

Infusing Mindfulness and Character Strengths in Supervision to Promote Beginning Supervisee Development

Jennifer E. Sharp¹
Alessandra J. Rhinehart

Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, Kentucky, United States

Clinical supervision is a fundamental aspect of the training process of mental health professions. Supervisors strive for effectiveness as they foster supervisory relationships that are developmentally appropriate and growth-oriented. Mindfulness and character strengths bolster intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal effectiveness. The Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) is used as a framework to explore the unique characteristics of beginning supervisees and present creative strategies for employing mindfulness and character strengths to promote supervisee development. Concrete strategies are suggested for supervisors to infuse mindfulness and character strengths into individual, triadic, and group supervision during practicum and internship.

Keywords: supervision, mindfulness, character strengths

Beginning supervisees experience high levels of anxiety and limited self and other awareness; therefore, integrating intentional strategies to help supervisees grow through these challenges is imperative (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). As the field of supervision continues to grow, exploring innovative approaches to supervision for counselors-in-training is worthwhile. Borders and Brown (2005) suggested that counseling students may benefit from mindfulness, as developmentally, they experience anxiety, lack of confidence, and dependency within supervision.

Considering the recent attention afforded to mindfulness in counseling supervision, strategies for incorporating mindfulness and related practices with beginning supervisees, particularly throughout the practicum experience, is a timely topic. Paired with mindfulness, character strengths create a strong foundation for promoting increased self-awareness that may benefit beginning supervisees (Niemiec, 2014). Strengths-focused learning activities are associated with increased flexibility in responding (Fredrickson, 2001, 2009), and may support supervisees as they “build new skills, new ties, new knowledge, and new

¹ Address correspondence to Jennifer E. Sharp, Northern Kentucky University, MEP 203F, Highland Heights, KY 41099. Email: sharpj8@nku.edu

ways of being” (Fredrickson, 2009, p. 24). This article addresses a gap in the literature by infusing mindfulness and character strengths into a supervisory approach that promotes supervisee development. In the first section of the article, counseling literature on effective supervision from a developmental perspective will be briefly reviewed. In the next section, literature on mindfulness practices and how mindfulness relates to supervision will be presented. Following this discussion will be an introduction of literature on character strengths and how character strengths may support supervisee development. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of concrete strategies for incorporating mindfulness and character strengths into supervision.

Effective Supervision

Supervision is an integral aspect of the educational process for counselors (Watkins, 2010). It is a structured art form comprised of roles, expectations, responsibilities, and skills focused on fostering the professional development of supervisees and ensuring client welfare (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Haynes, Corey, & Moulton, 2003). An effective supervisor is one who engages with emotional intelligence, maturity, flexibility, humility, and transparency, and actively seeks to enhance their own self-awareness (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES], 2011). Through utilizing self-awareness, supervisors can engage thoughtfully and skillfully with supervisees to cultivate productive working alliances (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Additionally, working to minimize power differentials while also setting clear expectations to alleviate anxiety (Ellis, Hutman, & Chapin, 2015) are key components of clinical supervision.

Supervisees’ Developmental Needs

Understanding supervisees’ unique needs from a developmental perspective is an essential aspect of effective supervision, as both faculty and site supervisors guide the supervision process. Stoltenberg and McNeill’s (2010) Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) introduces three overriding structures: (a) self and other (client) awareness, (b) motivation, and (c) autonomy. According to the model, supervisees develop, in a non-linear progression, through three levels. Beginning supervisees, particularly those in practicum, enter their practice in Level 1, which is characterized by a high focus on self, limited self-other awareness, and difficulty identifying strengths and weaknesses. These supervisees tend to appear anxious and are highly motivated to acquire new counseling skills. Supervisees early in their training demonstrate a low level of autonomy and are often dependent on their supervisors. They have a need for structure and positive feedback. They are also challenged with responding to unexpected events, tend to display limited conceptualization skills, and lack theoretical flexibility.

Throughout their early training experiences, Level 1 supervisees desire validation in order to take risks and develop appropriately (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). An awareness of these characteristics aids supervisors in connecting with their supervisees and

structuring developmentally appropriate supervision activities. Infusing knowledge of clinical supervision literature, along with the benefits of mindfulness and character strengths provides an avenue through which faculty supervisors in the field of counselor education may adapt their supervisory style to meet the unique needs of their supervisees. Mindfulness and character strengths are now detailed with a focus on developmentally appropriate outcomes for beginning supervisees during their practicum and internship experiences.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness practices, which focus on present moment experience, cultivate self-awareness, assist with stress management, and support internal and external focus (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). Additionally, mindfulness re-integrates the heart into education and serves as a resource for strengthening both interpersonal connections and compassion for self and others (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). Cultivating compassion for self and others is essential in developing effective counseling relationships; despite this, counselor education programs “seem to be lacking in more implicit aspects of the therapeutic relationship” (Campbell & Christopher, 2012, p. 215). As such, many counselor educators focus on clinical skill development and miss the mark on supporting counselor trainees in working through their own interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges. Mindfulness practices offer some promise in supporting students in developing both their intrapersonal awareness and their interpersonal effectiveness (Barbezat & Bush, 2014).

Mindfulness has been utilized as a resource for navigating challenging mental and emotional states, and is hypothesized to support the development of therapeutic presence in counselors-in-training (Campbell & Christopher, 2012). Therapeutic presence has been described as “bringing one’s whole self into the encounter with clients by being completely in the moment on multiple levels: physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually” (Geller, Greenberg, & Watson, 2010, p. 599). Mindfulness refers to the ability to regulate one’s attention with awareness, and an orientation to experience that is open and accepting of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise (Bishop et al., 2004; Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness has been identified as a resource for aiding counselors in developing responsiveness, attentiveness, and empathy in therapeutic encounters, while also lessening defensiveness and reactivity (Campbell & Christopher, 2012). Mindfulness has been used with beginning supervisees in psychology (Hopkins & Proeve, 2013), counseling (Campbell & Christopher, 2012), social work (Gockel, Burton, James & Bryer, 2013), and marriage and family therapy (McCollum & Gehart, 2010). As previously stated, the field of counselor education may benefit by continuing to explore innovative approaches for training beginning supervisees to cultivate the core conditions (i.e., unconditional positive regard, empathetic understanding, and congruence) set forth by Rogers (1957).

Psychoeducational programs involving direct mindfulness instruction and experiential practice activities, which focus on the flow of breathing, external sensations and internal sensations through focused awareness, are called mindfulness-based interventions (MBI; Bishop et al., 2004; Jennings, 2015). In general, MBIs are associated with reductions in negative affect, anxiety, depressive symptoms, perceived stress, pain, and interpersonal sensitivity (Astin, 1997; Baer, 2003; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Shapiro, Brown, & Beigel, 2007). Mindfulness is also associated with increases in connectedness with others, well-being, positive affect, self-compassion, gratitude, and empathy (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Rothraup & Morgan, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2007; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998). These findings suggest that mindfulness may have utility as a form of stress inoculation that may be extremely relevant for counselors-in-training and beginning helping professionals (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009).

Mindfulness in Supervision

Using a cohort-controlled research design, Shapiro et al. (2007) examined the effects of a mindfulness intervention on beginning supervisees and found that the intervention group reported significant decreases in negative affect, anxiety (both state and trait), perceived stress, and rumination, as well as significant increases in positive affect and self-compassion. These authors suggested that mindfulness training may support emotion regulation and serve as a buffer against stress for beginning supervisees. Schure, Christopher, and Christopher (2008) adapted a MBI, mindfulness-based stress reduction, to fit a semester-long class format for beginning supervisees. Thematic analysis of end of semester supervisee journals indicated that supervisees reported physical changes, emotional changes, attitudinal changes, interpersonal changes, and increased spiritual awareness resulting from course participation. Additionally, supervisees linked their participation in the course with increased comfort with silence, a greater ability to center and stay present with clients, and a shift in their view of the counseling process. Across professions, the use of mindfulness in supervision is associated with stronger supervisory relationships (Daniel, Borders, & Willse, 2015), increased empathy (Hopkins & Proeve, 2013), improved supervisee self-efficacy (Gockel et al. 2013), and therapeutic presence (McCollum & Gehart, 2010). Given the stress, anxiety, and uncertainty characteristic of supervisees early in development (Ellis et al., 2015; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010), creative strategies are needed that support supervisees in responding to stress and self-doubt.

Character Strengths

Paired with mindfulness, character strengths create a strong foundation for promoting increased self-awareness that may benefit beginning supervisees (Niemic, 2014). The VIA character strengths framework identifies 24 virtues that are valued among humans (e.g., leadership, hope, forgiveness, creativity, curiosity; Niemic, 2013). Character

strengths tend to: (a) enhance contentment and/or joy for self and/or others, (b) inspire others and/or elicit admiration by those who witness them, and (c) occur across settings and times (Baer & Lykins, 2011). In addition, institutional and cultural practices often support the development and expression of character strengths (e.g., kindness, forgiveness, leadership; Baer & Lykins, 2011).

The character strengths framework has been researched in over 30 different countries to validate the existence of 24 character strengths cross-culturally (Biswar-Diener, 2006). Therefore, the VIA character strengths classification is a useful tool for helping individuals identify their strengths, and it celebrates a broad range of strengths that are not culturally bound. This framework is a resource for supervisors to learn, use, and apply a strengths-based perspective (Niemiec, 2014). The practice of identifying strengths in oneself or others, strengths-spotting, is one strategy for incorporating strengths into supervision (Niemiec, 2014). Of particular note is the concept of signature strengths, which are internal strengths that serve to energize and empower individuals when they are employed. Individuals generally have five to seven signature strengths they express across settings, which reflect their innate assets (Niemiec, 2014). Capitalizing on signature strengths may be one useful strategy for mitigating the effects of stress and self-doubt experienced by beginning supervisees (Fialkov & Haddad, 2012).

The character strengths are organized into 6 broader areas: (a) wisdom strengths (e.g., creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective), (b) courage strengths (e.g., bravery, perseverance, honest, and zest), (c) humanity strengths (e.g., love, kindness, social intelligence), (d) justice strengths (e.g., teamwork, fairness, leadership), (e) temperance strengths (e.g., forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation), and (f) transcendence strengths (e.g., appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, optimism, humor, spirituality) (Niemiec, 2013). Exploring and deploying one's signature strengths is linked with increases in happiness and decreases in depression (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2013; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Research also indicates that students who participated in an intervention focusing on strengths identification and application showed reductions in anxiety and depression (Brunwasser & Gillham, 2008). In a study by Proctor and colleagues (2011), supervisees who participated in activities designed to cultivate their strengths demonstrated increases in life satisfaction not seen in a comparable control group. Furthermore, Fialkov and Haddad (2012) indicated that supervisees reported feeling competent, energized, and connected both to themselves and their clients following the identification and utilization of their strengths.

Integrating Character Strengths and Mindfulness in Supervision

Based on emerging research, the identification and employment of VIA character strengths may be useful in supporting feelings of general life satisfaction and competence related to counseling (Fialkov & Haddad, 2012; Proctor et al., 2009). Paired with mindfulness, character strengths strategies may support supervisee development and increase supervisee self and other awareness. These outcomes parallel the developmental growth

process outlined in the IDM (Stoltenberg and McNeill, 2010). Incorporating mindfulness and character strengths into supervision may assuage the stress and anxiety of beginning supervisees as they navigate the responsibilities essential to the therapeutic relationship (Schure et al., 2008). The next section will offer guidance in developing knowledge of mindfulness and character strengths, and provide concrete strategies for integrating mindfulness and character strengths practices into supervision.

Suggestions for Supervision Interventions

Mindfulness and character strengths are two synergistic tools that supervisors may utilize in efforts to support beginning supervisees' developmental progression. Mindfulness provides a foundation to promote supervisee development of self-awareness and reduce anxiety, as it focuses on non-judgment, curiosity, and expansion of insight (Campbell & Christopher, 2012). Character strengths provide a foundation to promote supervisee efficacy and confidence, as they promote the recognition and deployment of one's inherent best qualities and personal characteristics. Integrating mindfulness and character strengths resources help supervisors ensure client welfare by promoting supervisee development and improving their ability to offer therapeutic presence with clients. In the next section, resources are identified for developing knowledge in mindfulness, cultivating a mindfulness practice, and integrating mindfulness practices into supervision.

Applying Mindfulness to Self as Supervisor

Developing a foundation of knowledge and practice in mindfulness is a crucial first step towards infusing mindfulness into clinical supervision. This foundation aligns with the previously mentioned call for supervisors to actively enhance their own self-awareness in efforts to increase their effectiveness (ACES, 2011). Supervisors are strongly advised that practice and integration of mindfulness into one's way of life is a prerequisite for sharing the practice with others (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Career teachers of mindfulness indicate that the most skilled teaching of mindfulness is based upon a personal mindfulness practice cultivated over several years (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Supervisors seeking to cultivate a mindfulness practice may do so by (a) enrolling in a mindfulness-based stress reduction course offered through a local hospital, wellness center, or remotely via an online learning platform; (b) attending a workshop that focuses on the unique applications of mindfulness to the work of therapists/clinicians/helpers, such as programming offered through contemplative and holistic learning institutes (e.g., Garrison Institute: <https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/>, Omega: <https://www.omega.org/>, Esalen: <https://www.esalen.org/>); (c) enrolling in mindfulness-specific coursework offered through a university; and/or (d) finding and learning with a local teacher in tai chi, meditation, yoga, or another embodied awareness modality. In addition, several popular press books may be particularly useful for supervisors to deepen their knowledge. Three

recommended books include *Sitting Together: Essential Skills for Mindfulness-Based Psychotherapy* (Pollak, Pedulla, & Siegel, 2016), *The Mindful Therapist: A Clinician's guide to Mindsight* (Siegel, 2010), and *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom* (Hanson, 2009).

Supervisors who incorporate mindfulness practice into their own lives are better equipped to incorporate these approaches in supervision (Campbell & Christopher, 2012). A supervisor's practice of mindfulness strengthens their capacity to actively introduce and support supervisees in experimenting with such practices. The following activities serve to cultivate knowledge and understanding of mindfulness with beginning supervisees: mindfulness meditations, seven plus one activity, and mindfulness of positive feelings.

Mindfulness meditations. Utilizing brief supervisor-guided mindfulness meditations is one particularly simple way to incorporate mindfulness into both group and individual supervision during practicum and internship. Supervisors may incorporate brief guided mindfulness meditations at the beginning of supervision sessions. These meditations may last from 30 seconds to five minutes and can be tailored to supervisees' personal characteristics and developmental needs. Supervisees may respond more positively to this practice when the meditations are framed as a strategy to assist them in becoming fully present in supervision and to support the transition into the supervisory session (i.e., an arriving meditation). Meditations may focus on the breath, sounds, or physical sensations. As the semester/term progresses, supervisees can be invited to become more progressively involved and to experiment with leading the arriving meditations. This supports self-awareness and the development of autonomy, as outlined in the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

Seven plus one activity. Early in the term, supervisees may benefit from learning more about the seven (plus one) attitudinal tenets of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The seven attitudes of mindfulness include: (a) non-judging: watching the action of the mind in the manner of an impartial witness, (b) patience: allowing life to unfold as it does without a time press, (c) beginner's mind: approaching moment-to-moment experiences with curiosity as if we are seeing them for the first time (d) trust: confidence in oneself and a quiet knowing that intuition is a reliable guide, (e) non-striving: paying attention without seeking to achieve a goal, (f) acceptance: embracing the reality of the present moment, and (g) letting go: non-attachment to our thoughts and feelings (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Supervisors may add self-compassion as an eighth (i.e., plus one) attitude to the original list, which entails recognizing the universality of human suffering ("it's not just me"), being kind/warm to oneself, and recognizing that imperfection is part of life (Neff, 2011). This exercise addresses beginning supervisees' need for support in managing anxiety.

For this activity, supervisors might provide a brief verbal description of each of the attitudes, and then assign supervisees to small groups. In small groups, supervisees could be tasked with identifying and discussing which attitudes of mindfulness they tend toward

naturally and which attitudes are most challenging, and to provide examples from their lives. Through discussion, supervisees are often able to link with other supervisees who have different gateways into mindfulness. This also supports the development of self and other awareness as supervisees continue to develop counseling skills competencies outlined by ACA (2014). As a full group, the supervisor may facilitate a discussion of patterns and themes that emerged in small group discussions promoting insight and motivation to grow.

One pattern that may emerge is the tendency of supervisees to have one or more attitudes of mindfulness (e.g., trust, patience, acceptance, beginner's mind) they tend toward. Identifying supervisees' primary attitudes of mindfulness provides additional resources to integrate moment-to-moment mindfulness into client sessions. Self-compassion may also be particularly relevant to beginning supervisees, as they struggle with adapting to a clinical setting, practicing skills and strategies with which they are not yet comfortable, and experience anxiety (Ellis et al., 2015). In fact, the concepts of self-compassion and non-striving provide a foundation for fostering conversations about issues such as perfectionism, trying too hard to get somewhere (striving), and working harder than the client (Neff, 2011). Fostering mindfulness allows supervisees to identify how these issues might slow down and inhibit the therapeutic process. Discussing such insights during a group supervision session allows the opportunity for students to grow and bond together, as a group. This type of exercise during practicum or internship sets the stage for collaborative thinking and the development of consultation skills needed to progress through higher levels of the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

Mindfulness of positive feelings. Cultivating positive feelings may also be utilized as a mindfulness strategy to increase collaborative learning, help supervisees feel more connected to the content, and bolster their resources for the future (Fredrickson, 2001, 2009). As previously stated, positive emotional experiences are linked with changes in thinking, behaving, and interacting; therefore, they are crucial building blocks for developing new skills, knowledge, and resources in supervisees (Fredrickson, 2001, 2009). Supervisors may consider using guided reflection activities to induce positive feelings and enable supervisees to experience key ideas related to the supervisory and therapeutic relationships. Two strategies to cultivate mindfulness of positive feelings include remembering what is important and mindfulness of care.

Remembering what is important: A reflection. In the remembering what is important reflection, supervisees may be asked a series of questions, including (a) "What motivated you to pursue a degree in this profession?"; (b) "Think of an event or interaction that happened in the last week that helped you remember your motivation to become a professional counselor"; (c) "I'll ask a few questions to help you remember the details: Who was involved? Where were you when this event happened? How did you feel when it was happening?"; (d) "What thoughts and feelings come up as you remember?"; and (e) "Do you notice any sensations in your body as you remember?" Processing in dyads and

as a whole group might follow this reflection, and one common supervisee reaction to this exercise is “I’ve been working really hard in this clinical experience and haven’t intentionally considered why I’m doing this for some time.” Teaching topics that emerge from this exercise may include: (a) supervisees have the internal knowledge and capacity to cultivate a sense of perseverance and to tap into it; (b) positive emotional experiences can change the course of a class, interaction, or day; and (c) attending to emotion is tantamount in clinical work, and the omission of emotions may block one’s ability to connect with a client. This activity may be particularly useful when the non-linear nature of developmental progression is most apparent, as mentioned in the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010), or at points in the term when motivation wanes.

Mindfulness of care. This activity is designed to help supervisees recall a time when they felt cared for, so that they can experience and connect with how important a caring container is for facilitating clinical work. Possible questions to guide this reflection/feeling induction may include: (a) “Think of an event or interaction when you were with someone and felt deeply cared for by that person”; (b) “How did you know they cared for you? What are the ways they communicated that care to you?”; (c) “How did you feel in that moment?”; and (d) “What are you thinking, feeling, and sensing in your body as you remember this experience?” Processing in dyads and as a whole group may follow this activity, with an emphasis given to the role of positive regard and therapeutic presence in shaping an environment that facilitates a caring container.

Applying Character Strengths to Self in Supervision

Developing fluency in the language of VIA character strengths is a crucial foundation for utilizing it in supervisory sessions (Peterson & Park, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). An important first step is for supervisors to complete the VIA character strengths survey and become familiar with their own signature strengths, which also supports a best practice in supervision (ACES, 2011). Beginning to utilize the language of strengths is particularly powerful as it creates a common, shared language of strengths for supervisors and supervisees (Linkins, Niemiec, Gillham, & Mayerson, 2014). The identification of strengths in supervision promotes confidence, which fosters autonomy for Level 1 supervisees, and may alleviate anxiety related to evaluation. Recommended resources for learning more about character strengths include: *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), *Mindfulness and Character Strengths: A Practical Guide to Flourishing* (Niemiec, 2014), and the VIA Institute on Character website (<http://www.viacharacter.org/www/>).

Character strength student reflection. One sample activity which focuses exclusively on identifying supervisees’ VIA character strengths may be most relevant early in the supervisee’s experience (i.e., week 2 or 3) is as follows:

Compose a two-three page response to the following prompt:

After taking the VIA Character strengths survey, identify and discuss your top five strengths. How might you bring these strengths to your practicum experience? How do you imagine drawing on your strengths in working with clients? Describe how you'd like to be perceived by the clients you see. Identify 3 steps you can take to build on your strengths and move towards becoming the counselor you aspire to be.

Supervisors may use this activity to introduce supervisees to the language and concept of character strengths early in their supervision experience when supervisee anxiety is highest. This writing assignment familiarizes supervisees with the VIA Character strengths framework and provides a foundation for incorporating the language in class and supervision sessions. Supervisors may wish to build on the initial strengths identification activity by inviting supervisees to compose written reflections regarding their strengths use at various points throughout the supervision experience. See Appendix for a sample journal prompt that may be employed at the midpoint and end of the term to support supervisees in continuing with a strengths-orientation. Items from the midterm reflection are repeated in the final evaluation journal, with wording adjustments to focus on the end of supervisees' initial field experience (i.e., practicum) and moving on to their subsequent field experience (i.e., internship). These written journals may be reviewed by the supervisor and incorporated into midterm and final supervision sessions. Writing activities are layered atop of the use of strengths language throughout the semester with the intention of increasing supervisees' self-perceptions of competence and constructing an empowering language throughout the supervisory process (Linkins et al., 2014).

Incorporating strength language. Supervisors are encouraged to interweave the language of strengths into triadic supervision throughout the semester. Triadic supervision provides a perfect forum for strengths-spotting, the practice of identifying strengths in oneself or others (Niemic, 2014). When strengths-spotting in others, it is particularly important to label the strength, connect it with a particular behavior, and express appreciation (Niemic, 2014). A sample strengths-focused supervisory strategy, which may be utilized in triadic supervision, may include the following prompts: (a) "As you listen to your colleague describe a particular site experience, what character strengths do you believe they utilized?" and (b) "Identify the parts of your colleague's narrative that jumped out to you and help us understand how those connect with the particular strength." Additionally, the following questions may be directed to the supervisee who provided the example: (a) "How does that fit with your perspective on the situation?", (b) "Did you realize you brought those strengths to the table?", and (c) "What do you notice as you hear someone else identify and label your strengths?" This activity not only supports confidence, but also promotes other-awareness and collaborative mindset, both essential

elements in interpersonal effectiveness.

In dyadic or triadic supervision, strengths-oriented questions may be utilized to support supervisees in thinking differently about challenges that arise (e.g., Questions such as “What strength might you bring to adjust your approach to this situation?” and “Is there a colleague/collaborator that you may enlist whose strengths complement yours?”). Strengths spotting may also be utilized to help supervisees recognize successes that their developmental anxiety blocks them from seeing. For example, a supervisor may strengths-spot in the following way, “As I listen to your recollection of this experience, it seems as though you utilized bravery, perspective, and kindness in approaching your client when you gave her feedback about how harsh her self-judgments sounded as she spoke them aloud (insert particular example given by supervisee here).”

This strategy fits with the broaden and build theory of positive emotions, namely as positive experiences and emotions are generated in supervision, then supervisees build confidence as they recognize their use of strengths and its impact with clients (Fredrickson, 2001). It also strengthens the bond between supervisee and supervisor in the supervisory relationship. When repeated over time, the process of strengths-spotting may support supervisees in acting with agency and increasing confidence in progressively more challenging situations. This is a particularly valuable tool as they progress through Level 1 of the IDM to Level 2, a developmental level marked by increased autonomy and decreased anxiety (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). In addition, providing a framework for strengths-oriented communication early on and throughout supervisee training may also help to serve as a buffer against burnout, which reduces supervisee effectiveness (Dreison et al., 2018). This also supports supervisors’ ethical responsibility to ensure client welfare (ACA, 2014).

Conclusion

Mindfulness and character strengths are complementary strategies that supervisors may utilize in efforts to support beginning supervisees’ developmental progression. Mindfulness provides a foundation to promote supervisee development of self-awareness and reduce anxiety, as it focuses on non-judgment, curiosity, and expansion of insight (Campbell & Christopher, 2012). Character strengths serve as a resource in promoting supervisee efficacy and confidence, as well as recognition of one’s best qualities.

Effective supervision involves intentionally approaching supervision with strategies to support beginning supervisees. This is not only practical, but is also ethical. It is imperative to have a strong foundational knowledge base of the supervision process, effective strategies for promoting development, and awareness of supervisees’ unique characteristics (Stoltenberg and McNeill, 2010). It is also useful to continue enhancing this foundation, in both literature and practice. Integration of mindfulness and character strengths are innovative avenues to meet beginning supervisees where they are as they work through high levels of anxiety and limited self and other awareness during practicum and internship.

Given the unique needs of Level 1 supervisees (i.e., high anxiety, limited self and other awareness, lack of confidence, and dependency within supervision), mindfulness and character strengths offer promising approaches to counteract developmental uncertainty (Borders & Brown, 2005). Mindfulness supports the development of therapeutic presence, emotion regulation, empathy, and responsiveness (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2007). Early research also suggests that mindfulness reduces defensiveness and reactivity, which is fitting for preparing Level 1 supervisees to progress to Level 2, in which they will work through the conflict between autonomy and dependency (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Furthermore, identification and utilization of character strengths is associated with feelings of competency and connection to clients (Fialkov & Haddad, 2012).

No found research exists that explores the synergistic use of mindfulness and character strengths; however, integration of the two approaches is likely to support effective supervision. Continued exploration of the use of mindfulness and character strengths with beginning supervisees through qualitative and quantitative research will strengthen the viability of these supervision interventions. Additionally, extending this framework to fit the needs of Level 2 supervisees, particularly those in internship, may be useful. Eventually, solidifying the use of mindfulness and character strengths in supervision as an evidence-based practice is paramount.

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Appendix

Midterm Journal Assignment Incorporating Character Strengths

- (a) Identify 3 aspects of your practicum that are currently going well.
- (b) Identify and describe how you used at least 3 character strengths during your practicum experience (e.g., curiosity, honesty, kindness, teamwork, leadership, gratitude, humor, etc.).
- (c) Identify 2 aspects of your practicum performance that you would like to see change by the end of the semester.
- (d) What additional knowledge/information do you believe you need to be successful in practicum this semester?
- (e) What additional skills do you wish to further develop/improve upon prior to beginning your internship? (e.g., working with problem behaviors in small groups, demonstrating empathy, identifying key concerns in individual counseling)
- (f) List additional topics, challenges, etc. that you would like to explore/hope we explore in practicum.