

SUPERVISING ACADEMIC ATHLETIC COUNSELING TRAINEES

Mark B. Andersen
Victoria University of Technology

Judy L. Van Raalte
Springfield College

ABSTRACT

There has been much discussion in the academic athletic counseling literature about "how to" deliver services to various populations. However, little attention has been devoted to the "quality control" of these services. One important way of maintaining service quality is through the supervision of academic athletic counselor trainees and practitioners. The purpose of this article is twofold: first, to present supervision models particularly pertinent to the field of academic athletic counseling; and second, to present issues and problems commonly encountered in the supervision of academic athletic counselor trainees and practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Supervision is a central feature of training and practice in many service delivery fields. In the applied psychology professions, supervision is often a career-long process. There has been brief mention of supervision in the sport psychology literature, a field closely allied with academic athletic counseling (e.g., Andersen, in press; Andersen & Alden, 1991; Bryant-Whelan, 1991; Ellickson & Brown, 1990; Lutz, 1990; Sachs, 1993; Smith, 1989; Taylor, 1991; Van Raalte & Andersen, 1993), but discussion of the supervision of academic athletic counseling trainees has been limited at best.

Supervision of academic athletic counselors is important to assure that student-athletes receive the best attention and care possible. The issue of supervision is particularly crucial as more academic athletic counselors work with interns and assume supervisory roles. An examination of what one does (or should do) as a supervisor of interns and employees who are working with student-athletes seems needed.

The first order of supervision of service delivery is always the student-athlete's welfare. Also of paramount importance is the development and training of the academic athletic counseling trainees, helping them become better and more competent practitioners. Central to this goal is the supervisor's role of helping trainees understand their strengths and weaknesses and how those may facilitate or disturb the academic athletic counseling process.

The questions that will be addressed in this paper include the following: What sort of models are most relevant to academic athletic counseling supervision? What should occur during supervision? What are some of the conflicts and problems that often arise in supervision? And finally, what is involved in the process of supervising a junior supervisor (i.e., meta-supervision)?

MODELS OF SUPERVISION

The extensive literature on supervision is too large to review thoroughly here. Rather, this paper will present background on the types of supervision models that could be used in academic athletic counseling and lay a general groundwork for supervision of academic athletic counseling trainees and practitioners. Also to be discussed are phenomenological, psychodynamic, behavioral, and cognitive-behavioral models and how features of each may have some application to the supervision of academic athletic counseling trainees and practitioners.

Phenomenological Models

Phenomenological approaches to supervision have their roots in the work of Rogers (1961). Just as Rogerian therapy attempts to create an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard for the client, Rogers' (1957) supervision model involves the creation of a safe and caring atmosphere that includes trainee role-playing, supervisor demonstrations of techniques, taped sessions of accomplished practitioners, and self (and supervisor) critiques of trainee sessions with clients. This is, above all, a supervisee-directed form of supervision where the supervisor sets up the conditions for supervisees to explore their strengths, weaknesses, successes, and mistakes in a threat-free environment. For many in academic athletic counseling this type of supervision may be too slow and clinical, but there is much to be said for phenomenological supervision and the creation of safe and unconditionally positive supervision environments.

Psychodynamic Models

A major feature of psychodynamic supervision is an examination of the psychological and relationship history (both good and ill) that the trainee brings to relationships with clients. The psychodynamic model also explores the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee and how what is happening in supervision may shed light on what occurs in the counseling sessions with student-athletes. Both this approach and the phenomenological approach are based on relationships and are examples of "parallel process" models of supervision (Friedlander, Siegal, & Brenock, 1989) where what is going on in therapy is related to similar processes occurring in supervision. This model is probably the most foreign for academic athletic counseling practitioners whose backgrounds are in physical education or exercise science. Nevertheless, it might be helpful for academic athletic counselors to examine carefully what they bring to their relationships with student-athletes, what their real motivations for being in the field are, and what needs of theirs are being met by working with student-athletes.

Behavioral Models

These models are based on operant and classical conditioning and involve assessing supervisee strengths and weaknesses, teaching various skills and techniques (e.g., test anxiety management or time and stress management), and extinguishing supervisee behaviors counterproductive to treatment (Delaney, 1972). For many academic athletic counselor supervisors, behavioral models may be attractive in that they are more clear-cut, more task-oriented, and not as subjective as the relationship-driven models.

Cognitive-Behavioral Models

Recently, Kurpius and Morran (1988) developed a cognitive-behavioral model of supervision that may have great appeal to supervisors of academic athletic counselors. The behavioral and cognitive-behavioral models are the most "training" oriented models and focus more on trainee skills and techniques than do the relationship models, which focus more on the interpersonal dynamics. In cognitive-behavioral supervision, the supervisor might ask the supervisee to mentally rehearse a counseling session with a difficult student-athlete and then discuss the images or mental pictures the trainee produces to help the trainee better prepare for problematic student-athletes. The supervisor might also explore the belief system of the supervisee to discover and challenge any irrational beliefs the supervisee may have that may interfere with the counseling process (e.g., "All my student-athletes should like me"). Many beginning academic counselors come to their first meetings with student-athletes with overly high expectations. Some cognitive restructuring may help such trainees develop a more rational understanding of, and realistic expectations for, academic athletic counseling outcomes.

All of the models mentioned above have something to offer the supervisor of academic athletic counselors. Perhaps the most sensible technique would be frequent supervision with an eclectic approach that is dynamically dependent on the trainee's level of development. For neophyte academic athletic counselors, the behavioral and cognitive-behavioral models seem most appropriate, since beginning trainees need more guidance and more task-oriented supervision to hone their skills. Once those skills are well-established, then supervision of a more subtle nature (e.g., relationship-driven models) may further refine their skills as academic athletic counselors.

SUPERVISING THE TRAINEE IN ACADEMIC ATHLETIC COUNSELING

Academic athletic counseling trainees and practitioners come from a variety of backgrounds such as education, physical education, and psychology. It would be difficult to design one supervision program that would perfectly fit these different orientations and individuals. Supervision, however, remains central to any service delivery field, and some issues are relevant to all academic athletic counselors regardless of background. Four basic considerations for supervising trainee work with student-athletes (i.e., ethical issues, supervision training, transference and countertransference, and peer and meta-supervision) are discussed in the following sections.

Ethical Issues

Ethical and legal issues such as dual role relationships, sexual involvement, and exploitation abound in supervision experiences (Andersen, in press; Bartell & Rubin, 1990; Harrar, Vandecreek, & Knapp, 1990; Kurpius, Gibson, Lewis, & Corbet, 1991; Sherry, 1991; Upchurch, 1985). The ethical climate of supervision sets the tone for future practice, and to insure that supervisee proceeds as smoothly as possible, the establishment of clear ethical guidelines and a working alliance between the supervisor and the supervisee is helpful. Seriously considering the American Psychological Association Code of Ethics (APA, 1992) is at least a starting point for standards of ethical behavior when supervising academic athletic counselors working with student-athletes.

Supervision Training

Supervisors of academic athletic counselors probably have very little training in how to supervise. This is also the case in most service delivery professions. Most supervisors have never received any formal training in supervisory processes. For the vast majority of supervisors, training in supervision has been limited to their own experiences of being supervised as students (Dowling, 1986; Norcross, 1984).

Mordock (1990) offers a framework for the education and training of future supervisors that includes a program directed at improving skills in the

administrative, supportive, and educational aspects of supervision. Taub, Porter, and Frisch (1988) also offer a solid program for the training of supervisors. Their work, which suggests initial training, coursework, and practicum experience in supervision, could serve as a model while those in the field of academic athletic counseling begin to determine what training in supervision will be needed for future students, how that training will be obtained, and what form it will take.

Transference and Countertransference

In the supervisor-supervisee relationship, transference and countertransference phenomena may help to explain why some students emerge empowered from training while others leave disappointed (Cook & Buirski, 1990). In the supervisory relationship, transference occurs when supervisees begin to respond and relate to supervisors in patterns similar to how they have interacted with significant others in their lives. For example, supervisees with parental dependency issues may transfer that dependency and cling to the supervisor just as they cling to a parent. Countertransference happens when similar processes occur from the supervisor's point of view.

Transference and countertransference phenomena can also come up in the relationship between the trainees and student-athletes. The most dramatic examples would be when the student-athlete falls in love with the academic athletic counselor (transference) or vice versa (countertransference). It is the supervisor's job to sensitize the trainee to these interpersonal dynamics in order to better understand the student-athlete's needs and to help avoid feelings and behaviors on the part of the trainee that would be counterproductive to student-athlete growth and development. Although it is not necessary to agree completely with some proponents of object relations theory (e.g., Klein, 1990) who believe that "the transference phenomenon exists in all interpersonal relationships. . ." (p. 49), assessing transference and countertransference in both academic athletic counseling sessions and in supervision helps in examining some of the most important relationships involved in service delivery.

Peer and Meta-supervision

Meta-supervision is the supervision of supervision. It is common practice in mental health fields where department heads supervise the practitioners who supervise the interns. Meta-supervision provides practitioners a chance to monitor and improve their own supervisory skills and increases self-confidence and professional competence. This practice could add an important dimension to academic athletic counseling settings.

Respectability, accountability, and quality control might be enhanced with the establishment of career-long peer or collegial supervision for practicing academic athletic counselors. Sachs (1993) has made a strong appeal for such practices in sport psychology: "It is generally advisable, as well, for more 'established' sport psychologists [or academic athletic counselors] to have a

colleague (or several colleagues) with whom one can consult on a regular basis. These supervisory sessions . . . provide professional guidance that may be needed" (p. 928). All of the supervision considerations discussed above (e.g., training in ethics, transference, and peer supervision) have the potential to help out the growing field of academic athletic counseling in the areas of accountability, respectability, and quality control of services.

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS UNIQUE TO ACADEMIC ATHLETIC COUNSELING TRAINEES

Academic advising and career counseling are the workhorses of academic athletic counselors. It can be argued that the delivery of these services is primarily an educational process (cf. Rotella, 1990) not requiring supervision of a clinical or counseling nature. In this context, supervision would consist of monitoring the consistent and coherent delivery of academic progress assessment and career counseling. This appears to be a limited definition of academic athletic counselor supervision that fails to address the dynamics of the interpersonal encounters in the delivery of such services. Most students and practitioners of academic athletic counseling are, or often will be, working with individuals on a one-to-one basis and/or with whole teams. It is therefore important to examine more closely some of the specific problems supervisors may encounter when supervising trainees delivering academic athletic counseling services.

Informal Encounters

Academic athletic counselors operate in a realm that would, at best, be overly informal to clinical and counseling psychologists. For reasons of building rapport, gathering information, and setting long-term outcome goals, classic clinical psychology boundaries would hinder more than help the academic athletic counseling process. On the other hand, there are academic athletic counselors who are quite intimately involved with teams outside their roles as academic athletic counselors (i.e., they travel with the team, eat with the team, or see team members socially). The rationale for this very familiar behavior is that the academic athletic counselor needs to become part of the team and that familiarity breeds acceptance.

Between psychotherapy models and academic athletic counselor as "team buddy" (Murphy, Carr, & Swoap, 1991), there is a middle ground that may expose the academic athletic counselor to important data and yet maintain boundaries salubrious to student-athlete development. Just as limited contact produces gaps in counselor knowledge, extreme familiarity produces opportunities for dependency fostering. The question of who is being served by such familiarity remains the central issue. Do academic athletic counselors serve student-athletes by making themselves indispensable? The importance of balancing familiarity and boundaries could be reinforced by solid trainee supervision that helps the trainee recognize when familiar behavior with

student-athletes crosses over the line of serving the student-athletes to fulfilling the academic athletic counselor's personal needs.

Record-Keeping

Academic athletic counseling sessions occur in a variety of locations, including playing fields, locker rooms, and offices. In many cases sessions may be informal in tone. Nonetheless, it is the obligation of academic athletic counselors to maintain professional records of academic athletic counseling sessions. These records do not have to be clinical in nature but should at least include what the problem or issue is, what was done during the session, and what directions are proposed for future sessions. In this age of accountability and litigation, the supervisor of academic athletic counselors needs to monitor and remind counselors of the responsibility to maintain accurate records of all contacts with student-athletes.

Misalliances

It is important to determine early what student-athletes need or want from academic athletic counseling relationships. During early relationship building, a misalliance can occur when a trainee or practitioner enters into a relationship with the student-athlete, the nature of which is not helpful to the student-athlete. Premature buying into student-athletes' versions of their problems with coaches, teachers, or parents may only reinforce a bad situation or even exacerbate it. Statements such as, "Yeah, it does seem like the professor is on your case," help to solidify student-athlete dissatisfaction. Careful supervision of trainee/student-athlete interactions could help trainees find better ways of problem-solving and help them recognize how they can become enmeshed in conflicts and actually become part of the problem. However, it is important to remember that the academic athletic counselor is the student-athlete's advocate whose goal is to form an alliance with the student-athlete. Thus, any situation where a student-athlete is experiencing difficulties with a professor or a coach needs to be carefully investigated and all the relevant facts gathered so that the counselor can maintain the appropriate professional stance.

Referral

With some student-athletes, after a strong bond has developed with an academic athletic counselor, a story of sexual abuse, eating disorders, or other traumatic material may emerge. This may be disturbing to the trainee, but the supervisor can help the trainee understand that this is actually a very good sign. That the student-athlete feels comfortable enough to talk about such sensitive issues indicates that the trainee is doing all the right things in the relationship (e.g., being empathetic and providing a safe environment). However, the situation becomes particularly touchy when referral to a clinical practitioner seems necessary (Heyman, 1993). The student-athlete finally has taken time to

talk about what is painful and probably central to other problems but then is sent to someone else for continued treatment.

If at all possible, the supervisor should help the trainee refer *in* (i.e., bring a qualified professional into the office with the trainee and the student-athlete and proceed from there) and not *out* (Andersen, 1992). Sending a vulnerable student-athlete away to someone else in another environment may be more than enough to stop the therapeutic process. Supervisors should have a list of counseling center staff who are sensitive to student-athletes' concerns and a referral list of local clinicians on whom they can rely.

SUMMARY

Supervision of academic athletic counseling trainees is much too broad a topic to cover in one report. It is hoped, however, that this paper will stimulate discussion on any or all of the topics covered, which are far from exhaustive. Academic athletic counseling need not abandon its current pattern of supervision services and take up counseling supervision instead. One solution might be a synthesis of current supervision practices and elements from the models presented here. High quality supervision is important as the field of academic athletic counseling attempts to reach its ultimate goal: better service and care of student-athletes.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (1992). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. American Psychologist, *47*, 1597-1611.
- Andersen, M. B. (1992). Sport psychology and procrustean categories: An appeal for synthesis and expansion of service. Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology Newsletter, *7*(3), 8-9.
- Andersen, M. B. (in press). Ethical considerations in the supervision of applied sport psychology graduate students. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology.
- Andersen, M. B., & Alden, M. F. (1991). Incorporating sport psychology services into collegiate athletics. Athletic Administration, *26*, 23-25.
- Bartell, P. A., & Rubin, L. J. (1990). Dangerous liaisons: Sexual intimacies in supervision. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, *21*, 442-450.
- Bryant-Whelan, G. (1991, Summer). Issues and answers [Invited paper]. Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology Newsletter, p. 11.

- Cook, H., & Buirski, P. (1990). Countertransference in psychoanalytic supervision: An heuristic model. Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, 8, 77-87.
- Delaney, D. J. (1972). A behavioral model for the practicum supervision of counselor candidates. Counselor Education and Supervision, 12, 46-50.
- Dowling, S. (1986). Supervisory training: Impetus for clinical supervision. The Clinical Supervisor, 4(4), 27-34.
- Ellickson, K. A., & Brown, D. R. (1990). Ethical considerations in dual relationships: the sport psychologist-coach. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 2, 186-190.
- Friedlander, M. L., Siegal, S. M., & Brenock, K. (1989). Parallel processes in counseling and supervision: A case study. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 36, 149-157.
- Harrar, W. R., Vandecreek, L., & Knapp, S. (1990). Ethical and legal aspects of clinical supervision. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 21, 37-41.
- Heyman, S. R. (1993). When to refer athletes for counseling or psychotherapy. In J. M. Williams (Ed.), Applied sport psychology: Personal growth to peak performance (2nd ed.) (pp. 299-309). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- Klein, R. S. (1990). Object relations and the family process. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Kurpius, D. J., Gibson, G., Lewis, J., & Corbet, M. (1991). Ethical issues in supervising counseling practitioners. Counselor Education and Supervision, 31, 48-57.
- Kurpius, D. J., & Morran, D. K. (1988). Cognitive-behavioral techniques and interventions for application in counselor supervision. Counselor Education and Supervision, 27, 368-376.
- Lutz, D. J. (1990). An overview of training models in sport psychology. The Sport Psychologist, 4, 63-71.
- Mordock, J. B. (1990). The new supervisor: Awareness of problems experienced and some suggestions for problem resolution through supervisory training. The Clinical Supervisor, 8, 81-92.
- Murphy, S., Carr, C., & Swoap, R. (1991, October). A model program for consultation and intervention with elite athletes. Workshop presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology, Savannah, GA.
- Norcross, J. C. (1984). Some training predictions and recommendations. The Clinical Psychologist, 37(1), 24-25.

- Rogers, C. R. (1957). Training individuals to engage in the therapeutic process. In C. R. Strother (Ed.), Psychology and mental health. Washington, DC: APA.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). On becoming a person. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rotella, R. J. (1990). Providing sport psychology consulting services to professional athletes. The Sport Psychologist, *4*, 409-417.
- Sachs, M. L. (1993). Professional ethics in sport psychology. In R. N. Singer, M. Murphey, & L. K. Tennant (Eds.), Handbook of research on sport psychology (pp. 921-932). New York: Macmillan.
- Sherry, P. (1991). Ethical issues in the conduct of supervision. The Counseling Psychologist, *19*, 566-584.
- Smith, R. E. (1989). Applied sport psychology in an age of accountability. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, *1*, 166-180.
- Taub, B. R., Porter, J. D., & Frisch, G. F. (1988). Training for psychotherapy supervisors: A supervision traineeship program. The Clinical Supervisor, *6*, 75-84.
- Taylor, J. (1991). Career direction, development, and opportunities in applied sport psychology. The Sport Psychologist, *5*, 266-280.
- Upchurch, D. W. (1985). Ethical standards in the supervisory process. Counselor Education and Supervision, *25*, 90-98.
- Van Raalte, J. L., & Andersen, M. B. (1993). Special problems in sport psychology: Supervising the trainee. Proceedings of the 8th world congress of sport psychology (pp. 914-917). Lisbon, Portugal: International Society of Sport Psychology.

Mark B. Andersen is a licensed psychologist who specializes in psychological interventions with student-athletes. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Arizona. Currently Andersen is a professor in the Department of Physical Education and Recreation at Victoria University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, where he supervises sport psychology practica and internships.

Judy Van Raalte is an assistant professor of psychology at Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts, where she teaches several undergraduate classes and supervises graduate students' applied work with student-athletes. She also serves as coach of the varsity women's tennis team.