Conceptual definition and empirical investigation of ethics in doctoral supervision

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Rationale

- Learning ethical codes of conduct is a central part of researcher development. Most students learn ethical guidelines and codes of conduct from their advisors or senior colleagues (Alfredo & Hart, 2011) - the quality of the ethical conduct adopted by students is influenced by the supervisory practices they encounter during their studies.

- Supervision does not, however, exist in a vacuum that consists only of the student and the supervisor, but rather is rooted in context of a scholarly community (Becher & Trowler, 1989, 1989; Dysthe, Samara, & Westrheim, 2006) -> the supervisory relationship is an arena for mediating disciplinary traditions, practices, cultures, and norms.
Prior research

- Good supervision contributes to degree completion, length-of-time to candidacy, student well-being and satisfaction, and competence development (Meyer, Shanahan, & Laugksch, 2005; Case, 2008; Pyhältö, Stubb, & Tuomainen, 2011)

- Ethical problems in supervision (e.g. incompetent / inadequate supervision, abandonment, intrusion of supervisor views and values, abuse, exploitation, dual relationships, encouragement to fraud, authorship issues (Goodyear, Crego, & Johnston, 1992; Mahmud & Bretag, 2013)

- Less known about how student perceptions of the ethicality of supervision influence the doctoral experience in terms of study process outcomes.
Research Question

- Do attributes of ethics in supervision predict positive (engagement, and satisfaction with supervision and with doctoral studies) or negative (burnout, and attrition intentions) outcomes in the doctoral experience,

- and if so, how?
Participants

- 236 doctoral students at two research universities in Finland
- Educational sciences, teacher education, psychology
- 183 women, 53 men
- The sample is representative of the doctoral student population in the two universities in terms of the fields, average age, and sex.
Methods

Ethical Issues in Supervision Scales

- Based on a set of qualitative studies (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2012; 2014; 2015; 2017), in which ethical issues in doctoral supervision were categorised according to five ethical principles (cf. Kitchener 1985; 2000):

Breaches of:

- **respect of autonomy**: Intrusion of supervisor views, narrowness of perspectives
- **non-maleficence**: Exploitation and abuse, misappropriation, dual relationships
- **beneficence**: Not promoting well-being, not promoting integrating into the scholarly community, not promoting a collegial culture, lack of supervisor competence
- **justice**: Inequity, unfair treatment
- **fidelity**: Abandonment, inadequate supervision
Methods

**Doctoral Study Survey** (Pyhältö, Stubb & Tuomainen, 2011)

- **Burnout** (exhaustion, cynicism and inadequacy), 11 items
- **Engagement** (energy, dedication, and absorption, 9 items)
  - (developed based on Schaufeli et al., 2002; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001)
- **Satisfaction with** a) doctoral studies, b) supervision (1-7, 1 = very dissatisfied, 7 = very satisfied)
- **Attrition intentions** (yes / no)
Results:
Contribution of ethical components in doctoral students’ affective experiences and learning environment fit

PhD Supervision

Ethical principles

AUTONOMY
BENEFICENCE
FIDELITY
JUSTICE
NON-MALEFICENCE

Outcomes

Affective experiences

Engagement

Burnout

Satisfaction

Attrition intention

Perceived learning environment fit

Ethical principles

AUTONOMY
BENEFICENCE
FIDELITY
JUSTICE
NON-MALEFICENCE
## Results: Summary of simple linear regression analyses for ethics variables predicting positive (+) and negative (-) outcomes in the doctoral process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Form (fidelity, benef., autonomy)</th>
<th>Rule (Non-malef, justice, fidelity)</th>
<th>Care (autonomy + benef.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Energy +</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Dedication +</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Absorption +</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction: PhD studies +</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction: supervision +</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.52***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout Exhaustion -</td>
<td>-1.54</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout Cynicism -</td>
<td>-1.50</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>-.35***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout Inadequacy -</td>
<td>-.97</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition intention -</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.23**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .000*
Conclusions 1/2

- Prior research
  - both emotions and dynamics in the educational environment are important factors in the study experience (e.g. Pekrun, Goetz, & Frenzel, 2007; Golde, 2005; Pyhältö, Vekkila, & Keskinen, 2012).

- Contribution
  - Ethical principles in the context of doctoral supervision contribute to the student’s experience, and most importantly, they do so in different ways - some through an affective domain, some through the perceived person--learning environment fit.

- Future directions
  - Refinement of items
  - Longitudinal data
  - Inclusion of other disciplines besides behavioral sciences.
Conclusions 2/2

- The tool Ethical Issues in Supervision Scales can serve the needs of institutions that wish to measure the “ethical pulse” of their doctoral education and supervisory practices.
- The tool complements the work of
  - Gray and Jordan (2012): instrument measuring the relationship between student perceptions of their supervisors and of academic integrity
  - Anderson and Louis (1994): instrument measuring graduate student experience and subscription to norms of science
References


- Lofström, E., & Pyhältö, K. (2015). “I don’t even have time to be their friend!” Ethical dilemmas in PhD supervision in hard sciences. International Journal of Science Education 37 (16): 2721-2739.


Thank you for your attention

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