CHARACTEROLOGICAL RESISTANCES IN PSYCHOTHERAPY SUPERVISION

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A developmental model is used to provide greater understanding of the phenomena of resistance in psychotherapy supervision. Some underlying characterological issues that may cause resistance include autonomy, identity, basic trust, shame and narcissism. The manifestations of and approaches for dealing with characterological resistances are discussed.

While resistance has long been discussed as an obstacle to the process of psychotherapy (Freud, S., 1912, 1914; Freud, A., 1936; Fenichel, 1945; Gill, 1963; Greenson, 1967) it has been less frequently addressed in the context of psychotherapy supervision. The most frequent aspect of resistance in supervision that has been discussed in the literature is the type of resistant behavior most commonly manifested by supervisees. Among these behaviors Bauman (1972) includes: submission, turning the tables, self-depreciation, helplessness, and projection. Bauman also discusses supervisory methods for dealing with these forms of resistance including interpretation, feedback, clarification, generalization, ignoring, the alter-ego technique and audio taping. Kadushin (1976) also describes the forms that supervisory resistance can take. These include flattery, redefining the supervisory relationship, reducing the supervisor’s power, ensuring that uncomfortable topics won’t be raised, engaging in excessive self-criticism to solicit reassurance, concealing problems and distorting what actually occurs in the therapy session. Dodge (1982) notes that supervisees may resist learning by remaining aloof, intellectualizing, rationalizing and discussing tangential issues. Finally, Gutheil (1986) observed that ideology can be used as a rationale for resisting new behaviors in supervision.

Liddle (1986) rather than describing the forms that resistance in supervision typically takes, discusses the reasons behind it. She defines supervisee resistance as a defensive response to a perceived threat. Some possible sources of threat in supervision include: evaluation anxiety, performance anxiety, deficits in the supervisory relationship and personal issues of the supervisee.

The present article attempts to further articulate the types of personal issues that may result in supervisee resistance to learning psychotherapy in supervision. In particular, resistance that is caused by developmental deficits or characterological factors is examined. While developmental issues have been previously discussed in the supervision literature with regard to the overall process of supervision, particularly the task of forming a professional identity (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Loganbill, Hardy & Delworth, 1981; Ralph, 1980), they have not, yet, been applied to the process of resistance in supervision. In this article, a developmental model will be used to provide greater understanding of the phenomena of resistance in psychotherapy supervision. Some underlying developmental(characterological issues that may cause resistance in supervision include: basic trust, autonomy, identity, shame and narcissism.

Finally, the concept of developmental or characterological issues as discussed in this article refers to common problems occurring in the training of many supervisees rather than exclusively to the rehabilitation of impaired trainees. As Johnson (1987) discusses in Humanizing the Narcissistic Style, characterological issues can be a personality style that occurs in relative degrees as well as an indication of severe psychopathology.

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Furthermore, the manifestations of and approaches for dealing with characterologically based resistance are based upon clinical experience with supervisees at various stages of training.

Resistances Based upon Issues of Autonomy and Control

Supervisees who have unsuccessfully mastered the stage of "autonomy vs. shame and doubt" (Erikson, 1950) tend not to feel sufficiently in control of their lives. They often attempt to gain transitory feelings of autonomy by attempting to gain control with people and with things. These struggles for power and control extend as well to their relationships with clients and with supervisors. Supervisees that have problems with autonomy are much like toddlers going through "the terrible twos" who don't yet know what they want—only what they don't want. Such supervisees tend to be helpless rejecters of complaints. They, thus, frequently report that they are feeling stuck with clients and solicit advice from supervisors. When help is offered, however, they have a propensity to "Yes, but . . ." the supervisor. Furthermore, as control issues are expressed pervasively, problems with autonomy are frequently manifested in parallel process. In such instances, the supervisee presents the problem of the complaining, resistant, and help-rejecting client and then behaves in a similar fashion with the supervisor.

For example, John came to group supervision expressing frustration with and asking for help in dealing with a demanding, passive—aggressive client. After listening to John's presentation of the case, the group tried to help him to understand the client's dynamics. He argued with every hypothesis. When the group tried to help him devise therapeutic strategies, he told them that none of these strategies would work. Finally, when the group attempted to empathize with his feelings of frustration, John said "No, I'm not frustrated. I'm irritated."

Both John and his client were unable to receive help without endangering their precarious sense of autonomy. Supervisees with autonomy issues tend to experience the supervisor as an authoritarian over-controlling parent. They alternately attempt to please the supervisor by asking for help and to assert their autonomy by covertly resisting perceived supervisory inducts. Two approaches that can be used in working with supervisee resistance resulting from a perceived threat to autonomy are: a) techniques which bypass the resistance and increase supervisee autonomy and b) processing the resistance (including the supervisee's issues with autonomy and control).

Three techniques that can be used to increase supervisee autonomy are: the Socratic dialogue (Glickauf-Hughes & Campbell, 1992), the Zen Koan approach and the use of homework assignments. In the Socratic dialogue, truth is discovered in the exchange between people. "The Socratic philosopher could not persuade his interlocutor outright, but had to help him draw the hidden knowledge out of his soul" (Maranhov, 1986, p. 220). Thus, using the Socratic method, supervisees are not given answers to questions but rather are asked questions by the supervisor to help them to discover personalized answers (Glickauf-Hughes & Campbell, 1992). The Socratic method is particularly useful in working with supervisees that have control issues precisely because it is so respectful of the student's autonomy. By not providing supervisees with answers but instead asking questions to help them to find their own, supervisees are helped to trust their own perceptions, intuitions and thinking. Furthermore, the supervisor clearly behaves in direct contrast to the supervisee's internal transferential object.

A second technique for increasing autonomy is the Zen Koan technique. This approach is based upon the principles that are frequently used to teach Zen Buddhism. According to these principles, problem solving at its most creative occurs when the Zen master utters the turning words which free the disciple's thinking (Sayama, 1986). One technique for accomplishing this is giving the disciple a Koan or puzzle to solve in order to discover some principle about life. A classic example is that used by the Chinese Zen Master, Hawking Eraker, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" The Zen Koan approach is very similar to the type of strategies used in psychotherapy by Milton Erickson and Nick Cummings (Sayama, 1986).

The Zen Koan technique is particularly helpful with supervisees who have difficulty mastering a concept due to some internal resistance. This approach helps supervisees arrive at an answer indirectly by being told, a story, riddle, paradox, etc., without being given the solution that helps to discover a personal meaning.

For example, a supervisee presented a case from his therapy group in which he experienced
one client being unfairly scapegoated by the other group members. From the supervisee’s description of the client, it appeared as though the client had a great conflict between his dependency needs and his fundamental distrust of people. This seemed to result in the client behaving most provocatively toward others when he most needed comfort from them. As a result, the client often elicited anger rather than supportive responses from other group members. As the supervisee was strongly identified with the client, he found it difficult to understand the interpersonal process that the client set up which resulted in the client feeling hurt by others. The supervisor thought that he might best enable the supervisee to understand his client’s dynamics by telling the supervisee a joke that related to these issues. The joke that the supervisor told was as follows:

It was twenty below zero and a man was driving down an isolated road in rural Maine. Upon noticing that his car was wobbling, he stopped to go out to determine the problem and unfortunately discovered that his tire had gone flat. He began to change his tire but was not able to locate his jack anywhere. He had no blankets or extra clothing in the car so he had no alternative but to walk to the nearest farmhouse to borrow a jack from someone in order to change his tire. If he did not get help, he would freeze to death. It was about two miles to the nearest house. While the man was walking he began to ruminate about how upset the farmer would become when awakened in the middle of the night. He was quite certain that the farmer could be very angry with him and might even slam the door in his face. He detested being in this position. The man finally arrived at the farmhouse, rang the doorbell and waited, becoming angrier by the minute. When the farmer answered the door, the man look the farmer straight in the eye, and said, “Keep your ______ jack!” and walked off.

Upon hearing the story, the supervisee laughed and understood the point. By externalizing the issue, using humor and most importantly allowing the supervisee to derive the meaning for himself, the joke was able to bypass his defensive resistance to understanding his client’s dynamics.

The third supervision technique that can be used to increase autonomy is the use of “homework” assignments. The term homework is not used here to mean assignments to practice new behaviors. Such assignments would more likely incur greater resistance in the form of stubbornness and passive–aggressive behaviors (e.g., forgetting) in such supervisees. Rather, the homework technique is used as a means of respecting supervisees’ needs to do their work on their own (i.e., at home). When supervisors process a difficult issue with supervisees and they express resistance in the form of feeling stuck, blocked or not knowing the answer, the supervisor can thus suggest that they table the subject and that the supervisee might wish to think about it further over the next week. Finally, the fourth approach to dealing with autonomy-based resistance involves processing and understanding the meaning behind the resistance rather than attempting to circumvent it. One of the most helpful means of accomplishing this is parallel process. Eckstein & Wallerstein (1958) first noted that supervisees’ problems with supervisors frequently reflect the problems existing between supervisees and their clients. Supervisees, thus, unconsciously enact their client’s problems with their supervisor as a means of getting help with their clients. The author has also observed that supervisees’ problems with clients that are enacted in supervision may also reflect issues of the supervisee. Thus, supervisees who have autonomy issues may frequently engage in power struggles with both supervisors and clients. In using parallel process, supervisors may thus help the supervisees to understand their own autonomy issues indirectly by understanding those of the client.

In the example given earlier, the supervisor might help John to understand that his client is not trying to be intentionally uncooperative. Rather, he is resisting help as the best means that he has available of feeling autonomous. The supervisor may later observe that the same process seems to occur with John in supervision and suggest that perhaps John and his client unconsciously engage in struggles because their autonomy is very important to both of them.

A final means of working with autonomy-based resistance in supervision is processing the resistance directly. In this approach, the supervisor: a) observes the supervisee’s resistant behaviors (e.g., excessive arguing, rejecting most suggestions), b) inquires about them (e.g. “What were you feeling when I suggested that you ______?”, “It seems as though we’ve been debating a lot today. What do you make of that?”), c) empathizes with the reasons behind the resistance and d) processes their interpersonal impact and cost.

Resistance Based upon Insufficiently Developed Sense of Self or Identity

A second reason for resistance in supervision involves the supervisee’s development of a personal and professional sense of self and/or identity. It has frequently been observed that the development of a sense of identity is an important aspect of the process of learning to be a psychotherapist (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Loganbill,
Hardy & Delworth, 1981). To the extent that it is superimposed upon earlier separation—individuation issues (such as an impoverished sense of self), the struggle to form a professional identity is far more difficult.

Resistance in supervision may thus occur when the supervisee experiences the supervisor's theoretical orientation as both different than and ego dystonic with the orientation that the supervisee currently identifies with. While ideology has been observed to be a source of resistance in supervision (Gutheil, 1977), the dynamics underlying this resistance has not been explained. Ideological and/or theoretical differences between supervisor and supervisee may endanger resistance in supervision when they threaten a supervisee's precarious sense of self. In supervisees with this developmental issue, to learn from the supervisor means to merge with him or her (as it did in their families of origin). Consequently, supervisees with separation—individuation issues of this nature often hold on tenaciously to their current professional identity, orientation and ideology. They, thus, tend to reject and devalue the orientation of the supervisor (if different from their own) rather than to selectively identify with the aspects of the supervisor's approach that fits them.

For example, Ann, a supervisee with a self disorder, was raised in a family in which she became the ideal object of her parents and gave up her real self (including her values, beliefs, and sexual preference) for parental approval. In reaction to her background, when she entered graduate school she rigidly espoused a humanistic orientation and derived a strong personal and professional sense of identity from it. When assigned psychodynamic and behavioral supervisors, she was argumentative and contemptuous toward them. Furthermore, she was unable to profit from these modalities with separation—individuation issues (such as an impoverished sense of self), the supervision process is limited in it's ability to resolve this problem. For supervisees struggling with this difficulty, supervisors can only identify the issue involved, help supervisees to see it's consequences (e.g., limiting learning) and suggest personal psychotherapy as a vehicle for resolving this problem. Helping supervisees who struggle with an impoverished sense of self is a clear case of where the boundary between therapy and supervision must be maintained.

Resistance Based upon Issues of Basic Trust

Learning psychotherapy is a difficult process involving anxiety about facing the unknown (Mollon, 1989). This learning process can be made far less stressful when experienced in the context of a trusting relationship with a supervi-
However, supervisees who have not developed a sense of "basic trust" (Erikson, 1950) will have difficulty establishing the type of openness and vulnerability necessary for developing a supportive supervisory relationship. Having previously experienced relationships with parents who were cruel, critical and/or rejecting, they anticipate being hurt by others including the supervisor. They try to allay this hurt by assuming a paranoid or counterdependent stance in supervision. Such supervisees may resist discussing painful countertransference feelings or turning to their supervisor for help. They may also remain on the alert, listening carefully to things that the supervisor says which might indicate any harmful intent.

Supervisees whose resistance is manifest in the form of guardedness, defensiveness, extreme self-sufficiency and maintaining a close attitude may be struggling with an underlying lack of basic trust in others. Such supervisees anticipate that the supervisor will hurt, humiliate or reject them. Resistance in supervision stemming from lack of basic trust may best be dealt with by: a) processing and helping supervisees to understand its dynamic origins and b) providing supervisees with a new interpersonal experience in supervision.

When supervisees behave in an excessively guarded manner, the supervisor may thus first observe this and comment that the supervisee behaves as though he or she expects to be hurt by the supervisor. If the supervisee acknowledges his or her guardedness, the supervisor may follow this comment with a question aimed at uncovering the transferenceal origins of this expectation (e.g., "Were the people in your life who treated you this way?"). If the supervisee responds positively to this question, the supervisor may then empathize with his or her past and current experience (e.g., "It sounds as though you were very hurt by your parents and that you expect me to behave in the same way toward you. That must make it hard for you to trust me enough to help you with this very difficult task of learning to be a psychotherapist.")

Implicit in this process is that the supervisor provide the supervisee with a different and corrective interpersonal experience. Supervisees who have issues with basic trust need the supervisor to be reasonably constant and predictable. They respond well in relationships which reflect the core Rogerian conditions of warmth, empathy, and congruence (Rogers, 1951). Finally, supervisees who have difficulties in basic trust need the supervisor to be sensitive to their feelings. It is particularly important that supervisors understand how frightened these supervisees are even when they use reaction formation and thus don't express their fear directly.

For many supervisees with moderate trust issues, the approach described can be highly effective in overcoming their resistance and thus creating a more open atmosphere in supervision. If, however, the supervisee's early injury is more severe and his or her basic trust issues are more extreme, the supervisee may need to be referred for personal psychotherapy to help resolve this difficulty.

Shame-Based Resistance

A particular instance of the supervisee's fear of being hurt but one of such importance that it warrants a separate category is resistance in supervision that results from defending against excessive feelings of shame and low self-esteem. While many trainees fear that who they are as a person will not be acceptable for the profession of psychotherapy (Eckler-Hart, 1987), this concern is far more pronounced in supervisees who have shamed based personalities.

Shame is an emotion that has been insufficiently studied because in our culture it is so easily absorbed by guilt (Erikson, 1950). In the past several years, however, there has been a renewed interest in the affect of shame (Kinston, 1983; Morrison, 1983). Shame may be conceptualized as the reaction to the loss of an idealized self-image (Severino, McNutt & Feder, 1987). One basic thesis is "that shame originates interpersonally, primarily in significant relationships, but later can become internalized so that the self is able to activate shame without an inducing interpersonal event" (Kaufman, 1985).

While learning to be psychotherapist may induce anxiety, and mental pain in most supervisees (Mollon, 1989), these concerns are far greater for supervisees suffering from low self-esteem. Such supervisees tend to be hypervigilant about being criticized and insulted by others, including by their supervisors. As such, it is very difficult for them to expose their weak areas to the supervisor and to hear constructive criticism without feeling narcissistically injured. Indeed in such supervisees, even interventions with no critical intent may be experienced as hurtful. Some manifestations of shame-based resistance are: a) failure to bring
in tapes, b) inability to discuss problem areas, c) hypersensitivity to feedback and d) excessive self-berating.

Supervisees who are resistant in supervision because of an underlying problem with shame require particular sensitivity on the part of the supervisor. Being sensitive to the supervisee involves the use of both empathy and tact. While supervisees may not appear to be struggling with self-esteem but rather may seem quarrelsome or un-cooperative, it is important for the supervisor to be aware that their negative behavior may be motivated by the attempt to defend against a sense of a bad or defective self.

Thus when supervisees repeatedly fail to bring in tapes, the supervisor may gently begin to inquire if they have some discomfort about being seen. When the supervisee becomes defensive about supervisory feedback, the supervisor may ask about and empathize with what the supervisee is feeling at the time. It is extremely important that supervisors communicate that they understand: a) what high requirements the supervisee has for him or herself, b) how self-critical that the supervisee becomes when he or she fails to live up to those high standards and c) the supervisee’s belief that the supervisor is as critical and demanding of the supervisee as the supervisee is of him or herself. Supervisors must also let supervisees know that they understand how difficult it must be for them to expose themselves under those circumstances.

In addition to empathy, supervisors may minimize shame-based resistance in supervision by giving feedback with a great deal of tact. It is often helpful to first give supervisees positive feedback prior to any feedback that connotes some failure. Secondly, any negative feedback given by the supervisor is best framed as “the supervisee’s growing edge” or introduced as “a common difficulty in learning to be a therapist is . . . ”

Furthermore, it is helpful when giving constructive criticism to use the least provocative wording possible. For example, rather than asking supervisees if they feel “angry” at a client, they might be asked if they feel “annoyed”. Instead of telling supervisees that they are “being too directive”, it might be suggested that “as this client’s parents were fairly authoritarian, it might help him become more autonomous if you don’t help him out quite so much.” Finally, the Socratic method can be a useful device in helping sensitive supervisees to draw their own conclusions, thus, helping them to save face.

The second important strategy in working with shame-based resistance is to help supervisees develop a more realistic ego ideal with regard to their identity and competency as a therapist. In particular, they must be helped to understand that “it is no small task to become a capable, careful and ethical psychotherapist” (Eckler-Hart, 1987 p. 683). Becoming a psychotherapist involves a major transition and the process of making that transition includes many feelings of doubt and uncertainty (Barnat, 1973, 1974; Cohen, 1980; Gaoni & Neumann, 1974; Grebnef et al., 1973; Tischler, 1968). Since the process of learning psychotherapy is inherently lacking structure and prescription, this transition is particularly difficult and anxiety producing (Mollon, 1989). Because of the ambiguity in the learning process, “trainees inevitably suffer injuries to their self-esteem and self image when they are floundering” (Mollon, 1989, p. 113). Finally, as evaluations of one’s ability as a therapist are often experienced as evaluations of one’s self (Cohen, 1980; Muller, 1985), failure in the psychotherapy training process is often experienced as a failure as a person (Eckler-Hart, 1987). For supervisees with low self-esteem, this problem is greatly exacerbated.

The supervisor must thus help the supervisee to develop realistic self expectations. This can be accomplished to some extent with the use of self-disclosure. As the process of supervision in some ways resembles “armchair quarterbacking”, supervisees can easily come to idealize their supervisors (believing that they always know the right thing to say) and feel deficient by comparison. It is thus often helpful for supervisors to share instances when they struggled with similar issues as the supervisee. This is especially important in regard to therapy with difficult clients. It is also beneficial for supervisors to give supervisees information that normalizes their worries (e.g., how learning appropriate timing is a life-long task, how supervisees frequently worry about their competency and self-worth, that countertransference is only hurtful when therapists are unaware of it and how learning to be a therapist is a very difficult process).

Most important, as shame has been postulated as resulting from a break in the interpersonal bridge between individuals (Kaufman, 1985), it is critical that sufficient trust be maintained in the supervisory relationship so that the experience
and origins of the supervisee’s feelings of shame can be openly discussed. Nothing heals the shame experience more than having it revealed to and accepted by others.

Finally, being empathic with a supervisee’s underlying experience of shame does not mean that the supervisor should enable the supervisee. Meyer (1970) discusses how pleading fragility can be used by supervisees as a means of effectively preventing supervisors from exploring painful and threatening issues. It is not recommended that supervisors avoid giving supervisees difficult feedback when necessary or exempt supervisees from bringing in tapes because of the supervisee’s sensitivity. Rather, it is suggested that potentially painful issues be discussed with empathy and tact. Should supervisees have such low self-esteem, however, that they are unable to receive even tactful feedback, they may need to take a leave of absence from supervision to better solidify their self-esteem in personal psychotherapy.

Resistance Based upon Narcissism

A problem related to shame-induced resistance in supervision is resistance that is cause by underlying narcissistic issues including grandiosity, perfectionism, and the wish to be the favorite supervisee. Perfectionistic strivings, in particular, have been found frequently to cause difficulties for supervisees in learning psychotherapy (Arkowitz, 1990). Brightman (1984) describes the narcissistic vulnerabilities of psychotherapy supervisees as paralleling the narcissistic vulnerabilities of childhood. Narcissistic issues can often be a defense against low self-esteem and may thus be expressed in similar ways to those described in the previous section (e.g., avoiding problems, sensitivity to feedback, not bringing in tapes). Narcissistic issues may also be expressed by self-important behaviors and by attempted collusions with clients and supervisors. Mollon (1989) observed that narcissistic injuries in supervisees often result from disillusionment over grandiose therapeutic aspirations. While all supervisees struggle with these issues, those with narcissistic issues have even greater resistance to examining and accepting their errors and fallibilities and to giving up their collusions. Furthermore, they may grow quite angry when the supervisor fails to collude.

In discussing supervisory strategies for working with resistance in narcissistic supervisees, it is first important to discuss the developmental origins of narcissism. Individuals with narcissistic issues have insufficiently mastered the “rapprochement subphase” (Mahler et al., 1975) of separation-individuation (Johnson, 1987). Under optimal conditions during rapprochement, children learn to give up their omnipotence and accept their limitations. What children need during this period is to have their magnificence appreciated and their failures accepted and understood (Johnson, 1987). When parents need their children to be either more or less than they are and either excessively indulge or shame them, their children maintain a grandiose self-image (Miller, 1981).

In working with grandiose trainees, supervisors may use the same strategies as the “good-enough mother” (Winnicott, 1965) does with rapprochement child. As supervisees begin to gain mastery over learning the therapeutic process (e.g., understanding client dynamics, becoming aware of countertransference, appropriately timing interventions), supervisors are advised to express genuine and enthusiastic appreciation for their achievements. When supervisees make errors, supervisors are advised to empathize both with the difficulty of learning the therapy process and the discomfort in making a mistake. Should supervisees’ grandiosity be so extreme that they are unable to acknowledge errors, supervisors must confront this behavior and empathize with how difficult it must be for them to admit and accept their mistakes. As with rapprochement children, supervisees’ grandiosity is most easily given up when it is deflated gradually. Should time and ethical considerations permit, it is helpful to have an initial period in which supervisees may enjoy their successes before supervisors gradually begin to note their therapeutic errors. It is important, however, that this period must not evolve into a “narcissistic collusion” (Willi, 1982) or mutual admiration society between supervisee and supervisor in which difficulties and differences are permanently avoided. Such collusions may take two forms. Supervisees may assume the “progressive narcissistic role” (Willi, 1982), basing in the supervisor’s praise for being such outstanding students (but failing to share their weaknesses and vulnerabilities) or the “regressive narcissistic role” (Willi, 1982) in which the supervisor is idealized (subtly influencing the supervisor to avoid conflict and keep the discussion off the supervisee). The regressive narcissistic collusion is a particularly common pattern among therapists-in-training who have long served as self-objects for their parents (Miller, 1981).
After an initial period of idealization, should the narcissistic collusion be seen as a form of resistance to supervision, it must gently be confronted. As individuals who have a propensity to engage in collusive relationships tend to do so in many situations, one way that supervisors can introduce the issue is through parallel process when supervisees raise the issue of collisions occurring with their clients. Some examples of this are when: a) their clients idealize them and they don’t know how to respond and b) they feel like an audience with their clients and don’t know how to engage them other than as a cheering section. The issue of narcissistic collusion in supervision may also be processed directly with supervisees in the here-and-now.

The Influence of Supervisor Character in the Resolution of Supervisee Resistance

By focusing on supervisee character style, it is not meant to be implied that entanglements in or impediments to the process of supervision are solely determined by the characterological issues of the supervisee. The impact of supervisor countertransference has in fact been frequently addressed in the literature (Issacharoff, 1982; Grey & Fiscalini, 1987). A great deal of unresolved resistance in supervision is thus likely due to an interaction between the character or developmental issues of both the supervisor and supervisee.

Thus, for example, should a supervisee with autonomy and control issues be assigned to a supervisor with similar issues, the supervisee’s oppositional behavior could evoke more authoritarian behavior from the supervisor. Needless to say, this would most likely contribute to an increase in rather than a resolution of the power struggle.

As a second example, should a supervisee with a regressive (or idealizing) narcissistic style be assigned to a supervisor with a progressive (or grandiose) narcissistic style, the supervisee’s idealization of the supervisor might be reinforced (rather than processed or bypassed). This could potentially lead to a narcissistic collusion between supervisor and supervisee in which both parties do not feel free to give the other honest feedback. This issue is addressed by Kadushin (1976) in his discussion regarding the importance of addressing excessive flattery in supervision.

Thus when supervisees are assigned to supervisors who have parallel or complementary issues, there is a greater probability of a “collusion” (Willi, 1982) or “unconscious game between players played over a period of time” (p. 255) which may become fairly entangled. There is thus a far better chance of helping supervisees learn from their resistance by assigning them supervisors whose own characterological issues do not parallel those of the supervisee or who are at the least quite aware of their own countertransference feelings.

It is beyond the scope of this article to elucidate all the possible permutations and combinations of mismatched or well-matched supervisors and supervisees. However, the above discussion does point to the importance of supervisor-supervisee matching in the working-through of characterological resistances in supervision.

Conclusion

A developmental model is used to provide greater understanding of the phenomena of resistance in psychotherapy supervision. Some underlying developmental or characterological issues that may cause resistance include: autonomy, identity, basic trust, shame and narcissism. The manifestations and approaches for dealing with characterological resistance are described. Interaction with supervisor personality and implications for selection are discussed. The impact of both upon supervisee resistance seem to merit further attention in future research.

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