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Research Article

Examining the 360° Case Conceptualization Process: A Comparison of Two Groups

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Abstract

An examination of the differences between two supervision models/processes used for case conceptualizations in group supervision was conducted. The first group utilized a relatively new construct, titled the 360° Case Conceptualization Process, which incorporates a strengths-based method encouraging reflective practice and risk taking. The second group in the study utilized a supervision format that assigns a familiar fictional character of interest to each group (Peer Roles). The authors utilized a case study design to provide an in-depth look at the 360° Process in practice while also making some comparisons to a group supervision class utilizing a different model. Results demonstrated the 360° Process group focused more on developmental considerations of both the counselor and the client and utilized less instructor directives than the Peer Roles group.

Key Words

Group supervision • Case conceptualization • Experimental • Counselors-in-training

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The 360° Process for group supervision was created out of a need for a process which incorporated a growth mindset while considering different developmental levels specifically related to presenting case conceptualizations (Rausch & Gallo, 2018). There was a gap in the area of group supervision which embraced an intentional discussion surrounding the importance of risk-taking while also using a strengths-based approach. The 360° Process provides a structure that combines the most important aspects of supervision for the counselor-in-training. These aspects include: developmental levels, reflective teaming, intentional times devoted to the counselor and client and a focus on strengths all provided in a visual model. The 360° Process focuses on helping counselors-in-training become more competent in conceptualizing clients, an important part of their work post-graduation (Rausch & Gallo, 2018). One important area of growth during the learning process includes group supervision--an area where many counselors-in-training may experience trepidation and anxiety.

Integrative Developmental Model

The Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) is a developmental model of supervision originally created by Stoltenberg and Delworth in 1987 and then first revised in 1998 by Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth. This model of clinical supervision outlines interventions, approaches and techniques across three levels of counselor development. It also uses the three overriding structures of autonomy, self and other awareness, and motivation. The model provides supervisors with a structure to help identify the development of counselors-in-training across levels of experience and theoretical orientations. Counselors-in-training engaging in field experiences may be considered in the earlier phases of Level 1, according to the IDM, and may vary between levels as they progress through practicum and internship. Stoltenberg and McNeill (2010) reported that counselors-in-training at earlier levels may demonstrate “considerable anxiety”, accompanied by a “lack of confidence” (p. 50). This anxiety creates difficulty for the counselor-in-training to experience empathy for clients, reducing effectiveness in their work (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). One method for increasing effective practice includes helping counselors-in-training build procedural knowledge (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). During this time, the working memory may be flooded with new schemata, allowing for less capacity for counselors-in-training to focus on empathy, their own affect and cognition, and the client perspective (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

A goal of a counseling supervisor is to assist counselors-in-training in developmental growth across three overriding structures presented with the IDM: self- and other-awareness: cognitive and affective, motivation, and autonomy (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Within each structure, supervisors assess for, and help counselors-in-training develop: “intervention skills, assessment techniques, interpersonal assessment, client conceptualization, individual differences, theoretical orientation, treatment plans and goals, and professional ethics” (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010, p. 25-26). Past research has focused on the efficacy of the model with play therapy (Hartwig & Bennett, 2017), substance abuse counselors (Anderson, 2000), counselor self-efficacy with depressed and sexually abused clients (Leach, Stoltenberg, & Eichenfield, 1997), and supervisee development during practicum (Tryon, 1996), among others.

Author (2013) called for the use of a developmental model, such as the IDM, when supervising school counseling counselors-in-training. Counselors-in-training face many common obstacles, including professional ethics and counseling skill competence, which are addressed in the structure of the IDM (Gallo, 2013). The structure of the IDM also incorporates tools, which provide additional direction for supervisors and counselors-in-training. Stoltenberg and Pace (2010) provided an outline format for case conceptualization which includes:

general client demographic information, socioeconomic information, presenting problems, relevant history, interpersonal factors, environmental factors, personality dynamics, testing, life transition/adaptation skills, formal diagnosis, therapist's conceptualization of the case, treatment plan, [and] questions/issues. This format is introduced as a method to "organize a breadth of information", rather than serving as a "concise summary" (Stoltenberg & Pace, 2010, p. 267). The structure of the IDM may help both the counselor-in-training and the supervisor feel more prepared to address the complexity of conceptualizing a client while also reducing the anxiety students feel when presenting client tapes.

Growth Mindset and Counselors-In-Training

Counseling students experience a great deal of anxiety when beginning their field experiences (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). Though a healthy amount of anxiety can be helpful, too much can inhibit their ability to be present with clients and to utilize their counseling skills (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). This anxiety can also leak into supervision as the counselor-in-training worries about their performance and the constructive feedback that is given during this time (Fitch & Marshall, 2002). Providing an atmosphere where students feel comfortable experimenting and making mistakes is just one goal of good supervision (Black, 1988).

Dweck's (2000) growth mindset refers to intelligence as something which can be transformed, rather than a predetermined and fixed trait. Dweck (2000) found that individuals who adopt this growth mindset also demonstrate higher rates of resilience than their peers who adopt a fixed mindset. Students may exhibit a fixed mindset, one where failure is avoided, mistakes may be hidden, and opportunities to improve are missed (Dweck, 2006).

An examination of current research focusing on the use of growth mindsets to reduce anxiety is limited. A study by Schleider and Weisz (2017) found a decrease in anxiety for an adolescent population, after providing one single intervention which provided participants with growth mindset education. A nine-month follow-up yielded a small to medium effect size ($d = .33$) (Schleider & Weisz, 2017).

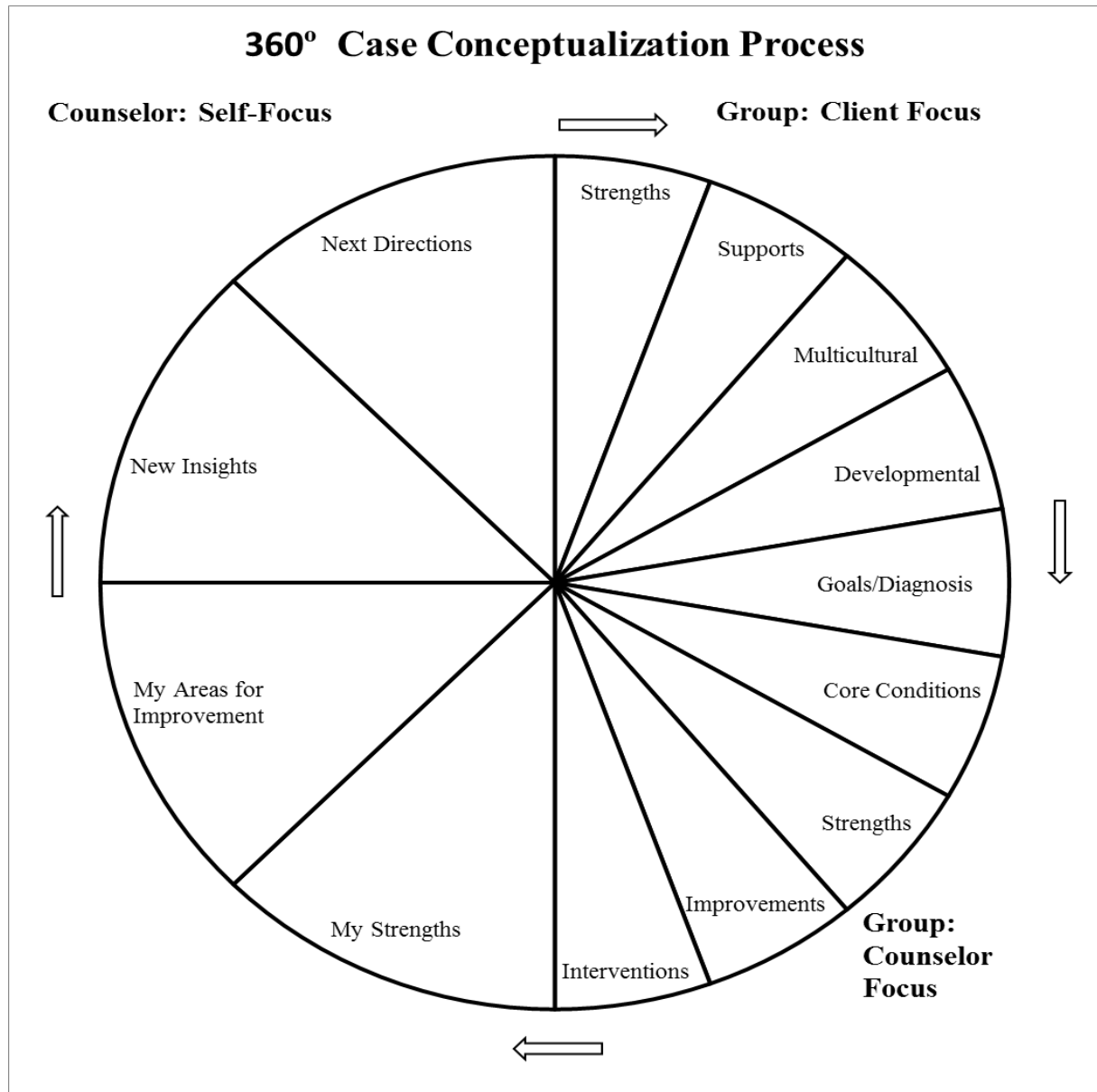
In the field of education, however, research examining the efficacy of the growth mindsets is more prevalent. O'Sullivan and Riordain (2017) explored the use of the growth mindsets with adolescent females when learning mathematics. At the conclusion of the study, not one student reported a fixed mindset, a finding which echoed previous research by Dweck (2007). Additionally, the students altered the way in which they approached challenging topics and puzzles, reporting learning from their previous mistakes (O'Sullivan & Riordain, 2017). When connecting this to counseling programs, counselors-in-training are required to participate in group supervision as part of their education (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs [CACREP], 2016). Students are actively participating during supervision and it is beneficial to create an atmosphere that supports learning from mistakes and being challenged during the case conceptualization process. Helping counselors-in-training build a growth mindset may help in their development, as they progress through their field experience placements and engage in group supervision. In addition to a growth mindset and consideration of development, providing a structure to support the case conceptualization discussion during group supervision may also be helpful.

Development of the 360° Case Conceptualization Process

The 360° Case Conceptualization Process was first developed in 2016 after a thorough review of the literature and an identified need for a structured process to review case conceptualizations during group supervision (Rausch & Gallo, 2018). This process incorporates a focus on developmental levels, like those found in IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010) and on growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006). A visual representation of the Process can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Case Conceptualization Process



When working through a case conceptualization using the 360° Process, the group will start at the top of the circle focusing on the client’s strengths, supports, multicultural considerations, development, and goals/diagnosis. The group will then transition to a discussion on the counselor’s demonstration of core conditions, strengths, areas for improvement, and interventions. The second half of the circle provides an

opportunity for the counselor-in-training to share their perceptions of their strengths, areas for improvement, new insights, and next directions. During this discussions, the supervisor is encouraging a growth mindset while also providing a balance of challenge and support.

The development of the tool is in the second round of the research phase. The first round of examining the efficacy of the 360° Case Conceptualization Process focused on better understanding the observable outcomes with a group of internship students. Results of the first study were positive, with the developers of the 360° Process adding a *Diagnosis* discussion area to the *Goals* portion of the visual tool (Authors, in review). The current study utilized a case study approach at a CACREP-accredited university in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. The purpose of this study was to further examine the use of the 360° Process through a comparison with a supervision group utilizing a Peer Roles model. Our research question to guide the study was, what is the relationship of the growth of different aspects of development: Client strengths, client supports, multicultural considerations, development level, goals/diagnosis, counselor strengths, counselor areas of improvement, counselor use of interventions, counselor described strengths, recognized areas of improvement, and counselor insights, between the two groups?

Method

Approval for this study was given through the first author's Institutional Review Board. This study followed a case study design, building on the work of previous research, which focused on the 360° Case Conceptualization Process. A case study design was chosen due to the ability to provide an in-depth look at the 360° Process in practice while also making some comparisons to a group supervision class utilizing a different model. Case studies are defined as "in-depth and detailed explorations of single examples (an event, process, organization, group, or individual) . . . drawn from similar phenomena" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 104). The case study design allowed for an investigation of the 360° Process, with an added component of comparison to an alternate supervision model. The professor of the 360° Process group is a co-creator of the 360° Process, which allowed for control over how the 360° Process was presented and conducted throughout the semester. Students in this section were introduced to the 360° process, given a visual copy of the 360° wheel, and allowed an opportunity to ask questions.

The professor teaching the participants in the comparison group had no knowledge of the 360° Process, instead utilizing a group case conceptualization technique which allowed students to assign a familiar fictional character of interest to each group. The class spent approximately one third of each class conceptualizing the selected characters in the context of three questions: (1) Why is your client here?, (2) How did this come to be a problem for your client?, and (3) What are you going to do for them? The students used a character (role) with different foci to develop a deep understanding of the array of counseling lenses which can be used in a professional setting.

Participants

Participants included school counseling and addiction-cognate students in two internship courses (first semester) at a CACREP-accredited institution in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. Participants in the study included ten students in the 360° group and nine students in the other supervision group (Peer Roles). Demographic information included: four males and 15 females, 18 of which identified as White and one

as Latino. Ten of the students were in the school counseling track and nine were in the addiction counseling track. An even mix of the cognates were in both groups. A convenience sample of participants based on regular course enrollment was used. Each participant was provided with informed consent by the principal investigator, who is also an author of the 360° Process. All nineteen students consented to participate in the study. Students in the 360° Process section discussed the goals of this supervision style with the principal investigator. Students were also instructed in the growth mindset philosophy and engaged in a discussion regarding the benefits of adopting this approach.

Instrument

A data collection form was created by one of the authors to organize the information gathered during the case conceptualization discussions. The author-created form was used to due to the unique features of the 360° Process and the need to capture specific aspects of the discussion. The data collection form included areas to mark regarding the time period of the audio taping process, number of participants, and the length of case conceptualization discussion which followed the time when students listened to or watched a client tape.

Procedure

Six case conceptualization discussions were audio-taped. Three tapes from the second week of the semester and three tapes from the last week of the 16-week semester. The audio tapes were transcribed by a research assistant, then coded independently by two members of the research team, using the team-created assessment tool. Neither instructor participated in the coding process. Thirteen areas from the 360° Process were marked according to the number of times a particular topic was discussed; the number of prompts made by the instructor were also noted. Both members, one of the co-creators of the process and a research assistant, had used the coding instrument during a previous study examining the efficacy of the 360° Case Conceptualization Process, and were familiar with the tool. Differences in coding were discussed verbally until consensual validation was reached (Patton, 2002).

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness and prevent researcher bias, the two researchers involved in coding and analyzing the data did not implement the group intervention (Patton, 2002). The two researchers used an iterative process to come to consensus. Peer debriefing, the process of engaging in extensive discussions regarding the progress and results of the study with an impartial peer, was also utilized within this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lastly, member checks were used with the two instructors to help ensure credibility and trustworthiness. The two instructors reviewed the transcriptions and made any needed clarifications for the research team.

Results

We utilized the comparison data (prevalence of the thirteen focus areas in the wheel) from each case discussion across groups and across time. Many of the focus areas resulted in similar findings between the two groups across time. For example, both groups had an increase over time in goals/diagnosis, counselor use of core conditions, counselor areas of improvement, and counselor use of interventions. Both groups also saw a slight decrease in the use of counselor described strengths, recognized areas for improvement, and instructor led directives. However, there were differences between the two groups as well. We identified three themes that

characterized participants' experiences in the 360° Process Group that were different than the Peer Roles group. The themes were in (a) counselor development, (b) awareness of client, and (c) autonomy.

Under the theme of counselor development, when looking at 'goals/diagnosis' responses, the 360° Process group increased 15% in the number of responses whereas the Peer Roles group went up 95%. However, the 360° Process group started the semester with a much higher number (27 versus 1) and therefore the rate of increase was not as dramatic with an end total of 37 for the 360° Process group compared to 21 for the Peer Roles group. Overall, the 360° Process group utilized more 'goals/diagnosis' discussions than the Peer Roles group. Another area of difference between the groups was in 'counselor use of interventions'. The 360° Process group began the semester with 24 discussions of 'interventions' and increased to 61 by the end of the semester. The Peer Roles group started with four and ended with ten instances of 'counselor intervention' discussions. Both groups had increases, but the percentage was much higher at the beginning and end of the semester for the 360° Process Group.

Under the theme of client awareness, the Peer Roles group decreased by 60% in their discussion of client developmental levels while the 360° Process Group increased by 75%. The Peer Roles group only had two points of discussion related to client developmental level versus the 360° Group, which ended with 39 points of discussion. Other areas related to client awareness included 'client strengths' and 'client supports', the 360° Process Group ended the semester with more discussion of 'client strengths' (13 vs. 5) and 'client supports' (3 vs. 8) during the case conceptualization process.

Under autonomy, differences between the two groups by the end of the semester were in 'instructor led directives'. The Peer Roles group went down by 1%, whereas the 360° Process group went down 21%. The 'instructor led directives' were much lower in the 360 Process group (32), whereas the Peer Roles group had 76 instructor directives at the end of the semester.

Discussion

To answer the research question, what is the relationship of the growth of 13 different aspects of development between the 360° Process and Peer Roles groups, the authors examined the change differences between the two groups at the end of the semester. The changes between the groups may offer the best explanation of how the two supervision approaches differed as they demonstrate the results of a four-month long process of conducting case conceptualizations. The two areas with the largest differences were in 'developmental level' and 'goals/diagnosis'.

When looking at the theme of counselor development, we considered 'goals/diagnosis' responses, and 'interventions' as fitting within this theme. When looking at 'goals/diagnosis' responses, the 360° Process group increased 15% in the number of responses whereas the Peer Roles group went up 95%. Though total numbers are similar between the groups at the end of the semester, the Peer Roles group incorporated less discussion of goals/diagnosis at the beginning of the semester. This could be due to the instructor preferring to scaffold these types of discussions as students move further into the semester. The 360° Process incorporates a discussion of goals/diagnosis into each case conceptualization, recognizing that the complexity and sophistication of these discussions changes throughout the semester, but also allowing students an opportunity to begin exploring this content.

Another noteworthy difference between the two groups by the end of the semester was in the number of responses related to the ‘counselor use of interventions’. The responses in the ‘counselor use of interventions’ area were much higher in 360° Process group (61 vs. 10). The 360° Process group focused on how the counselor utilized interventions with the client more often than the Peer Roles group. A possible reason for this could be due to the structure of the 360° Process. There is a designated time within the case conceptualization discussion for the group to discuss the interventions already utilized by the intern (and their subsequent success or struggle) as well as an opportunity for the group to suggest possible interventions the intern could try in the future.

Under the theme of client awareness, ‘developmental levels’, ‘client strengths’, and ‘client supports’ were compared. For the ‘developmental level’, the Peer Roles group went down 60% in the number of responses related to this area, whereas the 360° Process group went up 75% in this category. The 360° process structure includes an intentional aspect of discussion related to exploring the developmental level of the client and the counselor. As students progress through their internship experience and conceptualize their clients, they are able to move from a focus on very specific aspects of the client’s history or current situation into a more complex consideration of the client and a pattern of characteristics, including their development, which creates a more holistic view of the client (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010). They will also become more knowledgeable of how the client’s and their own developmental levels impact the counseling relationship (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010). If developmental levels are not consistently discussed in group supervision, students may begin to feel as if this is a preliminary point of discussion that does not warrant continued examination as their skills progress.

When examining the discussions related to ‘client strengths’ and ‘client supports’, the 360° Process group included more of this awareness during group supervision, which could in part, be due to the intentional time structured for this in the wheel. As students progress through the semester, they may begin to focus less on these aspects of the client, believing they are not as important in conceptualizing the client, though a holistic view of the client is often encouraged and an important part of the case conceptualization process (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010).

The structure of the 360° Process could also more closely align with student autonomy in the case conceptualization discussion, leading to less need for instructor direction as evidenced by a much higher rate of directives in the Peer Roles group throughout the semester, whereas there was a significant decrease for the 360° Process group. ‘Instructor led directives’ were much lower (32.5 vs. 76) in the 360° Process group than in the Peer Roles group. Instructor led directives are also developmentally appropriate as a shift in autonomy occurs for Level 1 counselors-in-training (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010).

Implications for Counselor Education

There are several implications from this study which could inform counselor educators in conducting group supervision. The first implication is the 360° Process utilizes developmental considerations of the counselor and the clients in discussions as evidenced by a dramatic increase during the semester in the 360° Process group. Understanding developmental levels is an important aspect for counselors-in-training to consider as they conceptualize their clients (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010). In addition, students in the group may learn vicariously through each other’s clients, including the client’s presenting problems and possible treatment plans - all of which should include discussion of client developmental levels. Discussions during group supervision can also build off previous cases presented by the student as the group focuses on the development of the

counselor. Students may comment on seeing similarities with their own development including common fears, self-awareness, and shifting motivation levels. Counselor educators are knowledgeable of developmental levels and can utilize this content to supplement these discussions.

The second implication as a result of this study is that the 360° Process relies less on instructor-led directives as students progress through the semester, which coincides with the development of the student. Students build autonomy as they gain experience, interact with additional clients, and consult with supervisors. Using a group supervision structure that builds on this development and is intentional about incorporating these discussions, allows for students to take more ownership of their own learning as well as their peers'. The 360° Process provides a flexible structure the group follows during the case conceptualization discussion and the visual representation provides a reminder of the different areas to cover- therefore, the instructor is not required to lead the discussion, but rather is able to add their observations and insights similar to the students. The ability for students to provide feedback to their peers in a constructive manner helps build altruism and is good practice for providing consultation for their peers as practicing counselors in the future.

The final implication is how the 360° Process allowed for more discussion of interventions used by the counselor. As students progressed through the semester and became more familiar with the structure of group supervision, they were intentional about incorporating discussions of the interventions used with their clients. As supervisors, we work with students on creating goals with the client and a large part of creating and reaching these goals are the interventions suggested and utilized by the counselor. As mentioned previously, the other students participating in group supervision are learning vicariously through their peers, and this includes learning about the variety of interventions used with different types of clients. Counselor educators are knowledgeable of a variety of interventions and provide input or suggestions throughout the process as well.

Limitations and Future Directions

The use of a case study design provided some new insights for how the 360° Process compares to another group supervision format. Nevertheless, there are limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, only one case conceptualization for the comparison group was used at the beginning and the end of the semester. Including more than one case may have provided a richer comparison for the study. A second limitation included the use of a single university to analyze data. The use of multiple universities to make comparisons would strengthen the reliability of the study. Another possible limitation is the Peer Roles supervision format was compared to the 13 pre-identified components of the 360° Process and was not analyzed according to the theoretical underpinnings of the Peer Roles model, which may have provided more insight and rationale for its use.

Future research involving the 360° Process may include the use of multiple groups engaging in group supervision as well as supervision classes at different universities. Designing a phenomenological study that explores counselor-in-training experiences using the 360° Process might also produce new insights that could be used to strengthen the 360° Process.

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