

Metaphoric Stories in Supervision of Internship: A Qualitative Study

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The authors describe a qualitative study that explored how the use of stories in supervision may contribute to self-reflection in master's-level counseling interns. Interns from 2 universities participated in facilitated discussions of 3 fairy tales throughout a semester. The analysis of storied discussions revealed 3 themes related to supervisee experience: recurring cycles of highs and lows, balancing external and internal influences, and struggles with self-awareness. Suggestions for practice and future research are included.

Stories contain metaphors that provide opportunities for reflection on many levels. In the present study, we examined how stories might contribute to self-reflection in master's-level counseling interns. Other counselors and counselor educators have also considered the use of stories in supervision and counseling. For example, the metaphor of the hero's journey has been used in counseling-related endeavors to examine career happiness (Henderson, 2000), to process grief and to counsel victims of physical violence (Halstead, 2000), to assist Vietnam veterans with trauma-related concerns (Tick, 1995), to open discussions of chronic illness (Hutchinson, 2000), and to enhance supervision (Sommer & Cox, 2003, 2006). Barclay (2007) pointed to the value of the metaphoric journey in narrative counseling, stating "[a] metaphor such as 'life is a journey' helps me understand my quest for both self-knowledge and the treasure of positive experiences, as well as, perhaps, the confusion and problems that arise" (p. 18).

What makes the story of the hero's journey so useful? Mythologist Joseph Campbell (1988) suggested that cultures from around the world have used stories to help individuals understand experience. He claimed that reflection on such a story allows you to see "its relevance to something happening in your own life. It gives you perspective on what's happening to you" (Campbell, 1988, p. 4). In essence, Campbell (1988) is saying that reflection on stories can contribute to individual meaning making. The hero's journey is one of self-discovery, and it is traditionally presented in three phases: an initial point of departure, an encounter with extreme difficulties or challenging tasks, and a return with a gift or boon (Campbell, 1973). Campbell indicated that most stories have some broad interpretation of this "ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage" (1973, p. 121); he added, "[t]he individual has only to discover his own position with reference to this general human formula, and let it then assist him past his restricting walls" (1973, p. 121). Recently, Lawson (2005) used the hero's journey to illuminate the developmental nature of counseling. He described a process in which life events offer a call to adventure, and he

stated that "if the call to adventure is answered, clients, with the assistance of the counselor, learn new ways of seeing the world and . . . of living in the world" (Lawson, 2005, p. 140).

Learning new ways of seeing is also important on the supervisee's journey to become a competent counselor. Drawing upon the use of metaphor, Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Delworth (1998) described the progression of skills developed by a rock climber as a means of understanding the stages of counselor development noted in the Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) of supervision. As supervisees develop, they experience changes in perspectives that allow them to view the three core constructs of the IDM—motivation, autonomy, and self- and other awareness—from varying vantage points. The use of metaphor can help to describe supervisees' experience, but supervision techniques that engage metaphor can also be used to promote supervisees' self-reflection and self-understanding. Examples of such techniques include the use of Greek mythology (Sommer & Cox, 2003), metaphoric stories (Young & Borders, 1998, 1999), environmental metaphors (Valadez & Garcia, 1998), and metaphoric drawing activities (Fall & Sutton, 2004; Saiz & Guiffrida, 2001). Duffy (2005) described the use of metaphor in the supervision of group workers and noted that this approach "has the advantage of multiple perspectives" (p. 251). She added that metaphor "is particularly useful when a worker is feeling stuck or puzzled about something" (Duffy, 2005, p. 252).

Anecdotal evidence and limited research have suggested that metaphoric activities help supervisees to understand the process of becoming a counselor. These activities "encourage supervisees to (a) think critically about where they are in relation to their goals and (b) use past learning experiences to conceptualize their own unique developmental processes" (Guiffrida, Jordan, Saiz, & Barnes, 2007, p. 398). Similarly, Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) concluded that as the professional counselor develops, self-reflection is the primary method of professional development across all stages and is instrumental in preventing stagnation. Self-reflection sharpens

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critical thinking skills, enhances self-discovery, reinforces new learning, and provides a method for insights and meanings to emerge (Griffith & Frieden, 2000).

Research-based and theoretical articles support metaphoric supervision. Young and Borders (1999) conducted research on the impact of intentional use of metaphor during supervision on supervisees' case conceptualization skills. Notable qualitative results included the increased use of metaphor in client sessions and the development of "an underlying theme for the supervision process . . . allowing the supervisor and the supervisee to develop a shared language for the supervisee's experience" (Young & Borders, 1999, p. 147). In a theoretical article, Sommer and Cox (2003) discussed *Psyche's* tasks as a metaphor to help supervisees explore their own struggles within counseling and supervision, thereby normalizing the counselor developmental process. They noted that supervisees should be encouraged to develop personal interpretations because "the beauty of story/myth is that others might find different, yet equally significant meanings that resonate for them" (Sommer & Cox, 2003, p. 333). Similarly, Crocket (2004) noted that supervision is optimal for the telling and retelling of stories, including imaginative ones. She viewed the supervisee as an "actor in supervision" (p. 173), rather than a receiver of supervision. Crocket's approach increases understanding as the supervisee becomes the "author-ity" (p. 173) by storying his or her experiences.

The value of reflective practices, such as the use of metaphor, has begun receiving more attention in counselor education. Griffith and Frieden (2000) reviewed Socratic questioning and journal writing, among other reflective practices, as useful interventions for counselors-in-training. Structured activities for guided reflection have been used to train experienced counselors in new roles as supervisors (Peace, 2000), to facilitate theoretical fit among counseling students (Guiffrida, 2005), to aid practitioners to become clearer about their own personal values and perspectives (Sax, 2006), and to facilitate personal and professional development in beginning counselor trainees (Germain, 2003). Considering the usefulness of the aforementioned creative and reflective practices, further exploration of these approaches to supervision merits attention. In their concluding remarks, Guiffrida et al. (2007) indicated that although useful variables had been identified that facilitated supervisee development using metaphor, it would be challenging to isolate the characteristics that would lead to supervisee and supervisor success. This would be especially true if experimental or controlled study methodologies were used. From this standpoint, it was the position of these authors "that more qualitative research would be needed to understand conditions under which metaphors are successfully introduced as a means to facilitate supervisee development" (Guiffrida et al., 2007, p. 339). To assist future efforts of supervisors and researchers in appreciating the multifaceted and distinct nature of these conditions, one focus, among others, would be to explore and isolate the perspectives of supervisees with regard to these metaphorical interventions. The present study is one such qualitative investigation.

Research Design

This study explored how the use of stories in clinical supervision of counselors-in-training might contribute to self-reflection. Three groups of master's-level counseling interns from two universities participated. Counseling programs at both universities were accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. Each group listened to and discussed three fairy tales throughout a semester during group supervision of clinical internship. These facilitated conversations were recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively analyzed.

Participants

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) noted that all sampling in qualitative research is purposeful and that multiple types of purposeful sampling exist, such as convenience or criterion. According to Merriam (1998), convenience sampling "almost always figures into sample selection" (p. 63); however, convenience sampling alone may not produce the richness of information required. In this study, convenience sampling and snowball or network sampling were combined. Based upon convenience, the first author planned to solicit volunteers from an internship class she facilitated. Additional participants were sought to obtain broader and richer information. The first and second authors offered a theoretically based presentation on this topic at a professional conference. Networking with conference attendees led to the third author offering to use the proposed interview protocol with two of his internship classes.

All 19 participants were from the north central region of the United States; there were four school counseling interns and 15 community counseling interns. Six interns were in their first semester of internship, and 13 were in their second semester of internship. The interns ranged in age from 25 to 51 years, with an average age of 33. There were 14 female interns and five male interns. Institutional review boards at both universities approved this study. Participation was voluntary and had no impact on course grades. Each individual signed an informed consent form before the study began. Interns were given the option of receiving alternate supervision on the days that stories were discussed. None of the participants chose this option.

Method

A qualitative approach was chosen because, as McLeod (2001) noted, "[i]t produces formal statements of conceptual frameworks that provide new ways of understanding" (p. 3). In this instance, a basic interpretive approach to analysis was determined to be the best fit. This method is inductive and descriptive. Although other types of qualitative research share similar characteristics, these other methods also have an additional purpose, such as generating theory or understanding the essence of a phenomenon. A basic interpretive study is simply

focused on understanding “how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 38). In our study, we were *not* interested in generating theory. We simply wanted to explore how counseling interns might relate to the use of stories in supervision of internship. Given that this was our primary goal, a basic interpretive approach seemed best suited to our needs. McLeod (2001) described this same approach using the phrase “generic qualitative method” (p. 131) adding that this method has several benefits including that it “demystifies qualitative research” (p. 131) and allows researchers more flexibility.

Protocol. The constructs mentioned in the IDM (motivation, autonomy, and self- and other awareness) were used as points of departure in choosing stories. We offer abbreviated versions of the selected stories here as a reference point; more detail may be found in Ward and Sommer (2006). “The Ugly Duckling” by Andersen (1959) is a story with themes related to motivation. A young swan encounters numerous difficulties on the journey to find his way in the world, and at times he questions his ability to continue. “Vasalisa the Fair” (Crossley-Holland, 1998) is a story with themes related to autonomy. Vasalisa’s dying mother gives her a doll and then Vasalisa is sent on a quest for light. She faces nearly impossible tasks of cleaning, organizing, and food preparation assigned to her by Baba Yaga, who holds the light she is seeking. The doll assists her in meeting these challenges. “Sea-Woman” (Crossley-Holland, 1987) is a story with themes related to self- and other awareness. Sea-Woman’s pelt is stolen by a fisherman, preventing her from returning to the sea. She shares a satisfactory life on land with the fisherman but she longs for her original skin and the ability to return to the sea.

Participants in each of the three groups listened to these three fairy tales on three occasions throughout the course of a 15-week semester of a master’s-level clinical counseling internship course. The first and third authors were the professors of record for the three internship classes, and they facilitated the storied discussions of the tales. Between the 1st and 3rd week of the semester, interns listened to and reflected upon “The Ugly Duckling.” “Vasalisa” was discussed between the 7th and the 9th week, and “Sea-Woman” was discussed between the 12th and 14th week of the semester. This schedule allowed researchers to coordinate when the stories were shared and also allowed for some flexibility to attend to internship requirements.

Group discussions, rather than individual interviews, were chosen for data gathering based on the idea that meaning is constructed through interpersonal exchange. After listening to each story, participants shared in conversations stimulated by semistructured interview questions. Examples of questions include the following: “In what ways does the Ugly Duckling’s search for belonging relate to your experience as a counselor-in-training?” and “Vasalisa relied on her little doll for information and guidance. What does the doll in this story represent for you?” and “Sea-Woman’s pelt is stolen

along with her ability to define herself. Please share any of your experiences as a counselor-in-training that may seem similar to this character’s story.” Follow-up questions were used to clarify participants’ statements and to help make links between participants’ views.

Analysis. Each of the three groups generated three discussion transcripts, one for each story. Transcripts relating to the individual stories were read together. For instance, the three transcripts relating to “The Ugly Duckling” were read and then reread for any phrases or words that seemed particularly striking, powerful, repetitive, or metaphoric. These phrases or passages were noted, and a comprehensive list was generated. These phrases were then synthesized into subthemes to avoid overlapping or redundant phrases or ideas. A similar process took place for each of the two remaining stories. Two subthemes for each story emerged, resulting in a total of six subthemes. After subthemes for each group of specific story discussions were identified, all transcripts were read again to determine if any subthemes identified in each specific story group related to subthemes from the discussion of other stories. A third and final coding collapsed the six subthemes into three comprehensive, overarching themes, including recurring cycles of highs and lows, balancing internal and external boundaries, and struggles with self-awareness.

I (first author) completed the qualitative analysis, and I used two strategies to address any potential for researcher bias and to help establish trustworthiness and authenticity. These included the use of reflective memos during coding and analysis (Charmaz, 2002) and the use of peer debriefers (Padgett, Mathew, & Conte, 2004). Handwritten reflective memos were completed throughout coding and analysis. At regular intervals, a condensed typed summary of these memos, including personal reflections and emerging themes, was sent to the two coauthors who served as peer debriefers. The peer debriefers received summaries via e-mail, and their comments, critiques, and suggestions were likewise shared via e-mail. These exchanges helped to clarify ideas for coding and theme development. Additionally, on three occasions, the first and second authors met for intense research retreats in which several hours of discussion of analysis transpired.

Results

As noted earlier, a final analysis collapsed the six subthemes, resulting in three overarching themes. Each final theme is illustrated in the following paragraphs.

Recurring Cycles of Highs and Lows

Participants described this theme in various ways. One noted, “highs and lows [in completing the counseling degree] were pretty extreme and no different than the Ugly Duckling when he was feeling like he was always being picked on . . . and feeling like he’s got much worth.” Another was on an “emotional roller coaster” because one semester “I kept moving

forward and I kept growing and feeling confident.” But the next semester, at a different site, “I just feel like I’m going backwards and I just have a lot of ambivalent feelings that I’m working through.” A participant noted, “Recently, I just kind of hit the wall and that seemed hopeless. I thought, ‘Why am I putting myself through this? I could’ve just stuck with what I was doing before and that would have been easier.’” This participant added, “The way I worked through it was just kind of the duckling thing: Just keep moving. So, that’s the hopeful part, sometimes you don’t know where it’s going . . . but you just keep moving forward.”

One frequently mentioned low experience related to perceived devaluation in the mental health hierarchy in which participants believed that counselors were viewed at the “bottom of the pyramid with counseling interns making up the lowest level.” One participant noted she was more sensitive to comments from supervisors and professors than she would be if she was a paid, professional counselor. She added that as an intern, “I almost feel like I have to prove myself . . . because you’re on the bottom; it’s established that you’re on the bottom, so you have to prove yourself.” The following quote poignantly reflects many participants’ views on this topic.

We don’t fit as counselors-in-training; we are unique from the rest of the people that we associate with like professors, and supervisors, and practicing counselors. . . . A lot of the hardships endured by the Ugly Duckling are similar to the hardships I endure . . . and until I find my correct peer group and those that appreciate me, I’m just going to keep getting kicked around.

At times, the low points were significant enough that participants questioned their commitment to the counseling profession. In discussing “The Ugly Duckling,” one mentioned “the long winter of hoop jumping” and added that, at times, “I just want to throw it in the air and . . . get my accounting degree.” Similarly, in reflecting on “Sea-Woman,” another noted that in her counseling program “they kind of pick apart and pick at you to find out who you really are.” She added, “it’s pretty easy to lose confidence and to lose your own value.” Another received only positive feedback from her site and faculty supervisors, but even this experience had its drawbacks. She felt “let down” and wanted to say, “Can you please just tell me what I’m doing wrong? I don’t know it all—there’s no way I could—I don’t want to hear everything’s good. I want to hear what I need to work on.” But instead she was left questioning herself, wondering if she was a “fake” or “if I really have what it takes to be a counselor.”

Participants also shared positive experiences related to their training such as receiving support from others. One participant described helpful exchanges with her coworkers and supervisors that led her to believe that “sometimes groups just don’t go well or sometimes things just don’t go well . . . but it happens no matter how long you’ve been doing this.” She

compared this insight “to where the swan thought he was ugly until he found his group and realized that he was like other people.” Several participants were helped when clients offered feedback such as “you’ve made a difference” or “you made my day.” Many participants noted that it was the support of family and friends that kept them going. A participant offered, “I think of all those people—parents, brothers, and friends. I wouldn’t be able to do what I have without them.”

Participants described feeling overwhelmed by the work required of them, but they also mentioned a strong desire to be a counselor. The following quote relates Vasalisa’s tasks to the requirements for graduation, and it demonstrates how challenges and rewards intertwine. “I can picture the tasks of cleaning, organizing, and preparing food. She had to do them in order to survive. And we have similar tasks as we go through these classes and prepare to graduate.” She then added that “[Vasalisa] moved on to doing the weeding and the linens to get to the ‘prize’ . . . and I see that as our required 3,000 hours of experience [for licensure]” leading to “the final prize of being able to practice as a counselor.” A final quote nicely sums up this theme of recurring cycles of highs and lows. A participant noted that during her clinical training, I’ve had moments when I really felt that I was getting it, and I was improving and happy with where I was at.” She went on to add, “and then, I would feel like I just got cut down and have to start rebuilding all over again . . . it was real difficult for me.”

Balancing Internal and External Influences

Although participants struggled to balance internal and external influences, they seemed to agree that developing one’s internal sense of direction was most important. One noted the need for an “inner strength . . . that little nudge to keep on going.” Another described finding an “unknown inner strength” when forced to deal with an emergency when her supervisor was out of town. Participants relied on supervisors, friends, and family, but sometimes, when help was most needed “right at that moment . . . those we rely on can’t really be there.” Learning to listen to this inner voice is hard, yet one participant suggested you have to “keep it alive and feed it” because self-reliance is essential.

Participants wanted to define themselves without alienating those in positions of power. One noted that “when you’re a counselor-in-training, you’re supposed to be learning from other people . . . there’s this expectation to do it their way.” She added that “[Sea-Woman] reminds me of finding my own . . . way of relating to clients and building that relationship instead of trying to do it the way that the people I’m learning from do it.” Another noted her supervisor’s attitude led her to question “Who are we, as counselor trainees, to know the right way to deal with clients?” She added, “but you have to follow your instincts, otherwise you’re going to end up second-guessing yourself all the time.” Another ardently stated that she did not like it when a “supervisor’s values are forced on you and you have to learn a way to kind of work around that.” Along

these same lines, a participant noted that she wanted to “move up” in her field, but “the older generation holds the positions of power and they don’t want to move. . . . It’s frustrating.”

Participants described challenges in balancing autonomy with a desire for external support or guidance. One suggested that in her program and at her site “you really have to check what you say from time to time . . . and it’s because of your values and it’s because of your uniqueness.” Another shared that she saw Sea-Woman’s skin or pelt as “her identity.” She added that sometimes based on “what’s happening outside of you, you can lose yourself and lose your identity and then you get the wake-up call and then you say ‘stop!’ you know, ‘this is who I am, this is what I am.’” She went on to share that she wondered how counselors who are “stripped” of their personal values and beliefs during training “could go on to help others . . . struggling with the ‘who am I?’ questions.” She added that if programs ask students to give up their ability to define themselves during training, “then at the end of the program they should make sure we gain it back.” In addition to supervisory influences, participants also noted the importance of balancing personal views with those of their clients. One participant shared, “we need to protect our values” but can’t “go to our clients and judge them by our values.”

Participants struggled to determine how to identify themselves when confronted with opposing perspectives because at times they needed to separate from as well as identify with others. There appeared to be a need for a strong autonomous self within a community that provided opportunities for being heard and being valued. Participants were anxious to find their own way, and yet, they still looked to professors, peers, and supervisors for support.

Struggles With Self-Awareness

Participants suggested that the ongoing need for self-awareness eventually had a negative impact on the way they communicated with others. One shared, “When I started school, I was very comfortable talking with people; it was easy to just listen and the questions seemed to flow fairly smoothly.” However, after beginning graduate studies, this participant lamented that “now I think too much when I’m in session.” Another participant reflected, “It’s actually odd; you go into a program where you’re supposed to become more comfortable talking to people and working with people and helping people.” She paused and then added, “but in a way, you become more uncomfortable with talking to people because you understand the influence that it can have.”

In discussing “Vasalisa,” a participant shared that she kept a journal because “you have your client’s thoughts, and your thoughts, and all these personal things going on in your mind.” She added that counselors help clients to “see how things connect or don’t connect” and “sometimes we have to do that for ourselves too. . . . You almost have to learn how to counsel yourself.” Many found ways to relate Vasalisa’s tasks to personal experience. Some participants emphasized a focus

on clients and pointed to the tasks as a way for counselors to achieve clarity regarding client stories. Others viewed the tasks in terms of self-awareness leading to the ability to “look at things in a different way” or to have “a light bulb moment.” Some participants shared that looking at their experiences in light of the story discussions in this study helped them to realize they had been “falling into the client’s story” or experiencing the client’s story as “mirroring one’s own story.”

Self-awareness requires being open to vulnerability, and this can be difficult. In this regard, Sea-Woman’s struggles resonated with several participants. One described Sea-Woman’s skin as “what I had to take off when I came to the Counselor Ed Program. I was very uncomfortable with exploring my own thoughts, you know, all this counselor know thyself.” This participant noted that like Sea-Woman, as a student “you’re not happy the whole time but . . . you go through the motions and then all of a sudden you get your degree and your own skin back [and] you start developing and start putting it all together.” Another shared that before he became a counselor-in-training, he “used to swim in the sea and have some fun,” but after deciding to attend graduate school, “somebody took my skin away from me so I had to learn to function in a different way.” He paused and then added, “in some ways, I would give a lot to go back and to be naïve [because] there are some things that it’s great to be naïve about.” He concluded, “This is fantastic to work and work on myself and work forward, but at the same time, it’s a lot of work, and I kind of liked hanging out on the other side sometimes too.”

In discussing “The Ugly Duckling,” a participant noted, “you think that the core part of counseling is the empathic listening and the nonjudgmental putting yourself in someone else’s shoes [yet] part of your growth is understanding where your beliefs are too.” She added that she felt extremely exhausted and she questioned, “Does anyone else normally think about all the stuff we think about, all the processes, and all the development, where my beliefs are, how they could possibly be influencing somebody on the subconscious level? It’s friggin’ exhausting.” Similarly, another shared that in meeting with a client, “you have to keep yourself so self-reflected and figure out where you are and all that kind of stuff that you’re more than the average Joe. You’re always kind of reevaluating your goals, your objectives.”

A final excerpt summarizes this theme about struggles related to self-awareness. A participant feared that after completing the graduate program, her original skin might no longer fit. She thought it was important for new counselor trainees “to understand it’s not going to be a comfortable process.” She added that if it seemed comfortable, “maybe they’re not taking their skin off and they’re not giving themselves an opportunity to challenge their values or to really reflect on other people’s worldviews, or you know, to see what it’s like living on shore.” She went on to share that she wished “someone would have explained that a little bit more to me when I started this program—that you’re going to change.” She paused and then

concluded that “somebody did say I was going to change, but I was like ‘Why do I need to change?’ I don’t think I had any real indication of how much and at what levels that change was even possible.”

Negative Case Data

The following paragraphs present disconfirming examples of participants who did not see the benefit of using stories. In considering the following excerpts, however, it is interesting to note that even when participants did not like or did not understand a story, they still benefited from reflecting upon it. For instance, in one group’s concluding discussion of “Sea-Woman,” a participant noted that the story “just sounds like an abusive relationship . . . and it’s stretching it to focus on counselor education stuff.” This excerpt is intriguing because although this participant thought the story was not relevant to counselors, he had earlier used the story to talk about his desire “to go back and to be naïve” as he was before he started the training program. He had also related Sea-Woman’s stolen skin and his own experience of “having to learn to function in a different way.”

In another example, a participant firmly stated, “I didn’t find [Vasalisa] to be relevant at all.” He added that it seemed to be about “a Renaissance time period, so I’m having a hard time connecting to it.” And yet, later in this same discussion, he responded in the following way to another group member who was talking about Vasalisa’s tasks: “When I [first heard] the story, it never even crossed my mind,” then he added in an animated voice that “the cleaning, the laundry, the dishes, the cooking, all that, yeah, we *do* have that in a way in counseling—we have to maintain a schedule and be held accountable for that schedule, we have to write case reports, verify insurance.” Through interpersonal exchange, he was able to see something of value for his own process in a story that he had previously not been able to connect to his experience.

Similarly, a participant noted that “this story [“Sea-Woman”] bothers me because I don’t see her as being powerless without her pelt. She still did define herself, but yet, when she got her pelt back she chose her other life.” She added, “I think as a counselor-in-training, when you first start your training, you do feel vulnerable. I felt vulnerable. And then you work through that.” She went on to add, “It’s not as if you lost something that you then get back. It’s still with you; you’re just more fully defined. You can’t go back to where you were though.” Although this participant did not like the story, she was still able to use it as a tool to help her reflect on her own process as a supervisee.

Sometimes participants did not like particular elements of a story. For instance, in the early stages of a discussion group focused on “Vasalisa,” a participant stated, “I didn’t like the little doll,” whom she viewed as “an enabler.” Later in the session when participants were discussing Vasalisa’s tasks, this participant shared, “In relation to becoming a

counselor, I didn’t get it. I didn’t understand that part of the story; I really didn’t understand this whole story in general.” She went on to add,

But, I think that’s okay because, in relation to becoming a counselor, . . . you do things and you learn things that you don’t understand, and you don’t know how [they] fit in. And then, you get to the end and the light bulb just turns on and you’re like, “Oh, I understand now why I had to do that or do that.” And I think that’s what kind of . . . happened in the story, [Vasalisa] got to talk to this Baba Yaga and she asked a question. And things seemed a little more clear for her. And I think that’s kind of how it is when you’re becoming a counselor.

To summarize, sometimes participants did not like a story, or a character in a story, or perhaps they thought they did not understand a story, but even in such cases, these participants were able to use the story to reflect on their own experience. The ability to do so usually stemmed from the group discussion in which comments and questions from peers helped to stimulate different perspectives.

Discussion

The aforementioned themes addressed recurring cycles of highs and lows, balancing internal and external influences, and struggles with self-awareness. The findings indicate that as these supervisees reflected on stories with universal themes, via a supervisor’s facilitation of storied dialogue and interaction with colleagues, they engaged in self-reflection that shed light on their own experiences. Thus, metaphors “can [help] move beyond jargon and fixed interpretations to new realities, understanding, and self-awareness” (Duffy, 2005, p. 248). Although three specific stories were used in this study, any story that has universal themes may serve as a point of departure for self-reflection.

Guiffreda et al. (2007) noted that “the success of metaphoric activities depends on how amenable the supervisee is to the approach” (p. 399). It is interesting to note that in the present study, whether or not the participants were familiar with the stories or even whether or not they liked the stories did not appear to affect their ability to use the stories to facilitate self-reflection. Perhaps one influencing factor is that these stories were discussed in a group setting. It may be that there is something significant about the group process of building upon others’ ideas that helped the participants to use the stories to process their own experiences. By the third round of storied discussions, the transcripts were lengthier, possibly indicating that as participants became more familiar with the use of stories in supervision, they also became more comfortable with the process. We are not sure what role gender may have played. Both men and women participants sometimes appeared to find the use of stories in supervision enlightening. According to the negative case data presented earlier in this article, two

women and two men described initial difficulties relating to stories. The protagonists in two of the stories, Vasalisa and Sea-Woman, were female, whereas Andersen (1959) portrayed the Ugly Duckling as a male character. Gender identity may have influenced some of the participants' abilities to relate to characters, but this did not seem to be the case across the participant pool.

Guiffrida et al. (2007) noted that "the success of metaphoric activities in clinical supervision also appears to be related to the supervisor's level of skill and comfort in developing and using metaphors in appropriate ways that resonate with supervisees" (p. 399). Perhaps the use of stories could provide a helpful structure for supervisors by removing some of the pressure that might be associated with metaphoric supervision. For instance, all stories are open to multiple interpretations, suggesting that there are no incorrect ways to view a story. Simply having the story as a frame of reference for generating discussion could provide the springboard for using metaphor in supervision.

A wide array of stories can be used, including cultural mythology and classic fairy tales. A selected story could be read aloud in internship or practicum. Before the story is read, supervisees should be informed that stories can be used to help understand personal experience. They should be encouraged to listen for passages that are particularly meaningful to them. After listening to the story, the supervision group can share in a facilitated discussion of the story. Readers can refer to this study's protocol section for ideas about the kinds of questions that can stimulate reflection. In addition to questions that specifically address a given story, supervisors can also pose general questions such as the following: If you were a character in this story, who would you be? Are there any characters that remind you of your clients or a supervisor? How might the main plot of this story be compared to your experiences as a counselor-in-training? Supervisees should be reminded that there are no incorrect answers to these questions, and they should be encouraged to generate their own questions about the story. The goal is to create a space wherein a dynamic dialogue can flow.

Counselor educators may be concerned about time constraints and the practicality of using this approach; however, failing to address personal experience and meaning making through self-reflective activities may not be effective in the long run. Storied discussions only need to occur on an occasional basis for the benefits of increased self-reflection to continue long afterward. Sound knowledge of such areas as theories and techniques is crucial, but a developing counselor also needs a meaning-making process to become an integrated and self-aware practitioner. For example, London and Tarragona (2007) noted that supervision is a "meaning-generating" system in which supervisors have a responsibility to "facilitate a process in which trainees may broaden their ways of understanding" (p. 255). Similarly, Anderson and Holmes (2007) noted that self-reflection can help su-

pervisees to identify both therapeutic strengths and potential "emotional blindspots" (p. 127). They suggested that a narrative or mythological perspective "can be extremely useful in helping therapists integrate different definitions of self" (p. 127). Clearly, the value of using stories in supervision as a meaning-making tool seems to be a topic of ongoing dialogue in the professional literature.

Future Directions

Our findings indicate that sharing and discussing stories appeared to be a beneficial means of stimulating self-reflection in the supervision of the master's-level counseling interns who participated in the study. How might further studies help to shape the practice of metaphoric supervision? Would counselors who are more self-reflective achieve better learning outcomes in training programs? Does gender of either supervisees or characters in chosen stories influence the effectiveness of using stories in supervision? What specific role does group interaction play in the process of understanding and using stories in supervision? Additional studies should continue to focus on the group supervision process because it seemed to have a synergistic effect on the exchange of ideas; however, it could also be helpful to interview individual participants to further clarify the process of using metaphors in supervision. Additional investigation into these areas, and others, could yield useful findings. Metaphoric supervision appears to offer possibilities for assisting some supervisees with self-reflection; however, there is still much to be learned about this process.

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