ETHICS IN DOCTORAL SUPERVISION
– WHAT IS IT AND HOW DOES IT MATTER?

ETHZ DOCTORAL SUPERVISION SYMPOSIUM
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CONTENTS

- What’s an ethical dilemma in supervision?
- Why should we care about ethical aspects in supervision?
- How can we handle the ethics of supervision?
SUPERVISION - A COLLECTIVE AND NESTED ENTERPRISE

• Supervision is activity nested in the research community; it is rooted within various contexts of a scholarly community (Pyhältö et al., 2012).

• Supervision is one of the central determinants of doctoral experience. It contributes to degree completion, time to candidacy, student well-being and satisfaction, and competence development (Meyer et al., 2005; Case, 2008; Pyhältö et al., 2011)

• A variety of factors – social, contextual AND ETHICAL - may affect how a supervision relationship plays out (Pyhältö et al., 2011; Löfström & Pyhältö, 2012)
ETHICS IN SUPERVISION

- Ethical issues in supervision may become ethical problems.
- These include:
  - 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)
WHAT’S AN ETHICAL DILEMMA IN SUPERVISION?

• A situation or circumstance that puts at stake or compromises values that are fundamental to ourselves or to the academic community
  • Know your values
  • Relate them to those generally associated with scientific ethics
• Not all dilemmas are primarily ethical in nature, e.g. can be methodological, legal etc.
ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN RESEARCH

*Respect for autonomy*
- Respecting the right of individuals to make choices regarding their own lives

*Doing no harm* (non maleficence)
- Avoiding harm, mostly psychological or social

*Benefiting others* (beneficence),
- Contributing to the well-being of others

*Being just* (justice)
- Being fair and objective, respecting equality

*Being faithful* (fidelity)
- Keeping promises, being honest and truthful

(Kitchener, 1985; Kitchener, 2000)

World Conference on Research Integrity:
- Singapore Statement 2010
- Montreal Statement 2013
# BREACHES OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND THEIR MANIFESTATION IN PRACTICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle at stake</th>
<th>Ethical issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding harm</td>
<td>Exploitation and abuse, dual relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficence</td>
<td>Lack of competence, inadequacy of support, blurred boundaries of supervisor role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect for autonomy</td>
<td>Intrusion of supervisor views and values, failure to support students’ independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>Supervision abandonment, failure to provide supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Inequity, unfair treatment</td>
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(Löfström & Pyhältö 2012)
### SUPERVISORS AND PHD STUDENTS EXPERIENCE ETHICS DIFFERENTLY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Supervisors</th>
<th>PhD students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f (%)</td>
<td>f (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-maleficence</td>
<td>29 (53)</td>
<td>17 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficence</td>
<td>12 (21)</td>
<td>35 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>5 (9)</td>
<td>12 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>7 (13)</td>
<td>26 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
<td>12 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>55 (100)</td>
<td>102 (100)</td>
</tr>
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\[(x^2(4, 42) = 23.375, p < .000)\]

Natural and social sc. (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2015)
SUPERVISORS AND PHD STUDENTS EXPERIENCE ETHICS DIFFERENTLY

- Differences in expectations of what supervision should focus on.
  - Fit between doctoral students and supervisors perceptions about supervision contributes to student satisfaction with their supervision and studies (Pyhältö, Vekkila & Keskinen, 2012; 2014).
- The expectations of supervisors and doctoral students clash in ways that potentially could cause misunderstandings and discouraging experiences, eventually conceptualized as ethical challenges and problems by the PhD student, if not handled adequately early enough (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2017).
WHAT DATA FROM NATURAL SCIENCES SUGGEST:

• Ethical issues manifested primarily as supervisors’ concern for project management and doctoral students as workers. The supervisors found themselves juggling numerous commitments and responsibilities as project leaders and employers of Ph.D. students and other staff.

• The doctoral students, however, hoped for and expected their supervisors to be concerned about them as persons in both personal and work-related ways.

• Also more experiences of exploitation compared to soc.sc., likely because of the way of working around, sometimes multiple, projects with sometimes undefined tasks, expectations and supervisory roles.

(Löfström & Pyhältö, 2015)
ETHICAL LEADERSHIP DILEMMA MODEL

• Authority and distance: being approachable, while maintaining a necessary distance

• Cultivating a relationship, but not too deep and private

• Considering what is in the interest of the team or group (of doctoral students) while attending to individual needs (Colnerud, 2017)

• Direct instruction versus letting the Ph.D. student figure things out
WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT ETHICAL ASPECTS IN SUPERVISION?

• Supervision is rooted in context of a scholarly community (Pyhältö et al. 2011). In the supervisory relationship, PhD students learn disciplinary traditions, practices, cultures, and norms, including ethical codes, norms, and practices of how the research community deals with ethical issues (Kitchener, 1992).

• The supervisory relationship provides a context, not only for developing students’ academic expertise, but also for developing ethical awareness and learning ethical problem-solving.

• Most students learn ethical standards of conduct from their supervisors and other seniors (Anderson et al., 1994; Goodyear et al., 1992; Alfredo & Hart, 2011; Lõfström, Trotman, Furnari & Shephard, 2015)
  • Researchers not well integrated into the research community apply more often ethically poor practices (e.g. True et al., 2011)
  • But also students who collaborate most closely with faculty are most frequently exposed to unethical behavior (Anderson et al., 1994).
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)

**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 et al., 2001)
- Satisfaction with a) doctoral studies, b) supervision
- Attrition intentions

N = 236
ETHICAL ASPECTS IN SUPERVISION MATTER TO PH.D. STUDENTS (LÖFSTRÖM & PYHÄLTÖ, 2017)
HOW DO THE ETHICS MATTER? - THE MECHANISM

• We know from prior research that both emotions and dynamics in the educational environment are important factors in the study experience (e.g. Pekrun, Goetz, & Frenzel, 2007; Golde, 2005; Pyhältö, Vekkaila, & Keskinen, 2012).

• Ethics of supervision contribute to the Ph.D. students’ experiences, and most importantly, they do so in different ways:
  – supporting or breaching certain ethical principles contribute through an affective domain (autonomy, beneficence)
  – while some through the perceived person-learning environment fit (non-maleficence, fidelity, justice)
HOW TO DEAL WITH ETHICAL DILEMMAS AS A SUPERVISOR?

• Recognise the ethical issue
  o Which fundamental value/principle does the situation jeopardize?

• Understand different perspectives
  o How might the situation look like from the PhD students perspective?

• Understand the expectations and needs of the PhD student
  o What do students expect/need? How does that fit with the structure and support offered?

• Find colleagues with whom you can discuss the issue
  o What are the additional perspectives or lenses through which we might consider an ethical issue?
HOW TO DEAL WITH ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN SUPERVISION AS A RESEARCH COMMUNITY?

• Understanding ethics and integrity in a systemic perspective (ethical climate, cultures around ethics and integrity) (e.g. Bertram Gallant & Kalichman, 2011)
  o Identifying the community’s fundamental values and how they are reflected in the discourses, norms, leadership and cultures in supervision
  o Introducing ethics as part of the culture and discourse; Safe to talk about ethical issues?
  o Recognise that the research community has a responsibility for ethics; Neither supervision nor ethics are individual matters

• Adopting a proactive approach to ethics
  o Spaces for discussing supervision and sharing experiences of supervision practices and dilemmas
  o Recognition of different supervision practices and dilemmas is a buffer against group think
  o Training (rules are not enough if values discussion is missing)
OUR RESOURCES

• Supervision of doctoral dissertations and their review process in Finland with a special emphasis on research integrity. Recommendations to universities. Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity and Universities Finland UNIFI. (2017). https://www.tenk.fi/en/tenk-guidelines


• Ethical principles of teaching and studies at the University of Helsinki. https://www.helsinki.fi/en/university/ethical-principles-of-studying-and-teaching
References


References


References


Thank you for your attention

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