Knowledge Practices in Clinical Supervision:

A Qualitative Study with Psychologists

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Certificate of original authorship

I, Belinda Gottschalk, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of PhD, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Abstract

It is well recognised that professionals should continue to learn throughout their working lives. In healthcare professions, one common practice designed to achieve this is clinical supervision. Supervision occurs within the context of rapidly changing professional lives, where widely available and ever-changing knowledge has led to a bombardment of information that is both empowering and confusing to professionals and their clients. Research that explores how professionals work with knowledge through supervision could shed light in this area. This is highly relevant to psychology, where the regulatory body prescribes that professionals meet regularly with colleagues to discuss their practice.

Much existing supervision literature conceptualises the practice in an individualised, decontextualised and reductionistic fashion, which is influenced by recent drives towards competency-based and evidence-based practice. This practice-based study aimed to examine and understand clinical supervision using an epistemic practice perspective, and in so doing, address gaps and offer a novel conceptual and methodological lens. The research posed two questions, namely, 'From an epistemic perspective, what is discussed in clinical supervision?', and 'What epistemic practices are enacted in clinical supervision and with what effects?'

Three pairs of psychologists audio-recorded five consecutive supervision sessions and were interviewed twice over that time. The sessions were analysed with a view to identifying and examining what was discussed, how problems were epistemically framed and what knowledge objects emerged in supervision conversations. Knorr Cetina's concept of epistemic object was activated in conceptualising and analysing how the psychologists approached knowledge objects. Further, epistemic practices that served to expand knowledge objects and make knowledge actionable were identified and explored. These included the recontextualisation of knowledge drawn from practice and theory, reframing, wondering, story-telling and asking expansive questions. Supervisors and supervisees activated these practices in an entangled fashion to build and extend knowledge within a context of collaboration.

The study makes empirical, conceptual and methodological contributions to the fields of supervision, and professional practice and learning. It illuminates the content of supervision, revealing it to be an epistemically intense practice involving skillful and continuous recontextualisation of knowledge. Concepts previously activated in studying knowledge practices are extended, and a fine-grained, longitudinal, practice-based study that does justice to the complexity of supervision is offered and demonstrates how knowledge is 'always in the making in supervision'. The research

builds an original understanding of supervision as emergent, complex and involving mutually constitutive engagement of practitioners and practice. Articulating supervision in this way provides novel and original understandings, offering possibilities for how this important professional learning practice is conceptualised and researched into the future.