

Effect of Metastereotypes and Conflict Experience on Research Supervisor-Supervisee Relationship Quality Among University Undergraduates

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The present study aimed at finding the effects of metastereotypes and conflict experience of students on research supervisor-supervisee relationship quality among university students. A 3 (positive, negative, and control condition of met stereotypes) x 2 (students with conflict experience and without conflict experience) between-subjects experimental study was carried out on a purposive sample of 180 undergraduate students doing research under the supervision of regular faculty members of the University of Sargodha. Metastereotype Activation Task (He et al., 2019) was utilized to induce metastereotypes in students. On a single item, students indicated whether they had conflict experience(s) with their teachers. The supervisor-supervisee relationship was assessed through an adapted version of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001). Supporting study hypotheses, the findings of factorial ANOVA revealed significant main effects and interaction effect of metastereotypes and conflict experience on the relationship quality. Implications of the findings and suggestions for future research have been discussed.

Keywords: Metastereotypes, conflict, supervisor-supervisee relationship

Effective research supervision of a graduate student needs contribution from both supervisor and supervisee. There is a need for strong faith and mutual understanding between the two for developing a strong bond. In the process of supervision, both parties (i.e.,

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supervisor and supervisee) must play their role. Students' supervision is an uncertain process that can be strengthened by support from the supervisor (Ismail & Abiddin, 2014). Many research studies (Worthen & McNeill, 1996) have suggested positive outcomes of a strong supervisor-supervisee relationship. Therefore, factors that shape this relationship are of great interest to researchers and practitioners.

The research supervisor-supervisee relationship has become an important working relationship with an increasing demand for higher education. The number of universities in Pakistan are increasing from the day of its formation, with almost 180 degree-awarding universities across the country (Edarabia, 2021). It is obvious that with the increasing demand for higher education, the number of research students has also been increased significantly as compared to previous years. Therefore, investigating the dynamics by which supervisor-supervisee relationship quality is formed is a worthwhile research pursuit.

Metastereotypes and Supervisor-Supervisee Relationships

A supervisor's guidance can be a great asset for a student leading to a supportive, and conducive relationship between them, which can result in a less burdensome and fruitful dissertation process. A successful relationship can be beneficial for both resulting in maximum chances for success and enhanced understanding of specific subject matter for student and supervisor respectively (Lowry, 2018). Supervision is defined as a process in which a subordinate (supervisee) is mentored and taught by an experienced and appropriately trained person (supervisor) (Bradley & Kottler, 2001). As of 2019, the Thesis mind listed on that different cognitive and dispositional variables may influence the supervisory relationship, and the present study aimed to examine the effect of cognitive (metastereotypes) and individual (conflict experience) factors on the supervisor-supervisee relationship.

Metastereotype is the belief or awareness held by in-group members of the opinions of out-group members about them (Vorauer et al., 1998). It is a stereotype about another stereotype (Schneider, 2004). When metastereotypes are established once, it is difficult to alter them again (Finkelstein et al., 2013). Various studies conducted on intergroup situations revealed the reciprocal consequences of feeling derogated and disliked by others. Especially, when we are despised by another person, anxious feeling concerning negative responses prevails in next contact with the same person (Plant, 2004; Vorauer et al., 2000).

Metastereotypes are of two types that is negative and positive. Negative metastereotypes refer to the negative beliefs of in-group members about the opinions of out-group members about them (He et al., 2020). For instance, a study in China illustrated that patients had beliefs that doctors viewed them as illiterate and impatient, which constitutes negative metastereotypes of the doctors in the minds of the patients. Mostly, the concept of metastereotypes content is negative. Negative metastereotypes may have an adverse influence on individuals' affect, as a result, they may increase psychological arousal (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011). An individual may not consider a metastereotype as negative always, he/she can also perceive it as a challenge and get motivation from it (Finkelstein et al., 2015). Positive metastereotypes, on the other hand, refer to the positive beliefs of in-group members about what out-group members think about them (He et al., 2020). For example, young people believe that older people view them as energetic. So, they would feel good and empowered by this metastereotype, therefore, it is positive in nature.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 as cited in Bal et al., 2015) sheds some light on the formation of metastereotypes. The main hypothesis of the social identity theory is that in-group members tend to enhance their self-image by seeking negative aspects of an out-group. This theory describes social identity as an individual's sense of who they are based on their membership in a particular group. According to (Jetten et al. (2015), groups (family, cricket team, social class, etc.) to which an individual is associated are significant predictors of a person's self-esteem and pride. Such groups are the sources of social identity i.e., a sense that the person belongs to the social world.

Stereotypes are the products of our normal cognitive process. During this process, we hyperbolize the differences that exist between groups and similarities present within the group (Korinek & Kimball, 2003). It is observable that group members may detach themselves from membership in a group that does not have a positive effect on their self-view. This type of distancing notably occurs when a group has boundaries that are not impermeable. In this case, members can show the reaction to their compromised self-image by making them appear less important to that level at which they invest psychologically in social identity. Therefore, an individual's emotions, feelings about his self-view, and activation of metastereotypes may have an instrumental role in mediating the effects of metastereotypes valence on an individual's social identity (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011).

Recent series of investigations provided data about metastereotypes in which individual measures were used for checking a person's inclination to consider an out-group person spontaneously (Vorauer et al., 2000). These investigations have shown that metastereotypes can sometimes have positive effects on intergroup relations but they can have a negative influence while dealing with out-group members. The activation of metastereotypes may also divert the attention of individuals from the goal of acting positively according to their personal standards about how to treat out-group members. The disposition of people to focus on their personal standards about how to behave with out-group members is mostly weak naturally (Monteith et al., 1996).

Having some types of metastereotypes can have adverse influences on individuals. For instance, individuals who are having a negative metastereotype about a group of their own tend to have identification problem (lower identification) with their in-group (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011) and they may avoid getting help from members of their own group if by doing so they are likely to confirm their negative metastereotypes (Wakefield et al., 2012). Vezzali (2017) conducted a study in Italy to investigate if positive metastereotypes induction might lead to better intergroup relations among members of the high-status group with members of the low-status group who were in conflict with each other. Results of the study were quite amazing as it was revealed that induction of positive metastereotypes led to positive feelings in high-status group members (Italian high-school students) and led them to be delighted for their next interaction with low-status members (African immigrants). The findings of this study showed the benefits of positive metastereotypes on intergroup relations.

Metastereotypes activation relates to an individual's self-concept and its activation occurs as a result of individuals' perception of them being negatively evaluated by others, which could have some serious consequences (Anseel, 2011; Vorauer et al., 2000). Intergroup relationships may be negatively affected by activation of negative metastereotypes (Finchilescu, 2010; Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2013). Tamura (2017) investigated the effects of metastereotype information on in-group perceptions and their attitudes and found that individuals induced with positive metastereotypes had favorable thoughts about members of outgroups as compared to those induced with negative metastereotypes. This study revealed that positive metastereotypes held by individuals can lead them to have better relationships with others.

Another study conducted by [He et al. \(2019\)](#) revealed that negative metastereotypes result in worsening the relationship between doctor and patient. It showed that how the doctor-patient relationship is directly influenced by metastereotypes affecting individuals' expectations, personal judgment, and contact experiences. In this way, behavior that is shown toward outgroup members is being affected by negative metastereotypes ([Shelton & Richeson, 2005](#)). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the direct influence of metastereotypes on the supervisor-supervisee relationship has not been empirically examined.

Conflict Experience and Supervisor-Supervisee Relationships

Often the allocated supervisor for undergraduate dissertations is not necessarily based on factors such as personality or individual characteristics, but instead on the supervisor's topic interests. Therefore, a conflicting situation may arise between supervisor and supervisee because of the complex supervision process and students' anxieties linked to the dissertation's completion ([Lowry, 2018](#)). Conflict is a process that occurs when one party has thoughts that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cherishes ([Bahrassa et al., 2011](#)). Conflict is like a competition between individuals that is present in the form of hostility. We can call it a process which an individual utilizes to seek rewards by vanishing the competitors and making them weak. Normally, violence is part of the conflict, but it can also occur without violence. Conflict is an action that an individual performs personally. The process of conflict is not unconscious; it is an individual's deliberate action to oppose someone else ([Chappelow, 2020](#)).

Conflicts are seen in class due to many factors such as different personality traits of teachers and students, variation in their values and beliefs, more crowded classes, and problem in communication that may cause misunderstanding ([Lowry, 2018](#)). An increase in the occurrence of teacher-student conflicts in universities has been observed, which might have adverse consequences for the educational outcomes affecting students' academic achievement. Therefore, it is an important issue in universities to manage these conflicts. An important part of any supervisor's role is managing the conflicts ([Mukhtar et al., 2011](#)).

Conflicts can create problems and issues in any relationship including the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee by creating anxiety, discomfort, and dissonance ([Korinek & Kimball, 2005](#)) and when conflict is experienced, these feelings become more

intense and stronger (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Korinek and Kimball (2003) observe that conflicts and loss of agreements that occur between supervisor and supervisee can't be overlooked. The supervisor-supervisee relationship can be adversely affected because of unresolved conflicts. Conflicts could have both positive and negative effects. Nelson and Friedlander (2001) found that in the presence of conflict, the reactions shown by the supervisees included fear, stress, feeling of insecurity, health problems, lack of trust, and extremities in their behavior. Therefore, better growth and satisfaction of supervisees can be achieved by successfully resolving and managing these conflicts.

A significant relationship has been observed between negative metastereotype and conflict experience. When a person develops negative metastereotypes then the intensity of these metastereotypes is increased when that person has conflict experience. For instance, He et al. (2019) conducted a study on the doctor-patient relationship and found that as a result of negative metastereotype activation, patients with conflict experience exhibited more negative attitudes towards the doctors as compared to those patients who had no conflict experience. This showed that the perceived social fairness is negatively affected by negative metastereotypes. They found a significant interaction between negative metastereotypes and conflict experience that had the strongest negative influence on the doctor-patient relationship.

Rationale

Dissertation or research thesis is one of the most important tasks for students to complete their academic degrees. Many students carry out the thesis in the last year of their degree programs mostly at the graduate, postgraduate, and doctoral levels. An outstanding thesis paves the way for students for their future research and higher studies. However, writing a research thesis also requires a lot of hard work and skills of students. Many factors could influence the quality of the thesis of students and one of the most important factors is the research supervisor. Of course, all students need a supervisor who can guide them in writing and accomplishing their thesis. A thesis includes the hard work of both supervisor and the supervisee, and it requires a satisfactory connection between them. It has been proposed by many researchers (e.g., Beinart, 2014; Zarbock et al., 2009) that positive outcomes like stronger supervisor-supervisee relationship and more disclosure can be achieved by a well-built supervisor-supervisee relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). This connection can be swayed by several variables including metastereotypes about the

supervisor and conflict experiences of students with their teachers. The present study was conducted to experimentally test the effects of metastereotypes and conflict experiences on the supervisor-supervisee relationship. To the best of our knowledge, no study has ever inspected the effects of metastereotypes and conflict experience on the supervisor-supervisee relationship. This understanding might lead to a better working relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee, which in turn may enhance the quality of the research project being undertaken by both the parties.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The present study was carried out to examine the effect of metastereotypes and conflict experience of students with teachers on research supervisor-supervisee relationship quality. More specifically, the present research has the following objectives:

1. To experimentally study the main effects of metastereotypes and conflict experience of students with teachers on the research supervisor-supervisee relationship.
2. To experimentally investigate the interaction effects of metastereotypes and conflict experience of students with teachers on the research supervisor-supervisee relationship.

In the light of the literature, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

1. Students in the positive meta-stereotype condition will report better supervisor-supervisee relationship quality as compared to the students in the negative meta-stereotype and the control conditions.
2. Students without any conflict experience with teachers will report better supervisor-supervisee relationship quality as compared to their counterparts having a conflict experience with the teachers.
3. The students in the negative meta-stereotype condition having conflict experience with teachers will report the poorest supervisor-supervisee relationship quality.

Method

Research Design

The current research was based on 3 (positive metastereotype group, negative metastereotype group, and control group) x 2 (with

conflict experience vs. without conflict experience) between-subject design using random assignment for metastereotype conditions. Overall, the present study had six treatment conditions with two main effects.

Sample

The sample of the present study consisted of 180 participants (girls = 100, boys = 80) having an age range of 21-24 years ($M = 21.92$, $SD = .84$), which was purposively drawn from various departments of the University of Sargodha. All participants were students in the 7th semester of their undergraduate courses (i.e., BS) in various academic disciplines carrying out their research thesis under the supervision of some regular faculty members. On a single item, participants indicated whether they had any conflict experience(s) with the teacher(s). After identifying participants with and without conflict experiences, they were randomly assigned to three conditions of metastereotypes using the draw method. In total, there were six different conditions of the experiment. The number of participants in each treatment condition varied because of the random assignment. Table 1 depicts the schematic presentation of the research design of the present study.

Instruments

The following measures were used to assess the study constructs.

Metastereotype Activation Task

Different instructions were provided to the positive metastereotype group, negative metastereotype group, and control group for the induction of the appropriate metastereotypes through Metastereotype Activation Task (He et al., 2019). The instruction given to the positive metastereotype group was: "how many positive impressions do you think your supervisor has about your lifestyle, academic ability, personality, and so on? Please describe these impressions with as many adjectives as possible. The instruction given to the negative metastereotype group was: "how many negative impressions do you think your supervisor has about your lifestyle, academic ability, personality, and so on? Please describe these impressions with as many adjectives as possible. The instruction given to the control group was: "what do you think about current developments in social media. Please describe these impressions with as many adjectives as possible.

Conflict Experience

Participants were requested to answer a one-item test about conflict experience. The question asked: "Have you ever had a conflict with your teacher(s) in the last three years?" (Yes / No). If yes, then how many times?

Student-Teacher Relationship Scale

An adapted version of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS; Pianta, 2001) was used to evaluate participants' relationships with their supervisors. The scale contains 15 items, and each item is evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, which ranges from 1 = *definitely does not apply* to 5 = *definitely applies*, which results in a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 75. A higher score indicates a good relationship of the supervisee with his/her supervisor. Alpha values for closeness and conflict subscale are $\alpha = .80$ and $\alpha = .77$, respectively.

Demographic Information Sheet

A demographic sheet was attached at the start of the questionnaire to record the demographic information of participants. It recorded participants' gender, age, family system, residence, and academic discipline.

Procedure and Data Analysis

First, the current research was approved by the Ethical Committee of Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha. Participants' signatures were taken for informed consent, and they were requested to give their demographic information (age, gender, education, family system, etc.). After that, participants were requested to answer a one-item test about conflict experience (CE) to check if they had any previous conflicts with their teacher. Ninety-seven participants were placed in a non-conflict group and 83 participants were placed in the conflict group. Each member of the conflict and non-conflict group was randomly assigned through the draw method to one of the three metastereotypes conditions, which resulted in six groups. Each group was engaged in its respective metastereotype activation task. After the completion of the metastereotypes activation task, participants were requested to complete the self-report measure

of the student-teacher relationship. Finally, participants were offered a token of appreciation for participating in our experiment.

Results

A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out for testing the proposed hypotheses of the present study. The psychometric properties of Student-Teacher Relationship Scale used in the present study. The reliability analysis suggests satisfactory internal consistency (.74) of the scale. The values of skewness and kurtosis are less than one indicating normal distributions of scores on STRS.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations scores on relationship quality in various conditions.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviations on Relationship Quality in Various Conditions

Conditions	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Metastereotypes	60	55.05	3.53
Negative Metastereotypes	60	42.65	6.07
Control	60	48.25	1.83
Conflict	99	49.24	5.63
No Conflict	81	74.92	7.54
Positive Metastereotypes x Conflict	28	54.82	3.29
Positive Metastereotypes x No Conflict	32	55.25	3.78
Negative Metastereotypes x Conflict	26	39.38	5.95
Negative Metastereotypes x No Conflict	34	45.15	4.91
Control x Conflict	27	49.00	2.11
Control x No Conflict	33	47.63	1.29

Table 2 presents the findings of 2-way factorial ANOVA. It depicts that metastereotype has a significant main effect on relationship quality. The findings of Gabriel's post hoc test indicated significant mean differences in relationship quality. Participants in the positive metastereotype group ($M = 55.05$) reported better relationship quality as compared to participants in the control group ($M = 48.25$) followed by participants in the negative metastereotype group ($M = 42.65$). This provided support to the first hypothesis. Moreover, conflict experience also had a significant main effect on relationship quality. Students having some conflict experience with teachers had significantly lower mean scores on relationship quality ($M = 49.24$) as

compared to that of their counterparts without any conflict experience ($M = 74.92$), which established empirical support for our second hypothesis. Finally, Table 2 indicated a significant interaction effect between conflict and metastereotypes.

Table 2
Summary of Findings of 2-way Factorial ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	η^2	Post Hoc
Metastereotypes	4843.10	2	2421.55	162.93***	.65	2 > 1 > 3
Conflict	115.26	1	115.26	7.75**	.04	-
Metastereotype x Conflict	406.19	2	203.09	13.66***	.14	-
Error	2586.16	174	14.86			

Note. Gabriel post hoc test was used. 1 = Control group; 2 = Positive Metastereotype Group; 3 = Negative Metastereotype.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1
Two-Way Interaction Effect of Metastereotype and Conflict on Relationship Quality

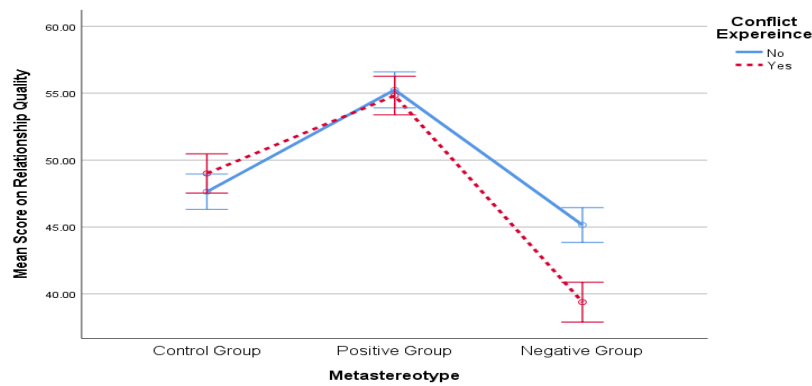


Figure 1 depicts the interaction effect schematically. Conflict experience made a significant difference in negative metastereotype condition where participants having some conflict experience had significantly lower mean scores on relationship quality as compared to that of their counterparts having no conflict experience. This furnished support for the third hypothesis of the present study. In positive metastereotype and control conditions, the mean scores of participants with and without conflict experiences were comparable.

Discussion

The results yielded empirical support for first hypothesis showing that students in the positive meta-stereotype condition reported better supervisor-supervisee relationship quality as compared to the students in negative meta-stereotype and the control conditions. Results of factorial ANOVA indicated that students placed in positive metastereotype conditions had the highest mean score on supervisor-supervisee relationship as compared to those of the other two groups. Those students who believe that their supervisors have positive views about them, tend to have better relationship quality. In contrast, poor relationship quality was observed of those students who were placed in negative metastereotype condition because negative metastereotype activation caused supervisor-supervisee's relationship to get worse. The negative effect of the induction of negative metastereotype on the supervisor-supervisee relationship was consistent with the findings of a previous study (He et al., 2019). Similarly, in their study on Whites and Blacks, Shelton and Richeson (2005) showed that both Whites and Blacks wanted to have contact with outgroups but the negative metastereotype of both groups was that the other group isn't interested in contacting them, resulting in a poor relationship between them. This demonstrates how negative metastereotypes of ingroup members might result in a poor relationship with outgroup members. Shelton and Richeson (2005) state that negative metastereotypes influenced expectations, interpersonal judgment, and contact experiences of individuals, which in turn influenced their behaviors toward out-group members. In the same way, negative metastereotypes held by supervisees put significant negative influence on their relationship quality with supervisors. Thereby our first hypothesis was supported.

The second hypothesis of the study stated that students having no conflict experience with the teacher(s) would report a better relationship with their supervisor as compared to those having conflict experience. Analysis of obtained data revealed that those participants who reported conflict experience with the teacher(s) also face conflict with their supervisors resulting in poor relationship quality. In contrast, those students who reported no conflict experience in past, have better relationship quality with their supervisors. Thereby, this result supported the second hypothesis. This finding is consistent with the results of the previous studies as well. Conflict can give rise to beliefs that are irrational in many ways, and as a consequence of these beliefs, they can wreak havoc on various relationships. So, such unreasonable beliefs may result in individuals to form emotional expectations in correspondence with conflicts, which determine the intensity and positive or negative orientation of emotional

occurrences. When an individual has a more negative view of a conflict, s/he will have a more intense negative emotional experience when a conflict arises. The persistence of a negative feeling is a consequence of negative belief through the continuous reflection of negative emotion, which results in alienation and declining trust (Jing & Sun, 1996).

According to the third hypothesis, the poorest supervisor-supervisee relationship will be reported by those students who were placed in negative metastereotype condition having conflict experience with their teacher(s). After performing analysis, we observed the interacting effect of metastereotype and conflict experience on supervisor-supervisee relationships which confirmed our third hypothesis. We can conclude that negative metastereotype condition was a stronger threat to those who have experienced conflict in comparison to those who have not experienced conflict. Students having conflict experience showed a more negative response to negative metastereotype conditions as compared to others. Therefore, the response of students with conflict experience was more negative than students without conflict experience when negative metastereotype condition was induced. The same was the case with positive metastereotype condition as students without conflict experience responded more positively as compared to those with conflict experience in the positive metastereotype condition. These findings are consistent with those of He et al. (2019) as they reported a significant interaction effect between negative metastereotypes and conflict experience on the doctor-patient relationship.

Limitations and Suggestions

Like every other research, this research also has its share of limitations, which are briefly described below.

1. The supervisor-supervisee relationship was examined only from the supervisee's perspective. The data was collected only from supervisees, not supervisors. Consequently, the present study could not examine the supervisors' perspective in terms of their metastereotypes and conflict experiences. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies should collect data from both supervisor and supervisee to get a clear idea about supervisors' viewpoints also and data should be analyzed on dyadic level using actor-partner interdependence model.
2. Data were collected only from students from the University of Sargodha, which might limit the external validity of the

findings. In future studies, data should be collected from various educational institutes from different regions to get responses from a variety of individuals that could have a better potential of being generalized.

3. The present study involved the students of BS programs, which limits the scope of the study. It would be quite interesting to examine the supervisor-supervisee relationship quality in relation to the focal variables of the present study in postgraduate and doctorate students who have more exclusive and long-term relationships with their supervisors.

Implications

The current study has yielded several important implications. Firstly, the findings could inform the development of training programs for research supervisors and supervisees to improve their communication and conflict resolution skills. By understanding the impact of metastereotypes and conflict experience on the quality of the relationship, supervisors and supervisees could learn to navigate these issues in a more constructive manner. Secondly, the research could contribute to the understanding of the role of social identity in research supervision relationships. Metastereotypes, or stereotypes held by one group about another group's stereotypes, could impact the way supervisors and supervisees perceive each other and the relationship. By recognizing and addressing these potential biases, research supervisors and supervisees could create a more positive and supportive relationship. Finally, the research could have implications for the recruitment and retention of undergraduate researchers. If metastereotypes and conflict experience negatively impact the relationship between supervisors and supervisees, this could lead to decreased satisfaction and motivation among undergraduate researchers. By improving the quality of the research supervision relationship, universities could potentially increase the likelihood of undergraduate researchers continuing on in research careers.

Conclusion

The present study found that metastereotypes and previous conflict experience with teachers have the potential to influence supervisor-supervisee relationship quality. The results indicated that positive metastereotypes lead to better relationship quality. In contrast,

negative metastereotype and previous conflict experiences with the teachers may result in poor supervisor-supervisee relationship quality. Students with negative metastereotypes about their supervisors who also have previous conflict experience with teachers are the most vulnerable group to compromised relationship quality.

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Received 18 January 2022

Revision received 07 October 2022