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Students' Experiences of In-person and Online Clinical Residencies: A Qualitative Study

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Students' Experiences of In-person and Online Clinical Residencies: A Qualitative Study

Abstract

Online counselor education programs have continued to grow in popularity. There is limited current research about residency experiences of counseling students. The coronavirus pandemic has forced counselor educators to move traditionally face to face residencies to the online platform. Our study explores the experiences of counseling students who attended both online and face to face residency using an in-depth phenomenological interviewing. Four major themes emerged including (a) self-care, (b) faculty interactions, (c) student connections, and (d) counselor identity and future practice. One narrative highlights the participant's experiences.

Keywords

counselor education, residency, distance learning, distance education, clinical skills

Author's Notes

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Online educational programs have continued to be a popular and effective path for both traditional and nontraditional students to complete college degrees (Chen et al., 2020; Cicco, 2013; Dietrich & Bowers, 2018; Holmes et al., 2020; Kolowski & Holmes, 2017; Oswald et al., 2015; Snow et al., 2018; Wilcox & Lock, 2017). In the counselor education field, an estimated 25% of students are enrolled in an online counselor educational program (Council of Accreditation in Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2019; Holmes et al., 2020). According to Holmes (2020) there is continued debate regarding the effectiveness of online counselor educational programs. The COVID 19 pandemic forced educators and students to adjust to changes and restrictions set forth by health officials and university leaders; traditional in person programs were required to adapt and offer online platform courses.

Fundamental concepts for counselors in training involve proficiency in interpersonal skills that are commonly demonstrated and assessed in the traditional face-to-face educational and professional settings (Cicco, 2013). Thus, a common belief is that online education may be appropriate for theory-based counseling courses but not for skill-based courses (Dietrich & Bowers, 2018). However, counselor education programs that primarily deliver their curriculum online will often employ a short-term intensive learning experience called a *residency* (Snow et al., 2018). A residency is traditionally conducted in person with a program's goal of being able to adequately assess students' counseling skills and dispositions (Cicco, 2013). With the sudden restrictions placed on counseling programs due to the COVID 19 pandemic, residencies were moved from the in-person format to an online platform. This required a collective gathering of resources, ideas, suggestions, and best practices for online education. There are research findings with no significant differences in comparing skill development between in-person and online residency students (Bender & Dykeman, 2016; Murdock et al., 2012; Ouellette et al., 2006;

Willke et al., 2016). Although there is research comparing land-based and online counselor education, it is limited. There is a significant need to expand this area of research and learn more about remote counseling residencies (Chen et al., 2020; Minton, 2019).

Whether a program is conducted primarily online or in person, counselor education programs are required to make sure their students gain the experience and knowledge necessary to become effective and ethical counselors. The Council of Accreditation in Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards gives counselor education programs the foundation needed to ensure their students meet these expectations (CACREP, 2016). Counselor education programs who are CACREP accredited, or in the process, are required to provide evidence of student progress throughout the program. The 2016 CACREP standards utilize key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess student progress. Every counselor educator program, regardless of platform, is required to develop KPIs in relation to each of the eight core areas and specialty areas. KPIs assess both knowledge and skills and measure student progress throughout the counseling program (CACREP, 2016). However, there is a need for continued research to accurately assess skill development, professional dispositions, and KPIs in online counselor education (Reicherzer et al., 2012). Measuring, tracking, and assessing student skill development, professional dispositions, and remediations may be challenging in an online counselor education program (Reicherzer et al., 2012).

Online Education

The Classroom

Students with an internet connection can engage in distance learning from almost anywhere, providing accessibility to students in rural communities (Kozlowski & Holmes, 2017). Flexibility in location can also help serve diverse student populations who may be underserved

(Snow et al., 2018). An online environment can promote a more adaptive classroom (Kent, 2015). For those who have physical disabilities, navigating the analog world can be frustrating, but an online program removes physical barriers, promotes social engagement, and provides access to support (Kent, 2015). Additionally, distance learning provides students and educators access to tools and resources only afforded by technology, like an online library database for research or instructional videos.

Technology has been used historically as an additional tool rather than a primary method of instruction. Although online counseling programs increase access for students there are still concerns of how to provide the best online instruction for courses that require skill-based practice (Wilcox & Lock, 2017). Audio and video technologies have been used in counselor education programs primarily for the recording and review of real or mock counseling sessions. Counselor educators and students may struggle to detect nonverbal cues through technology, deterring educators from using technology as a primary means of teaching counseling skills (Dietrich & Bowers, 2018). These concerns include the lack of nonverbal cues to assess student engagement and response, to accurately assess clinical skills, and isolation from the instructor and other students (Wilcox & Lock, 2017).

Learning Community

An online learning community is a group of people who engage each other in topic, work, or mutual interest (Fryer, 2020). Students in an online learning community may feel connected or that they belong to something that can impact their educational experience. Although the feeling of belonging can have different meanings for each student, students tend to have better educational outcomes and higher student satisfaction about their educational experience when they feel they are a part of their learning community (Fryer, 2020). Learning communities are often thought of

as student cohorts, however, learning communities go beyond these groups. Learning communities and the strategies to create a sense of community for students looks different from one college or university to the next (Fryer, 2020).

Although residencies are not required for all online degree programs, there are many benefits to including a residency as part of the curriculum including an increase in students' feeling of connection to peers and their university. The outcomes of Fryer (2020) suggest that student feel the most engaged and part of a learning community when they were being challenged during class time, in situations where they were able to get to know their peers better, during projects where they were able to self-evaluate, and in times of reflection. A sense of community with their cohort was also indicated in time where students were able to apply theory to real life examples, during activities that created self-awareness, and in instances where the learning process was normalized.

The Need for Connection

The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Teaching Initiative Taskforce (2016) has outlined recommendations for faculty presence and engagement with counseling students. Furthermore, the taskforce proposed a humanistic practice in distance education. This practice includes a focus on faculty fostering teacher student relationships from the beginning of class and maintaining the relationships throughout the course by acknowledging student personal, social, and cultural needs (ACES, 2016). These recommendations are supported by research suggesting that one of the most important factors in facilitating an online counseling program is instructor engagement (Dietrich & Bowers, 2018; Fryer, 2020). Student engagement increases student satisfaction and motivation to learn, thus reducing students' sense of isolation and improving student performance in the online setting (Fryer, 2020). The greatest challenge of remote learning is making students feel connected to

the university (Snow et al., 2018). There is limited research on the student experiences with residency online.

Problem Statement

Due to COVID 19, universities temporarily moved students to an online environment. However, adaptive remote learning in counselor education requires evaluation for effectiveness (Cicco, 2013). Research examining online and face-to-face instruction at the post-secondary level have been criticized for their lack of rigor (Smith et al., 2015). There are also mixed results regarding the difference in perception of online and face to face instruction. Relatively few studies have addressed the impact of online delivery of counselor education skill-based experiences (Smith et al., 2015). Despite these concerns, online distance education in counselor education programs continues to increase exponentially (CACREP, 2016; Holmes et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a need to examine the effectiveness of online skill-based courses, online teaching andragogy, and efficacy of online learning (ACES 2016; Cicco, 2013; Reicherzer et al., 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of student counselors who participated in both a land based and online residency. To explore student residency experiences, the researchers followed Seidman's (2019) in depth interviewing grounded in phenomenology. Counselor educators support student learning with technology when they understand student experiences. The results of this study will help inform training and practices for counselor educators in traditional, hybrid, or fully online programs.

Method

Seidman's (2019) method of in-depth interviewing is grounded in phenomenology

to understand the lived experiences of students who completed an online and face to face residency. Due to the positionality of the researchers, each remained aware of *epoche* and attempted to refrain from judgment (Patton, 2015). Seidman (2019) outlined the importance of studying, reducing, and analyzing data inductively rather than deductively. In concordance with Seidman (2019) the researchers analyzed each interview and transcript with an open attitude, awareness of personal bias, and clarity about preconceptions.

The basic mode of inquiry is interviewing, which gathers a deep understanding of the structures, processes, themes, and issues that permeate the participant's stories (Seidman, 2019). The researchers gathered data and explored the experiences and meaning, as described by the participants. This design requires a three-phase interview process with specific guides for each phase (Seidman, 2019). For the first phase, interview questions were designed to explore the participants' life history until they became a student. The second phase consisted of participant lived experiences in their first year at a land-based residency and their second year in an online residency. The third phase allowed participants to share their reflection on the residency experiences and the impact it had their development as a counselor. Once the data were analyzed and themes emerged, the researchers created profiles in the words of the participants to share the data in a meaningful way. Presenting data in narrative profiles allows for a coherent means for readers to learn in depth the rich experiences of participants related to the phenomenon under investigation (Seidman, 2019).

Participants

In concordance with the research design, the sample included a total of six graduate students who were either attending their last year in a mental health counseling program or were recent graduates of the program. Criterion based sampling was employed to ensure that

participants attended the most recent land based and online residencies offered in July 2019 and July 2020. The participants included five females and one male ranging in age from 24 to 54 ($M = 36$). All the participants were residents of Iowa and identified as living in a rural community. Four of the six participants indicated that they had children at home. Five of the six participants worked or volunteered full or part time while attending classes for their counseling degrees.

Data Collection

Once participant consent was received, the second researcher responded to the participants' consent with an email asking to schedule three interviews and to complete a demographic inventory prior to the first interview. Participants were able to exit the study at any time; however, none of the six participants dropped out of the study. The second researcher used the Seidman (2019) approach and obtained in depth narratives using the three phases. Interviews took place through a secured Zoom video conference. Three 90-minute interviews were scheduled with the participants as well as an additional one hour follow up for member checking after the initial data analysis. Per the research design, each interview was scheduled three to seven days after the previous interview. "The passage of time reduces the impact of possibly idiosyncratic interviews" (Seidman, 2019, p. 27). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the transcription service Otter.ai. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

Data Analysis

The researchers used thematic connections to build narrative profiles. We marked individual passages, grouped these into categories, and then studied the categories for thematic connections (Seidman, 2016). Thematic connections across the interviews were explored for meaning and resultant narrative profiles were created. In doing so we were able

“to present participants in context, to clarify their intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of a qualitative analysis” (Seidman, 2019, p.128). Furthermore, not all interviews are compelling enough to be presented as a narrative (Seidman, 2019). In this study, we used one of the six profiles to present as a full narrative. Although Seidman (2019) argued there is no right way to share interview data, a narrative of participant experience allows for a more robust analysis than providing a less substantial vignette.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness ensures quality and rigor of the data in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in this study helped to strengthen trustworthiness. To strengthen credibility in this study we incorporated feedback from participants. We utilized reflective questions to develop richer responses from the interview. Seidman (2019) suggested that the three-interview structure includes features that enhance validity. The structure encourages participants to account for idiosyncrasies and to check for internal consistency of what they said. Furthermore, by interviewing multiple participants, researchers can compare experiences. The goal of the Seidman (2019) approach is to find meaning in the participant’s experiences. We also engaged in member checking with the participants at the end of each interview to ensure the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the results. Transferability was harder to achieve in this study due to the sample size of six participants where findings cannot be generalized to larger populations. However, the did support the potential for applying results in future studies.

Results

The researchers used in depth interviewing to identify the lived experiences of

counseling students who completed both an online and in person residency. The results of this phenomenological study are presented with narrative profiles in accordance with Seidman's approach. The narrative profiles are coded with pseudonyms to allow anonymity of the respondents. The research problem identified in the literature review consisted of two main gaps in research. The first gap was the lack of student voice in counselor education about online residency. The second gap was the lack of research on student experiences and their learning outcomes. Alignment between CACREP standards and student experiences helps counselor educators understand the impact of adaptive online learning (Cicco, 2013). In this study, student experiences were explored in both online and in person formats to assess for similarities, differences, strengths, and limitations. In addition, students processed the impact on their counselor identity and utilization of clinical skills. Participant learning styles and engagement were reviewed initially to understand context for the identified themes. Four major themes were identified in this study. These include 1) Self Care; 2) Faculty Interactions; 3) Student Connections, and 4) Counselor Identity and Future Practice.

Joy's Narrative: 1st Interview

I had just an undergrad degree in organizational leadership. I had two children. I just kind of worked a job just for the benefits and the money really. I want to do something more. I kind of always wanted to do something with psychology or mental health.... I was really advised against it by my family. I was told that it wasn't important, and that it wasn't a fulfilling career, anti-mental health and huge stigma. At a certain point, I was just kind of like, "Nope, I'm going live my life and do what I want to do and what I think is important." I kind of lived under a pretty controlling family environment. It was, "our way or the highway." I really broke away from that when I started the program. ... Just being exposed to people outside of my community,

outside of my little circle helped me break out of that mindset.

My first real experience [helping people] was when I worked at a funeral home..... I don't know if that's technically considered a helping profession, but I really believe that it is. You're meeting with families in a very vulnerable time. You're really helping them through something even though it's a business. I really had a lot of interest in that industry and how we helped people through that time. It was not a nine to five job, and it didn't work out for my family schedule. ... When I got out of that job, I worked at a hospital just doing some administrative work. My current job is mostly administrative work. I did behavioral health intervention services. That was a really good experience. But the company that I worked for had some kind of clashing values on how employees should be treated. I only worked for them for about six months. I used to be able to see the change, the fruits of my labor. I got to see people come in absolutely distraught and leave having celebrated their loved one. Knowing I was a part of that, and then working in administrative work never feeling like my job really had any value, it was a downer.

I did my undergrad at the university, so I knew about the graduate programs. When I actually started my undergrad, I was going to do it in psychology, because that's the field that I wanted to work in. My academic advisor was like, "well, we don't typically advise people to get a psychology degree if they're never going to get a masters in it." ... I was like, "Oh, no, I'll never do a master's program." After a little bit more life experience, I lost my mom kind of in the middle of that. And it's weird to say, but she was one of the people that really promoted me not doing it. So, I felt a little bit of freedom, I guess, to explore the things that I wanted to do. So, I went ahead and applied and you know, I wasn't a great student in my undergrad, and I was like, I don't think I'll even get accepted. But if I didn't even apply, I'd be mad at myself; And

so, I started the program. I'm wanting to do something different in my community and for work. I didn't feel I was qualified to do anything other than administrative work without more education.

Joy's Narrative: 2nd Interview

The land-based residency was fun. I feel like it was the initiation into the program, because it was one of the first classes that I took. At the beginning of the week, there were a bunch of people that I didn't know. Everybody was so different. Different ages and different backgrounds. By the end of the week, I felt like I knew everybody. I felt like I could reach out to any of them with a question. I just know those people super well now. The highlight of the land-based residency was getting to know all the people in the program. I got up in the morning and there was a designated hour that was supposed to be used for self-care. I woke up in time to do that, instead of just blowing it off. I tried to do something fun, some reading for fun or calling my family and facetimeing with my kids. That was the first thing that I did in the morning. I went to breakfast and usually met with a group of people there that were also staying on campus. We talked about class and talked about life and got to know people through that. Then we had class. I would say class was pretty rigorous.... It wasn't just learning from a textbook. It was very involved with what we were asked to do and know and learn. It was a wonderful experience. It was exactly what I hoped I would get out of a master's program.

Before that, I think that my peers and I were putting in a lot different effort than I did in my undergrad. The discussion posting that we had been doing prior to residency just seems kind of lackluster to me. We talked about that in residency, that our professor expects a higher level of academic work from you. And I was like, "Yes, that's it. That's what I was waiting for." I think that everybody had to put in a lot more effort than we were maybe anticipating, as far as

coursework and the effort, but everybody rose to the challenge.... We had several hours of class, and then it was like an hour for lunch. I was pregnant at the time; I was really tired. I often went and took a nap in my dorm room. Then we went back to class for the afternoon. Again, fairly rigorous coursework; we were making recordings of ourselves practicing skills. It was hard, but it was worth doing. I learned a lot from doing it. Then in the evenings, we had activities to do fun stuff. I did some of that, but like I said, I was pregnant and super tired. ... That was what I was really looking forward to this year, that we didn't get to have some of those activities and hanging out with people just kind of for fun. I know they did a bonfire one night; you could go out on the lake and that kind of stuff. There was one night that I got together with some other people, we went and got our nails done. Just kind of free time to get to know other people. I felt like after the residency was over, I learned a lot about myself that week. I learned a lot as a human. Going through that week was life changing, really, I approach things differently. I approached my schoolwork differently. I knew that there were higher expectations for me. It was fun. It was, at times, intimidating. But also reassuring; other people are in the same boat as me.

A lot of my post-secondary education has been online. It was nice to get back in a classroom and have a collaborative space. When we got there, we took all of the tables and chairs, and we set them in one big rectangle in the room so we could all see each other and have that Socratic style of class. I thought that was really beneficial to be able to see everybody at the same time and have really good conversations as a group. That in a way was different from the traditional classroom. I guess to me a traditional classroom is the teacher at the front lecturing and everybody's sitting down and taking notes. There was none of that. We didn't do that at all. It was a face-to-face class, but it wasn't like a traditional experience in a classroom that I'd had before. I felt like in my undergrad, I was super intimidated by professors. Just like, "that guy's

the top of his field and I have to take his word as gold.” I feel like I could approach any professor that I’ve had with questions and life events, especially my advisor, I’ve gotten to know her super well, and we have a great relationship. I feel like residency was part of that, getting to meet these people that I’ve seen virtually. It was a whole different level of connection. As far as professors, I could reach out to any of them with a question. And I feel like meeting them face to face really helped with that.

For me personally, the biggest challenge was being pregnant walking around campus a lot.... As far as social challenges, I love people and talking to people and getting to know people and you know, sharing my life story and hearing about other people. I feel like there were some of my classmates that were super reserved and didn’t share a lot in class. I really struggled with that. Just because I’m like, “Well, what am I doing wrong?” I feel like I’m a welcoming and friendly person. Just having people that weren’t as open and wanting to share and getting to know each other was a challenge. Each of our professors held office hours. I never did use them, but I know people that did. I prefer to communicate more over email technology. I don’t like to feel like I waste other people’s time.

Joy’s Narrative: 3rd Interview

The remote residency was a lot better than I expected it was going to be. In talking with my peers, we all shared that we were really looking forward to the in-person residency just because we had enjoyed it so much and grown so much. But my remote professor did a fantastic job of integrating activities that you’re going to do at your desk. She mailed out supplies, she mailed out playdough and colored pencils, and coloring sheets, and all sorts of tools that we could use, that we may or may not have had. She really involved us more than just through a screen. It seems pretty simple, but it made a big difference to me. And just the activities that

we did, we used breakout rooms. There was that aspect of a smaller community. The class we were taking was group counseling. So, we were working in groups as if we were in a therapy group, I think that we called it the experiential growth groups. It was a growth group to work, and work off each other. We took turns leading and practicing skills and that was obviously part of the residency, but I thought it was beneficial as a person and a student more so than just the exercise of leading a group.

In the morning, I would get up and I was obviously home. So, I had all my home responsibilities at the same time. I'd get up and get my kids ready.... The stress of that was also a part of my experience. I got my kids ready, took them to my mother-in-law, went home, and I had half an hour to an hour of my own time to look through readings, prepare myself for the day, and then relax a little bit; there was an hour of self-care time where you could meet with everybody from school. I did go to that one day and I led a group one day, that was a fun experience.... We had classes for a few hours. We were in class for a long time. It was a long time without a break from the screen. ... But at the same time, I don't think there was any way around it. We would have class and then we had an hour for lunch. At that time, we didn't log out completely. So, you could still be in the classroom, if somebody was hanging out there, you could talk to them. Most people did turn off their video and microphone, though, and just kind of check out for an hour. Then we came back in the afternoon, and we did growth groups and a little more coursework, and then at the end of the day, we logged off. I went about my day as far as being a mom and a wife and having household chores that I felt that I had to do because I was home.

My interactions with my peers were good. I think having the land residency and getting to know everyone the year before helped. I feel like if I was trying to get to know people one on one, I wouldn't have had that opportunity online because people were trying to get away from

their computers when we weren't in class. I think people were trying to kind of get offline a little bit to relax. You couldn't really get offline if you were trying to interact with somebody. My interactions with the professors were good too. I only saw our one professor in class that whole week. We got emails and information from other professors. We had presentations by outside people as well. I forgot to include that in the day-to-day. I want to say like 3 or 4 days, there were presentations. I take that back; I did see other professors because they were in those groups. They were asking questions and they were helping lead discussions. I saw my professors more in the land-based residency, passing in the hallways and that sort of stuff. They were there during the online presentations, but the year before we all went to those presentations. You could see them and talk with them afterward and have an interaction that way.

I think our group kind of went through one struggle and not so much at residency but just kind of in class in general. Learning how and when to jump into a conversation online. I think that kind of the Zoom etiquette was something that we all had to go through and kind of figure out. If you're quieter and more reserved, you may have a harder time speaking in class because you might have to almost interrupt somebody to get a word in. ... It's harder online to cut somebody off and interject and make a comment, because you can't, you could sit there and raise your hand, but you're probably not going to get seen all the time. Maybe sometimes there is a raise hand button. But I think that it definitely is harder to jump into a conversation online.

My primary support during the online residency was my advisor who was also the professor that we had that term. And I was quarantined and going through some major health issues at the same time. I felt very supported in that way. Just having reached out beforehand, knowing she checked in with me every day via email, "How are you doing today? How are you feeling? What do you need?"

Joy's Narrative: Follow Up and Reflection

I like learning by researching, which is something I've learned about myself. My learning style is having to write papers and research things and learn a little bit for myself. It doesn't do me a lot of good to sit in a lecture for a long amount of time. I noticed it [changed] more in the online residency. ... I realized I am doing all this work by myself, which is basically counseling. It was just kind of a different feeling. I'm sure that there was some level of that with the land based, but with the web, being able to check in with those around me every day, I really noticed it more. So, as a counselor, I think it gives me perspective both in person and virtual experiences, when you're doing the actual counseling work. I think that it showed me that I learn a lot from myself. I seek out a lot more information on my own than is just presented to me. I look at everything, all the videos, readings, and textbook stuff. That's a part of it. But to me, it means that I really do look into stuff more on my own, more than I probably realized.

I think the skills that we learned in the first residency are a big thing. Going into the counseling program I was kind of like, "I don't know what I'm going to learn that qualifies me to be a counselor." ... Once we got to group, the second residency, I think things started to click with me. You know, it's about knowing yourself well enough to help somebody else. I think that's what counseling means to me. I think that's a big takeaway that I learned at the residency.

Discussion

This discussion section is based on participant feedback from six students in counseling residency, both in person and online. Counselor educators need to incorporate student feedback about residencies. We already know from previous research that the feeling of belonging can have different meanings for each student (Fryer, 2020). Students tend to have better educational outcomes and higher student satisfaction about their experience when they feel they are a part of their learning community (Dietrich & Bowers, 2018; Fryer, 2020). According to ACES

(2016) distant education should include a humanistic approach by faculty to foster teacher student relationships throughout student enrollment as these relationships impact personal, social, and cultural needs. Participants in this study highlighted several areas of focus for discussion including student balance and preparation for residency experiences, faculty accessibility, and social connections. These focus areas are important for both in person and remote residency but require specific attention in remote settings as many universities and counseling programs are novice in this approach.

Balance and Self Care

Residency can be an immersive experience where students focus on their education. For some participants, being at home during remote residency created issues with balance as they had family life and other distractions that made it challenging to focus on the demands of residency. For in person residency, although some reported it was hard to leave responsibilities behind, they were able to focus all their attention on the experience. It is important that students take extra steps to prepare for a residency experience. Preparation may include finding self care routines, childcare, and oversight of other household responsibilities while at a traditional residency. Remote residency should be treated similarly, where responsibilities are delegated, even if remaining at home. Some students may need to spend time out of town or at a hotel if they need further distancing from the pressure of taking on a dual role. For both in person and remote residency, financial aid could be used for childcare, travel, and hotel. Remote residency could include time away at a hotel of their choice. If leaving home is not possible during remote residency, students may need to use boundaries to reduce dual roles, such as finding a private workspace, childcare, enhancement of self-care practices, and delegation of responsibilities. Additional considerations include ensuring technology requirements are met and functioning prior to the start of the residency.

In terms of specific preparation for residencies, pre-residency self-care allows students to find practical applications for self-care during residency. For example, the book *Counselor Self Care* (Corey et al., 2018) can be used as a tool during residency. This resource allows students to take self-care assessments, engage in reflections, and participate in discussions on topics like self-compassion, mindfulness, personal and professional stressors, and growth and development as a counselor.

The university could also help prepare students with clear expectations and resources for the intensive residency experience. For example, the university could provide a residency planning schedule. This schedule could include what to expect from residency courses, how much time to allot for in class and outside activities, technology requirements, university resources, contacts, and social opportunities. All these factors can help students prepare to balance the requirements of counseling residency.

Faculty Accessibility

The theme that students found value in being able to have access to their faculty was present in both settings. Although professors were just as available in the remote residency as in person, the perception was different for students. The direct “on/off” of class via Zoom made some students feel they lacked further opportunities to expand their learning. Some students reported anxiety or hesitancy about sharing in class due to Zoom etiquette to not talk over one another; Internet lag may create confusion over who began speaking first. Discussing with professors, asking questions, and engaging in general dialogue outside of class time was seen as valuable.

Recommendations for professors and faculty include setting instructions for classroom engagement and etiquette as well as providing accessibility outside of class time. Possibilities for classroom engagement include requesting students use the “wave” gesture in class so the professor

can direct discussions, which will help with reducing student anxiety about interrupting each other. Additionally, small groups in break out rooms can allow students to dive into discussion or skills practice with the instructor dedicating time in each group to provide detailed feedback. Other ways to ensure students have what is necessary is to enable closed captioning and provide access to presentations or class content, which can increase clarity for students on what was said and who is speaking in the moment. Access to course content allows students to follow up, reflect, and plan for their week.

The following are recommendations for structure that can also help students feel supported during remote instruction. Having set office hours can help students know when to reach you and what avenues are best, such as phone or email. Virtual meeting blocks could be made available where students can reserve “face to face” time with a professor. After class ends the professor can remain available for 10-15 minutes so students can ask questions or explore topics further. If there are personal issues, such as grades, a face-to-face meeting time should be reserved to respect their privacy. Additionally, opportunities for guest speakers during residency can also help students connect with professionals and topics in the field of counseling.

Social Connections

Participants identified that they felt connection at in person residency with their peers. Remote residency experiences were reported as lacking the same in person connection, at such events like barbecues and after class gatherings. A remote residency should consider integrating a variety of student interactions in both academic and informal social settings. To avoid staring at a computer for lengthy periods of time, instructors can use a variety of tools. Jamboard is an example of an online tool where students can interact in a creative board where they can write, draw, add pictures, and work on projects as a team. Allowing for group assignments and

activities can help diversify learning and improve social connections between students. Another example could be Kahoot, which is a learning platform where the class can have fun while doing interactive quizzes or trivia.

The university can also promote social occasions where students can meet with each other outside of class. For example, the university created a social connection meeting where first year students could discuss and ask questions of the third-year students. Online communication hubs, such as Slack, can be used to create informal forums where students can continue discussions together with oversight from the professor. There could also be a virtual social hour in the evening for students who want to socialize where faculty are not present.

Counselor Identity and Technology

The participants in this study shared how COVID and online residency impacted their perspectives on online counseling. Prior to this experience, they shared experiences that technology and counseling was not actively addressed in their programs, and many felt it was too specialized or subpar to in person counseling. Most acknowledged that their perspectives were due to lack of understanding of the role and effectiveness of online therapy. Many students had to transition to online modes of counseling and residency; they had to learn quickly how to adapt and make methods effective for both clients and their education. All residency programs should integrate online counseling education, ethics, and techniques. Additionally, professors could receive training on how to engage students in remote learning and be provided access to online tools to enhance the learning experience for students.

Limitations

Limitations are constraints beyond the researcher's control but could affect the study outcome (Patton, 2015). Additionally, these constraints are usually related to research design

and methodology. One limitation of this study was that participants were from one location and each self-selected to be interviewed and self-reported their perspectives and experiences. Therefore, their views may not represent the experiences of candidates in other programs. The population is also specific, an inherent limitation because it excludes persons not meeting these criteria from participating in the study. However, the purpose of this study was not to apply themes and concepts but to understand the experiences of the participants as they perceived them.

Implications

Because the use of online technology in counselor education is relatively new, there is limited empirical research. However, regardless of educational setting, counselor educators are required to ensure that their students are offered the experience and knowledge to become effective and ethical counselors, following CACREP standards. Online education programs also continue to grow in popularity (Chen et al., 2020; Cicco, 2013; Dietrich & Bowers, 2018; Holmes et al., 2020; Kolowski & Holmes, 2017; Oswald et al., 2015; Snow et al., 2018; Wilcox & Lock, 2017). Though online counseling programs have both benefits and limitations, one of the most important considerations is that the graduate students are prepared to work in a similar setting. It is important for counselor educators to embrace the growth of online education as the use of technology and online education continues to expand. Counselor educators can improve the online experience and broaden professional understanding and competence.

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Table 1*Demographic Questionnaire*

Participants Pseudonym	Age	Gender
Sam	26	Female
Joy	Not Disclosed	Female
Monty	32	Female
Chris	52	Male
Sarah	24	Not Disclosed
Jess	47	Female