, they risk censure. If supervisors understand the importance of this dimension and are willing to address it then they have to walk an ambiguous line between what is and is not appropriate.

Thesis supervisors need not and should not engage in mainstream counselling, but by being more aware of the psychotherapeutic dimension of the supervisory relationship, they may be able to avoid repetitive, unpleasant, exhausting and sometimes destructive patterns of supervisor-supervisee relationships. Recognition of this dimension creates more possibilities for prevention of some of the problems described in this article and does not necessitate intrusive therapeutic interventions by thesis supervisors. Increased awareness and understanding of interpersonal processes can help the supervisory relationship independent of whatever deliberate interventions may be considered or executed.

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