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Exploration Of Appropriate And Inappropriate E-Disclosure: A Qualitative Investigation Of The Decision-Making Process Of Counselors In Training

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EXPLORATION OF APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE E-DISCLOSURE: A
QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF
COUNSELORS IN TRAINING.

by

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DEDICATION

Dedicated in loving memory to…

My Grandparents: Dr. & Mrs. Richard O. Cannon II and Mr. & Mrs. Jacob H. DeWitt

> You gave me roots to know who I am and where I am from, and branches that I
>
> may see and know the world.

My Aunt: Mary Connor Cannon

> My forever inspiration of unlimited compassion and adventure

My Counselor: Rev. George Herbert Richardson

> Forever a few steps behind, a true example of unconditional positive regard

Dedicated in honor of…

My Godchildren: Caroline & Trip Roberts

My Honorary Nieces and Nephews: Anna & Ryan Esbenshade, Cason & Will Cornell,

Hilary Jane Leong, Theodore Ethan Howard Brown, and Henry Radford Leach…

> You are all a great joy in my life.

And to my family:

> My parents Tom & Anne, my sister, and brother Andi & Curt…
>
> Thank you for your love, faith, and constant belief…
>
> You are the reasons I made it and the reasons I had the courage to try!
>
> I love you all, with all my heart! Thank you!

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how counseling students in CACREP accredited counselor education program made meaning of and categorize appropriate and inappropriate self-disclosure in the digital age. In particular, how do future counselors consider and apply ethical codes to personal behavior on social media? Utilizing a qualitative design, the researcher explored student decision making and understanding of ethical considerations in the personal use of social media. A vital component to the professionalism of counseling is the constancy of the presentation-of-self in all identities (public, private, in-person, or online) of the counselor. The researcher asserts that there is an ethical obligation of all counselors to consider the observations and interpretations for "client welfare" when engaging in online environments. The researcher discovered a lack of transcendence of ethical considerations between in-person and online disclosure. This awareness awakened a need for guidance from faculty and a yearning for discussion of appropriate use and ethical considerations.

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CHAPTER 1

Exploration of appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure: A qualitative investigation of the decision-making process of counselors in training.

INTRODUCTION

Counseling is a profession of care and empathy. Ethical mandates guide the counselor in developing best treatment practices for clients and establishing expectations for the role of the counselor (ACA, 2015). Individuals, couples, or families at vulnerable times in the journey of life seek the aid of professional counselors to assist in their navigation of trouble, pain, and confusion to find congruence, define a new normal, or to help articulate needs and wants not being met (Vogel & Wester, 2003). In counselor training, students are taught to use and hone active listening skills. Students are taught to approach clients with respect and cultural understanding, and to develop rapport and a therapeutic alliance to assist the client in heal, as guided by ethical mandates (Bitar, Kimbal, Bermúdez, & Drew, 2014; Hill, 2004). Counselor self-disclosure is a counseling skill that, when used appropriately, can assist in the building of the therapeutic alliance and rapport between counselor and client (Knox & Hill, 2003). The combination of counselor self-disclosure and other active listening and counseling skills are the tools used by the counselor to aid those who come to seek help. In working with clients in vulnerable emotional states, ethical mandates assist in defining the parameters of the

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counseling relationship (ACA, 2015). This research specifically investigates the ethics of counselor e-disclosure in the digital age.

The American Counseling Association (ACA) continues to adapt ethical codes to the times and phenomena current to the practicing professional. Ethic codes are vital in guiding new counselors and counselors-in-training in clinical practice, (Kitchner, 1992; Ponton & Duba, 2009; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). The profession of counseling has a tradition of adapting ethical guidelines to the social and cultural dynamics of the population served (Lannin, & Scott, 2013). Professional counselors adapt practice to meet clients where he or she is in experience and emotional health, all within the confines of appropriate professional behavior as outlined in professional ethical codes.

Evidence of the evolution of ethical standards to meet the evolving cultural needs of the greater societal populations served is found in the codes themselves. In response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the ACA included a "contagious and fatal diseases" rule in the 1995 ACA Code of Ethics revisions. The rule was meant to address the growing ethical concerns of mental health professionals working with HIV-seropositive individuals who were engaging in sexual practice that put others in danger of contracting HIV (Cohen, 1997). The rule expanded the confidentiality exceptions of 'duty to warn' to include warning identifiable third parties of the client who is at "high risk of contracting diseases commonly known to be both communicable and fatal" (ACA B.1.d., 1995).The language of the rule stated that the duty to warn was specifically for counselors who had confirmation of the client's contraction of communicable disease and knowledge that client was engaging in behavior that was known to put the third party in danger (Cohen, 1997). The broad language allowed for individual counselor interpretation and for state

legislation to craft laws that counselors could adhere to while maintaining ethical practice as outlined from the ACA code (Cohen, 1997).

The most recent phenomena to effect change in American society and the practice of counseling professionals is the expansion of the internet and the evolution of social media. Research supports that the next generation of young counseling professionals will be active participants in the social media culture (DiLillo & Gale, 2011; Levaholt, 2009; Levaholt, Barnett, & Powers, 2010). The internet and social media have changed the American culture, including, but not limited to, the way individuals communicate and seek information (Giffords, 2009). Aided by the rapid advancement of personal technology, the internet, and social media are almost fully integrated into the daily life of society (Behnke, 2008). Rapid technological advances and implementation in the daily lives individuals has made it increasingly difficult for the governing bodies of the disciplines of counseling to keep up with the ever-changing forms of communication (Lannin & Scott, 2013).

Unintended disclosure is no longer limited to the decorative preferences observed in the counseling office, but rather is available to the curious client with internet access (Lehavot, et al., 2010). It is important that counseling students be able to translate what could happen in the real world to what could also happen in the digital world. Social media provides a public forum for discussion and disclosure while still providing some individual anonymity and ambiguity of context (Tiereny, 2013). Counselors who practice in rural communities have limited control over the observations and conclusions clients may draw when the counselor is seen in the community with family, shopping in the grocery store, or sitting in a place of worship (Schank, Helbok, Haldman, & Gallardo,

2010; Helbok, 2003). So too is this true of the observations and conclusions clients draw when the counselors' online presence in social media is explored by the client (Lannin & Scott, 2013). In both instances, in public or online, the counselor may not have any knowledge of what the client has observed unless the client discloses these observations.

Outside of the clearly-defined prohibition of romantic and sexual relationships between counselor and client, the codes of ethics advise only that in issues of boundaries and dual relationships counselors must avoid harm and exploitation of the client. The codes also advise that self-disclosures be salient to the therapeutic alliance (ACA, 2014; APA, 2009; NASW, 2008). In the digital age, relationship perceptions manifest in ways not anticipated by code authors, and how digital natives understand appropriate self-disclosure is impacted by the social media phenomenon.

Ethical Codes

Without ethical codes, individuals seeking help from mental health professionals would be at the mercy of the personal, moral and ethical development of the mental healthcare professional, and there would be no standard of behavior or care for the profession (Meara, Schmidt,& Day, 1996; Urofsky & Engels, 2003). Before the development of the American Psychology Association's first code of ethics in 1948, and before the establishment of the American Counseling Association in 1952, ethics and ethical behavior of mental health providers was "tacit agreement" of professional behavior (Meara, et al., 1996). Since World War II, the helping professions, particularly in health and human services, have had to establish and adopt professional codes of ethics to provide standardization in professional practice and care. Like living documents, these

codes have been revised to address the ever-changing needs of the professional and to be relevant to practice in a constantly-changing culture (Ponton and Duba, 2009). Throughout these changes and revisions, the concept of self-disclosure has remained subject to definition, explanation, and guidelines for practicing professionals in establishing ethical practice.

Created from the significant needs of society, the helping vocations of physician, lawyer, clergyman, and soldier were trusted with autonomy and self-regulation. In response to this trust, these professionals would profess to act for the good of the public (Ponton and Duba, 2009). Helping professions all share very similar values in their ethical guidelines (de las Frentes, Willmuth, and Yarrow, 2005.) The American Counseling Association (ACA), American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), have similar missions and membership populations motivated to helping others. These most-identified governing bodies of the counseling profession have overlap in their ethical codes.

Ethics education is driven by the codes of ethics of governing professional bodies. Program standards, accreditation standards, and licensure standards for professionals are heavily influenced by these ethical codes (Urofsky & Engel, 2003). These codes are, therefore, not merely a guide for professional practice, but also serve as a guide for professional training and education. At the time of this current study, the ACA (2014) is the only major governing body that has revised its ethical code to address social media. The APA and the NASW have not, to date, done so, although a significant portion of the literature surrounding the ethical use of these platforms comes from the disciplines of

psychology and social work. Researchers in these fields have repeatedly called for the revision of codes to reflect the changing ways society has come to gather information.

"Ethical codes are supposed to regulate behavior…" (Kuntze, Streromer, Muller-Spahn, and Bullinger, 2002.) Social and medical service professionals have had to adapt and incorporate into their practice new means of communication with clients as the traditional boundaries between professionals and clients have deteriorated with the explosion of social media (Anderson & Guyton, 2013.) Maintaining a personal social media presence can hinder and potentially damage the therapeutic relationship between client and therapist when a client has access to unguarded personal information in the public space of social media (Tunick, Mednick, & Conroy, 2011.) Prior to the 2014 revision of the ACA Code of Ethics, counseling professionals, counselor educators, and counseling students have attempted to maintain boundaries without guidance, as both client and clinician information has become readily available to either with an internet connection (Osman, Wardle, and Caesar, 2012.)

The increased use of social media has generated new challenges for professionals in helping fields, especially those professionals who work intimately with individuals in vulnerable stages of life (Kellen, Schoenherr, Turns, Madhusudan, and Hecker, 2015). Private information that was previously difficult to obtain is now more easily accessible (DiLillo & Gale, 2011). Governing bodies and ethical codes have lagged behind in the development of concrete policies to aid professionals in navigating the ethical issues that have arisen from the explosion of social media use (DiLillo & Gale, 2011). While the ACA has outlined clear guidelines, there is still some ambiguity in other existing codes

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about the ethical issues of self-disclosure that arise, not only from professional use but also personal use of social media (Kellen et al., 2015).

In many instances, psychology and social work graduate students have the opportunity to major as undergraduates in those disciplines. These students are exposed to the professional code of ethics early in their training. In the discipline of counseling, students do not typically have the opportunity to major or minor in counseling and are, therefore, not exposed to the ACA Code of Ethics until they begin their counseling training (Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010). This delay in exposure to ethical training means that counseling students have already begun to establish behavior and habits that may be contradictory to ethical code as defined by the ACA Code of Ethics.

Ethical Decision-Making

Ethical dilemmas occur when there are acceptable but competing solutions to ethical issues that conclude in different outcomes (Kitchner, 1984.) Ethical decision-making models are used when individuals face a dilemma where there is not a clearly-defined right or wrong answer (Corey, Corey, and Callanan, 2007.) Ethical decision making is not a purely cognitive and linear process that that follows clearly defined steps. It is "discursive," using intuition, prescientific reasoning, and conscious logical debate as a part of the process (Kuntze et.al, 2002). The ACA, APA, and NASW ethical codes advise that self-awareness as well as the cultural and religious values of clients must be considered when making ethical decisions (ACA 2014; APA 2010; NASW 2008).

Good ethical decision making begins with the counselor's competence and the considerate implementation of the ethical codes (Bradley & Hendricks, 2008). Empirical

research exists that explores ethical training and ethical decision making for counselors in working with clients (Fialkov, Jackson, & Rabinowitz, 2014). These studies highlight the intricacy and ambiguity of ethical issues in the helping professions, (Dufrene & Glasoff, 2004). Many are quantitative and do not explore in-depth the processes used by counselors and students in making decisions. The few qualitative studies reveal that the way counselors practice decision making is sometimes different than the theory of decision making and often differs from issue to issue and client to client, (du Preez & Goedeke, 2013; Levitt, Farry, & Mazzarella, 2015).

Ethical decision making is a web of connected components: nonmaleficence, beneficence, autonomy, justice, and fidelity (Robson, Cook, Hunt, Alred, & Robson, 2000). In other words, counselors do not engage in intentional harm, contribute to the client's health, respect the individuals' freedom and choice, are fair, and are faithful to the relationship with the client. These considerations can become more complicated when counselors have not confronted conflicts between the professional codes of ethics and personal values (Ametrano, 2014). The components of ethical decision making and the need to identify values and reconcile them with a governing code of ethics may not change over time, the complexity of the relationships and the evolution of new technologies mean that ethics education for counseling students and practitioners must be evolving and dynamic (Hill, 2004).

Self-disclosure

In respect to the values of nonmaleficence, beneficence, autonomy, justice, and fidelity, researchers have asked how counselors use self-disclosure that will ensure no

intentional harm and contributes to client health, that respects the individual's freedom and choice, is fair, and is faithful to the relationship with the client. In developing relationship and establishing rapport, counseling students are taught to use self-disclosure, when appropriate, in order to establish empathetic and sympathetic understanding (Audit & Everall, 2010; Barnett, 2011; Bitar & Kimball, 2014; Henretty & Levitt, 2010; Henretty, Currier, Berman, & Levitt, 2014; Ziv-Beiman, 2013). An example would be a counselor working with the child of an alcoholic choosing to disclose that she/he was raised in a home of substance abuse. Disclosure in the therapeutic relationship also works to create a cooperative relationship, as in, "We are in this together. I have been where you are, and we can work to move you forward together…" It is believed that a counselor should only self-disclose when it is to the therapeutic benefit of the client; however, limiting personal disclosure seems at odds with the license and freedom of disclosure via social media.

As self-disclosure is a common and rather controversial counseling technique, its benefit is dependent on the therapist's expertise and care of the client (Hanson, 2005). Counselors-in- training are instructed to self-disclose sparingly, considering the impact of disclosure on the therapeutic relationship (Carew, 2009; Gibson, 2012; Knox & Hill, 2003). The professional literature is limited in the study of therapist self-disclosure to the counseling hour. However, social media has opened the proverbial door through which clients, clients' family and friends and potential clients can access information about a counselor that far exceeds therapist self-disclosure in the counseling hour. When the counselor engages in disclosure through social media, a client potentially has access to information about the counselor of which he/she is unaware, or, if aware, may not know

where or how the client accessed it (Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, & Chang, 2010.) In using social media, a counselor may potentially expose him or herself in a way that may have unintended and lasting impacts on the way clients, potential clients, and other professionals perceive him/her personally and professionally. Research does not currently exist that explores how counseling students who are engaged in social media understand disclosure outside of the therapeutic relationship and the potential issues that can arise from such exposure.

Conflict exists in identifying types of disclosure within the discipline of counseling. Some scholars identify self-disclosure types into three main categories and additional subcategories (Barnett, 2011; Zur, Williams, Levaholt, & Knapp, 2009). Other scholars describe seven types of counselor disclosure and assert that it is the level of counselor intimacy or detachment that is used to measure the suitability of the disclosure (Knox and Hill, 2003). The literature consistently acknowledges that counselor self-disclosure is not limited to verbal articulation. It includes what clients observe from choices of clothes and jewelry to art and decoration in the counseling room, and what clients observe when they see counselors in public (Barnett, 2011; Harris & Kurpius, 2014; Knox and Hill, 2003; Taylor, et.al., 2010; Zur, et.al., 2009). The literature almost exclusively discusses these instances of counselor self-disclosure in the context of the counseling session and therapeutic relationship (Barnett, 2011; Knox and Hill, 2003; Zur et.al., 2009). In instances of disclosure in the therapeutic hour, confines of the counseling room or office, or encounters in public, both the counselor and the client are aware of what the client knows and how the client came to know the information. The impact of

the knowledge of this information can be discussed within the openness of the therapeutic hour.

Today's culture promotes continuous self-disclosure through social media (Taddei & Contena, 2013). For young professionals who have grown up with the internet and social media, self-disclosure has become embedded in their daily lives, and the action of disclosure is automatic (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Zur, et.al. 2009). The advent of online social networking tools has enhanced communications capabilities and, at the same time, has challenged traditional ideas about privacy and ethical conduct. While the codes of ethics have begun to address the professional use of social media, information flows two ways. Information collected from social networking sites can be misconstrued or taken without contextual reference (Harris & Kurpius, 2014). While the ACA code discourages the casual searching of client information by the counselor, nothing guarantees the same courtesy by clients (ACA, 2015). With mere keystrokes, a client potentially has personal information about the counselor that will impact the therapeutic relationship (Taylor, et.al., 2010).

Professional literature, presented in depth in Chapter 2, provides the foundation of this research. Multiple perspectives are explored in studies on ethics, decision making, and counselor self-disclosure in various environmental contexts. However, the professional literature lacks studies that specifically examine counselor self-disclosure through the lens of a counseling student raised in the digital age. This study seeks to begin to fill that gap.

1.1 Problem Statement

Not anticipating potentially problematic issues can lead to serious ethical dilemmas (Gibson, 2012; Helbok, 2003; Taddei & Contena, 2013). Gaps in the use and understanding of social media between supervisors and faculty, persons who have lived with and without social media, and counseling students, those whose have had access to social media most of their lives, may leave the latter blind to the potential troubles in the personal use of social media (Osman et al., 2012).

Exploring how counseling students are making meaning of self-disclosure serves two purposes. The first is an exploration of ethical education across the curriculum of counseling education. Are counselor educators articulating the breath of all dimensions of self-disclosure, so that students understand its role in all aspects of their lives? The second purpose is to explore how students are interpreting the codes of ethics when clear definition is not available. We do not know what the next big media, communication, and relationship-altering medium will be or how it may affect the counseling profession. When codes of ethics lag behind the evolution and implementation of technology, will counselors be able to apply current codes to new phenomenon and, in turn, teach the next generation of counselors to do the same?

Literature exploring self-disclosure for counselors in all stages of development exists for special environments ranging from small rural communities to major university settings (Helbok, 2003; Schank, Helbok, Haldeman & Gallardo, 2010). While the contextual environments each present unique attributes, it is the environment of social media that presents new challenges. The ease and access to information and the

anonymity provided in the environment of the digital world create potential ethical concerns that may have harmful effects on the therapeutic relationship.

1.2 Nature of Study

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology to explore the counselor-in-training understanding of ethical considerations of self-disclosure in social media. The researcher seeks to understand how counselors-in-training apply the ACA Code of Ethics to personal use of social media. In an age of accepted perpetual self-disclosure, this study also seeks to understand how counseling students conceptualize counselor self-disclosure. Using a qualitative methodology, the researcher seeks to explore with counseling student participants how they categorize and perceive disclosure in order to determine how they use those categories and perceptions while engaged in social media.

Qualitative methods strive to explore in-depth meanings of the human experience and are intended to generate richer observations that are not easily reduced to numbers (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). The rationale for phenomenological qualitative study is to seek understanding of how counselors-in-training make sense of ethical disclosure while engaged in social media. With no consensus in the literature of the categories of counselor self-disclosure, this study looks to understand how counselors-in-training categorize self-disclosure within their definition of self-disclosure.

Data and Participants

Data for this study will be collected through face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with counselors-in-training. This method of data collection allows the researcher to develop professional rapport and collect non-verbal cues as part of the

interview. Access to potential participants will be identified through contact with CACREP liaisons at accredited counseling programs in southern states.

Participants will be selected based on selected criteria, including completion of a counseling education ethics course and personal engagement in social media. Participation will be voluntary, and all participants will complete an informed consent form. Participants will also be given explanations of the purpose, process, and procedures of the study. All efforts will be made to protect participant anonymity. A complete outline and discussion of the methodology will be continued in Chapter 3.

Research Objectives

To gain insight into participating counseling students' understanding of self-disclosure within the digital world, a qualitative methodological design and analysis will be used. The design will include in-depth interviews to allow participants to freely express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences. Comparisons of the participants' responses, looking for similarities, differences, relevant statements, themes, and text, will allow exploration of overall student awareness and consciousness of boundaries, dual relationships, and disclosure in the personal use of social media. Participants for this study will be sought from graduate counseling education programs accredited by Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs.

Research Questions

1. What are counseling students lived experiences of self-disclosure in the digital age?

2. What is the reasoning process of digital natives enrolled in counseling programs in distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure?

Conceptual Framework

This study explores participants' lived experience and understanding of ethical issues in the use of social media. Qualitative studies use inductive reasoning, emergent design, and the reliance on the expressions of the researcher and participants, (Cresswell, 2003). Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that explores and gives value to the consciousness of lived experience (Patton, 2002). Qualitative studies on the counselor's experience of self-disclosure are limited. The nature of qualitative research is based on the acceptance of the premise that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed by individuals' interaction with the world (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2013). As individuals' interactions are unique, corresponding realities are also unique, meaning that there is no singular accepted truth or reality.

A phenomenological qualitative design is appropriate for this study because the nature of phenomenological inquiry is "how people describe things and experience their senses" (Patton, 2002, pg. 105). Focusing on individuals' experiences with the phenomenon of self-disclosure in the digital age and through the medium of social media lends itself to the phenomenological approach. Qualitative inquiry accepts the idea that there are multiple truths and realities to be studied. Individuals encounter the same phenomenon; however, they experience phenomenon differently based on individual experiences, knowledge, and beliefs. In turn, individuals make different meaning of the encountered phenomenon. This approach allows the researcher to engage in in-depth

interviews wherein participants express their understanding of self-disclosure in the digital age. The researcher can then examine those rich descriptions for "meaning, structure, and essences of the experience" (Patton, 2002, pg. 482).

While quantitative research is a means of testing objective theories by examining the relationship between variables, qualitative methods explore and seek to understand the meaning of individuals or groups make of a social or human problem (Rubin & Babby, 2011). Quantitative methodology, utilizing surveys and tested instruments of ethical decision making to measure behavior was considered and rejected because it did not allow the researcher to explore individual experience and knowledge.

Qualitative inquiry is not limited to phenomenological studies. The ethnological method also utilizes a collection of experiences. Particularly, the guiding assumption of ethnographic studies is that any human group interacting together will evolve into a culture (Patton, 2002). While a study of the culture of a particular social media platform may unveil ethical behavior understanding, this study is interested in the individual's understanding, experience, and narrative in order to explore how counselors-in-training understand ethical behavior within the phenomenon of social media. Case studies are intensive analysis of singular unit, an individual, group, organization, or society (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological design requires a data set beyond an individual or specific group of homogeneous experience and will provide rich descriptive information so as to understand how counseling students make meaning of the specified ethics of self-disclosure.

As the population of counseling students becomes increasingly native to the digital world, understanding how they make meaning of the ethical issues that arise from self-disclosure has the potential of effecting how ethics education evolves for future counselors. The researcher of this study seeks understanding of the meaning and the discriminating process that counselors-in-training use in dealing with the ethical issues of self-disclosure in the digital world and within the phenomenon of social media.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the reasoning process of counseling students' disclosure in the phenomenon of social media. This study is an investigation of ethos influences applied to counselor self-disclosure and counseling students' ability to discern appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure. The study is intended to explore lived experiences of counseling students who are translating what may have been described to them as real world disclosure issues to digital world disclosure.

1.4 Operational Definitions

Counseling Students- for the purpose of this study 'counseling students' refers to students currently enrolled in a counselor education program.

Digital Age- for the purpose of this study, 'digital age' refers to this current period in human history marked by the transition from an industrial-riven to an information-driven society and the integration of personal technology into daily life (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

Digital Immigrants- "those who did not grow up in a digital world, but rather later came to adopt new technologies" (Prensky, 2001)

Digital Native- "individual born after 1980 and has grown up in an era of multiple social digital technologies" (Palfrey and Gasser 2008). For the purposes of this study, digital natives will refer to individuals who have a personal or professional presence on one or more social media platforms.

E-Disclosure- for the purpose of this study e-disclosure refers to postings, pictures, and any other identity presence on the world wide web (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

Ethics- "pertains to the standards that govern conduct [of professional members]" (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007, p.8).

Ethical Codes- for the purpose of this study, 'ethical codes' refers to an adopted document of prescribed values, principles, and behaviors of a governing professional organization (ACA, 2014).

Ethical Decision Making- "the reasoning process that is applied to a particular ethical dilemma, which involves an integration of professional knowledge of ethical codes, principles, and moral values in forming judgments about what to do" (Kitchner, 1984).

Self-Disclosure- "is a process in which a person shares personal feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes to another person" (Vogel & Wester, 2008).

Social Media- "activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Social Networking Sites- "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users

with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections

and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

1.5 Assumption and Limitations

Two assumptions can be applied to this study. The first is that counselors-in-training are using and engaged in social media and that they are well versed enough in the technology to be able to discuss potential self-disclosure issues that may arise from personal use of social media. The second assumption is that counselors-in-training have the personal insight and knowledge of ethics to discuss online behavior.

Addressing the first assumption, from information about the specific prevalence of social media use by counselors-in-training, based on general population information, it seems likely that counselors-in-training are engaged in social media. A 2014 Pew Research poll indicated that 74% of American adults use social media; of that 74%, 89% are between 18-29 years old (Pew 2014). Published research studies from disciplines related to psychology indicate that helping professionals are using social media (Levaholt et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2010; Tunick et al., 2011; Zur et al., 2009). Those participants were evaluated on the ethics of online behavior (Levaholt et al., 2010, Taylor et al., 2010). It is likely that counselors-in-training could also be evaluated on an ethical understanding of self-disclosure.

To address the second assumption, participants will be selected through a purposeful sampling method with one criterion being the completion of at least one stand-alone counselor training ethics course. Purposeful sampling is a sampling method wherein the participants are selected who will help the researcher understand and address

the question studied by meeting specific predetermined qualifications (Cresswell, 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Babby, 2011). Individuals who are in programs with infused ethics across the counseling curriculum or permitted to take ethics courses outside of the counseling curriculum to meet the required counseling ethics requirement will not be considered for this study. In selecting participants from programs with stand-alone counseling ethics courses, the researcher can conclude that the participants have at least had exposure to the entire 2014 ACA Code of Ethics. The same conclusion cannot be drawn for participants from programs with infused ethics curriculum or programs that allow students to meet the ethics requirement from courses outside of the counseling curriculum.

Limitations to this study are characteristics of the phenomenological design that set implementation and analysis parameters. The primary limitation is the inability to generalize results from the sample to a larger population, and this study is limited thirteen participants recruited and selected through criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Qualitative inquiry is not generalizable, as the experiences of any one individual will not be the same as another. Qualitative research looks rather for saturation. Saturation is achieved when the collection of new data does not yield any new additional perspective on the issue studied (Mason, 2010). Participants will be recruited and selected from CACREP-accredited counselor education programs in southern Mid-Atlantic States. Participants must be in good standing with their program of study, be engaged in the use of social media, and have taken at least one stand-alone counseling ethics course. Individuals from programs that do not offer stand-alone ethics courses, but rather infuse ethics instruction across the counseling curriculum, will not be considered for this study.

The second limitation is that of the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of the study (Cresswell, 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Babby, 2011). Interpretations of data collected are limited to the researcher and co-researchers. Biases may be introduced based on the researcher's experiences with social media. This researcher is an active participant in social media. Bias that potentially could arise is the participatory satisfaction the researcher finds in the engagement of social media. To compensate for any bias that might emerge from this researcher's use of and presence in social media, the researcher will journal to document thoughts and actions from this study. Journaling allows the researcher to be reflective within the research process and to document his/her experience in the field (Cresswell, 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Babby, 2011). This researcher is also new to the research process, and errors may be introduced because of lack of research experience.

1.6 Significance of Study

It has only taken a decade for radical shifts in social behaviors. The advent of online social media tools has enhanced communication capabilities and, at the same time, has challenged traditional ideas about privacy and ethical conduct. Currently, in counseling education programs across the country, young adults who have had access to social media sites since their young teen years are preparing to enter the counseling profession. It is not the intent of this research to end or ban personal or professional use of SNS by students at any level. In fact, several benefits of counselor engagement with social media can be enumerated. School counselor presence, when appropriate, provides good modeling of personal disclosure and the treatment of others in the digital world.

School counselor engagement in social media can also serve as an early alert to cyber bullying.

Literature from disciplines in business and marketing support the importance of private practice clinicians using social media for professional use as a marketing tool that can clearly express services provided and potentially remove the questions and eliminate the stigma of seeking mental health services (Crawford, 2009; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). The researcher acknowledges that having a digital presence is part of the new norm. Professional organizations and licensing boards have begun to provide counselors with clear directives for professional use of social media. These directives mean that counselors are no longer left to the mercy of the moral judgments of supervisors, and clients are not at the moral mercy of individual practitioners. The directives specifically guide professional use, but how counselors utilize social media within their private lives can also impact professional practice. Understanding how future counselors approach social media use and how counselors-in-training understand ethical use and boundaries of social media will help direct counselor educators in ethical training.

Knowledge Generation

This study is intended to contribute to the emerging knowledge of ethical concerns in the digital environment, but also to contribute to the ongoing conversation around counselor education practice. Counselors meet clients where they are emotionally, so to do counselor educators meet counseling students where they are in understanding the counseling relationship, but also where they have been raised and will practice.

Helping counseling students apply codes of ethics beyond what is known to what is unknown will serve as a protective stop-gap measure when ethical codes are in need of revision.

Professional Application

This study is intended to explore whether counseling students are translating what may have been described as real world, interpersonal disclosure issues to digital world, interpersonal disclosure issues. Social networking has impacted and changed how we as a society define relationships and how we communicate (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). It has become deeply entrenched in the lives of almost all individuals in the developed world. Skill in using and an understanding of the implications of social media use is imperative if counselors are to address the needs of clients. It is equally important that counseling students understand the self-disclosure issues that arise with the personal use of social media. Embracing the title and role of counselor is also to take up a mantle that never truly leaves the shoulders of counselors, irrespective of the environment (Birky & Collin, 2011). Because counselors are always counselors, a higher standard of behavior is applied to all venues of their lives. This is not because counselors create this higher standard for themselves, but rather because clients do so (Birky & Collin, 2011).

<div align="center">

1.7 Organization of the Study

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Ethical mandates assist the professional and counseling student in defining the parameters of the counseling relationship, developing the best treatment practices for clients, and establishing expectations for the role of the counselor (ACA, 2015). The adoption and implementation of ethical codes and standards give credibility to the

profession of counseling. As ethical codes evolve to meet professional needs and new

societal phenomenon, counselors must consistently re-evaluate their knowledge and

compliance with the most recent guidelines. This research specifically investigates the

ethics of counselor e-disclosure in the digital age. It is intended to explore how

counseling students are translating what may have been described as real world,

interpersonal disclosure issues to digital world, interpersonal disclosure issues. Chapter 2

will discuss and review all professional literature relevant to this study. Chapter 3 will

fully outline research methodology, and Chapter 4 will discuss the data analysis. Chapter

5 will include the discussion of the research implications of the study and make

recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses theoretical and empirical studies relevant to issues of counseling ethics and ethical codes, ethical decision making, and counselor self-disclosure for counseling students in the digital age. Ethical dilemmas and moral issues are, by nature, complex and intricate, leaving scholars limited in their ability to adequately explore the ethical decision making and reasoning skills of counselors and counseling students (Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004). The literature reviewed for this study explores ethics, ethical decision-making, and self-disclosure and exposes gaps in the literature that this proposed study hopes to fill.

Content and Organization of Review

The literature review follows the hierarchy of the cognitive complexity of knowledge from application to discernment to the synthesis of appropriate and inappropriate personal and professional self-disclosure in the digital age. It is divided into three sections beginning with ethics, continuing through ethical decision making, and finally moving to the construct of counselor self-disclosure. The chapter concludes with a summary supporting the relevance of the proposed study.

Strategy Used for Searching the Literature

The strategy used for conducting a literature review on the topic of ethical decision making related to self-disclosure in social media began with the utilization of resources from the Thomas Cooper Library. Literature for this review was retrieved from peer-reviewed journals using the electronic databases, indexes, and journals subscribed to by the University of South Carolina. Databases utilized included but were not limited to, Academic Search Complete, GoogleScholar, JSTOR, and PsycINFO. Boolean/phrase and keywords used to search databases were counselor/counseling, ethics, ethical decision making, mental health counseling, self-disclosure, social networking, and social media. In databases where literature was not specifically limited to the disciplines of counseling, psychology, or social work, additional keywords were used to narrow the focus of literature retrieved. Specifically, the key phrase was mental-health counseling.

2.1 Counseling Ethics

The establishment of training standards, regulation of governing bodies, and the creation of ethical codes are components of a social contract between professional counselors and society (West & Warchal, 2010). The ethical codes of a profession can be seen as the articulated expectations of the relationship between the profession and society (Ponton & Duba, 2009). In the literature, scholars across the helping disciplines have presented various views and positions about ethics, ethical codes, and the contexts of application (Burkholder and Burkholder, 2014). Meara et al. (1996) discussed the normative nature of ethical codes and stated that codes often contain ideals that, while not required attainments, are rather targets toward which the professional aspires. The

theoretical and empirical literature presented serves to support the continuing need to evaluate and study ethics as a crucial component to the development of the counseling professional.

Ethical Codes

Criteria for vocations to be deemed professions as explained by Ponton and Duba (2009) include: meeting a specific need of society and having a professional organization, a specific education or training, a specialized body of knowledge, and a recognition of the need met by the society served. Ponton and Duba (2009) discussed the evolution of ethics in professions that developed from the needs of society. These classical professions in health, order, and meaning (religion) all stemmed from existential needs of society. From these needs, vocations in medicine, law, clergy, and military emerged and were adopted by society. With the adoption of these professions to meet the societal needs, individuals were entrusted with privilege and, in some cases, exemption from some societal norms. These individuals, with knowledge of their respective fields, would profess to act for the good of the public and be granted autonomy and self-regulation. Ponton and Duba explain that these professionals entered into a social contract to place the welfare of the community served above their own. As societies' needs became more complex, professions evolved, expanded, or were created to meet these needs, and 'tacit agreements' and social contracts gave way to documented, articulated parameters of practice or codes of ethics (Ponton and Duba, 2009). The ethical codes are covenants between the profession of counseling and society. Ponton and Duba's article is relevant to the proposed study as it demonstrates that the evolution of society drives the evolution of professions and the ethical codes that serve as the covenant between professionals and the

society served. As society and cultural norms change so too professions evolve to meet these challenges.

Anderson and Guyton (2013) surveyed 88 professionals from the fields of medicine, psychology, and social work, measuring participants use of social media, their awareness of ethical conflicts arising from the use of social media, and their desire for specific guidance by governing bodies in social media usage. Of the 88 participants, 59% reported the maintaining a Facebook profile. When asked if they considered the professional and ethical ramifications of using social media, 69.32% of participants reported complete agreement in the concerns of professional and ethical ramifications, and 5.68% reported they had not thought at all about the ramifications of using Facebook. When considering how to avoid ethical issues with the use of social media, 59.09% of respondents agreed with statements regarding reasonable actions in order to avoid problems with online information. Participants agreed that they wanted governing bodies to provide ethical guidance in the management of technological advancements like social media (60.23%) and believed that professional organizations should be involved in establishing guidelines or regulations on the usage of technological advancements like social media (70.45%). This article is relevant to the proposed study as it indicates that professionals are aware of the potential ethical issues arising from the use and disclosure of personal information on social media. This study is limited in that it was a small sample comprised of only professionals from three helping disciplines. It did not explore beyond level of agreement what ethical issues participants foresee in the use of social media and how participants make ethical decisions when addressing these issues. The proposed study using counseling students seeks to address the gap in the literature on the

handling of perceived ethical issues and consequent decision making to address these ethical considerations.

Ethics Education

Ethical codes cannot address behavior in all aspects of practice and are written in an abstract and ambiguous language (Ametrano, 2014). Lacking the knowledge and ability to apply ethical codes, individuals fall back on intuitive moral reasoning (Robson, Cook, Hunt, Alred, & Robson, 2000). Ethical training, beyond knowledge acquisition of ethical codes, includes the development of ethical sophistication and the ability to confront and reconcile conflicts in personal and professional values (Kitchener, 1992). Training in ethics has included case studies, hypothetical scenarios, and vignettes, typically within the environmental context that has been most common: in public outside of the therapy room (Hill, 2004). However, the definition of 'public' has changed to include the digital environments of social media, blogs, websites, and even email (Tierney, 2013). Counseling students, digital natives, have had access to these new 'public' forums before coming to the counseling profession and may have established behaviors that do not align with ethical codes (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

Counselors must rely on individual understanding of professional behavior to guide them in specific situations. In their report from a working group at the 2002 Competencies Conference: Future Directions in Education and Credentialing in Professional Psychology, de las Fuentes, Wilmoth, and Yarrow (2005) state that the beginning psychology students must be able to "demonstrate awareness, knowledge, and skills of the following content areas: development of moral reasoning and moral

behavior; values and beliefs emerging from cultural contexts; ethical codes and practice guidelines; ethical principles, virtues, and orientations; and relevant case law" (de las Fuentes et. al., 2005, pg. 364). The group also believed that beginning students should demonstrate processing skills, such as the ability to explore their own moral and ethical values and attitudes, interpersonal skills of flexibility, openness to new ideas, change, and feedback, and awareness of differing moral and ethical values across cultures. The working group was speaking to the expectations of beginning psychology students but did not define the parameters of what a beginning psychology student is (undergraduate or first-year graduate student). However, considering the similar nature and context of the psychology and counseling professions, it is logical to have similar expectations of counseling students at the completion of their first year of training. The authors' articulation of expected knowledge and competence in ethical codes and practice and ethical principles, virtues and orientations are relevant to the proposed study in that it is reasonable to expect that counseling students with a minimum of one year of training or who have completed a counseling ethics course are appropriate participants.

In their article, Ufrosky and Engels (2003) discussed the need to strengthen ethical education for counseling professionals, in both psychology and counseling, through greater exposure to moral philosophy. The authors note that despite the establishment of ethical standards by professional organizations and the requirement of ethical education by accrediting bodies, ethical violations and abuses continue to plague the helping professions. The intimacy of the role counselors' play in the lives of clients necessitates a knowledge of counseling skills and ethics that goes beyond awareness of communication skills and ethical codes (Ufrosky & Engels, 2003). In recommending an

expansion of ethics education, the authors posit that new counselors will thus have a deeper understanding of ethical professionalism and will not be dependent on the expressed ethical standards. New counselors will have an ability to approach ethical dilemmas not articulated by codes or law with the skills and understanding that protect the client, counselor, and profession. Ufrosky and Engels's article is relevant to the proposed study because it articulates a need for ethical education for counseling students that reaches beyond the known and prepares them for the ethical dilemmas unknown that require a broader and deeper understanding of what it means to be an ethical professional.

Hill, (2004) surveyed counselor educators about five aspects of ethics education. Hill was motivated to investigate perceptions and practices of counselor educators who teach ethics courses or infuse ethics education throughout counselor education curriculum by his desire to understand how students' best learn to make ethical decisions in ambiguous situations with incomplete information. Recruiting from 313 CACREP-accredited programs within 117 education institutions in the United States and Canada, Hill received 74 completed questionnaires. Hill created the questionnaire himself and the eight section questionnaire included questions on materials used, methods of instruction, time spent on content areas, population considerations, ethical topics, theoretical models, student evaluations, and instructor goals. Hill's quest for a baseline for some uniformity in ethical education methodology was not realized, as each program and instructor approached ethics and the meeting the ethical standards in unique ways.

While Hill's study was inconclusive in its exploration of how ethical practice emerges, this study does demonstrate that ethical stances encompass behaviors and beliefs beyond expected behaviors that adhere to minimal standards. Hill's work provides

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support and relevance to this proposed study in that ethics, and ethical decision making are important components to the continued development of ethical education for counseling students (Hill, 2004). Ethics is a sub-discipline that is infused across the broader discipline of counseling. Hill prescribes further research that raises ethics from knowledge and following the rules in a defensive posture to using ethics an aspect of counselor identity development. This proposed study seeks to address the gap exposed by Hill in moving the exploration of ethics and ethical decision making from the level of knowledge to that of implementation in regard to self-disclosure in the digital age.

In 2009, Lehavot published an article that drew attention to ethical considerations in the use of social media by students and practitioners. Using the APA Code of Ethics from 2002, Lahavot discussed graduate students' use of social media and the concern of graduate faculty about using social media behavior as a screening tool for entrance into graduate training programs. Lehavot equates the internet with a public forum, such as a restaurant, and states that anyone who posts information on the internet without restrictions should have no expectation of privacy. Consequently, anyone who has access to the internet subsequently has access to the information shared and the right to use that information. Beyond privacy, Levhavot discusses the blurred boundaries between personal and professional identities. When individuals act outside of their professional role, the governing ethics are individual and not mandated by a governing body. Lehavot cautions against faculty using information from a personal social media post to screen or discipline students within their programs.

Lehavot (2009) makes recommendations for how faculty and students can move forward in the digital age, particularly considering the implications of students'

disclosure of personal information. She encourages graduate faculty and programs to establish policies about the screening of students and advertise what information will be searched as part of the application process. Graduate students are encouraged to reflect on how a posting might be read by colleagues, faculty, and potential clients. She also encourages students to utilize privacy settings to protect personal information. Lehavot's article provides suggestions to counselor educators for conversations with students on the implications of personal disclosure online. While social media was not addressed until the 2014 revision of the ACA Code of Ethics, Lehavot's 2009 article articulated the need for counseling students to be provided opportunity and space to reflect on the implications of online personal disclosure within the safe environment of their training. This article provides relevance to the researcher's question of participants' perceived issues of personal self-disclosure online.

Lambie, Hagedorn, and Ivea (2010) investigated the level of social-cognitive maturity, ethical and legal knowledge, and the ethical decision-making process in practice. Their 64 participants were registered in one of two ethics courses designed specifically for their respective counseling tracks, either school counseling or mental health/marriage and family counseling in a CACREP-accredited program. In a pre-test/post-test design, the researchers used three instruments, the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT), the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Questionnaire (ELICQ), and Ethical Decision Making Scale-Revised (EDMS-R), to answer the questions on the effects of counseling ethics courses on social-cognitive development. The research questions were: Does social-cognitive maturity predict ethical and legal knowledge and ethical decision making? What is the relationship

between social-cognitive developments, ethical and legal knowledge, and ethical decision making in counseling students' reported demographic information?

Lambie et al. discovered a significant increase in the ethical and legal knowledge but did not find a significant increase in social-cognitive development and ethical decision-making. The researchers concluded that students were able to acquire knowledge quickly, but struggled in the application of ethical knowledge and skills. Investigating application and in-depth understanding of ethical decision making may require an investigative method beyond reducing the behavior to a number. In attempting to reduce knowledge and understanding of ethical decision making to a number, Lambie et al. concluded that students struggled in the application of ethical knowledge and skills. Unlike the Lambie et al. research, this proposed study uses qualitative inquiry into students' understanding of ethical codes and ethical decision-making processes when disclosing on-line and the appropriateness of the information made available to the public through these mediums.

Osman, Wardle, and Caesar (2012) conducted a study with medical students in the third year of training, first year doctors (fyd), and senior staff grade (ssg) doctors in England. This study explored the extent of social media use within these three groups, their personal information available to the public via social media, and the degree of awareness and use of guidance on privacy, and the professionalism within each group. The researchers discovered that the more advanced in training and professional development the participant was, the less she/he engaged in social media. While the research also indicated that fyds and ssgs disclosed less personal information, these groups, along with the students, did not engage privacy settings to protect information

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from public disclosure. All participants indicated a lack of knowledge or awareness of any specific guidelines governing professional or personal use of social media. Students and fyds indicated a reliance on those more senior to them for guidance when no governing guidelines were available. Senior staff grade participants indicated a reliance on "good judgment" to guide individuals in the use of social media until the development and implementation of specific guidelines. This research is relevant to the proposed study in that it demonstrates the dependence of students and new professionals on their more experienced colleagues for assistance in the development of professional judgment in situations that may fall outside of the professional sphere, but may impact professional practice. It also illuminates the potential disconnect between experienced professionals and students in their need for conversations on e-professionalism. Quantitative in nature, the Osman et al. study does not explore in any depth the reliance of students on faculty for professional judgment development or how students make decisions about engagement and disclosure on social media. The proposed study seeks to fill this void in the literature.

Fialkov, Jackson, and Robinowitz, (2014) published a study in which they investigated the cognitive ability of two groups psychology students to conceptualize the deep underlying ethical issues presented in vignettes. The students were divided into groups by level of ethical training: those who had taken an ethics course and those who had not. The groups were given ethical scenario triads with the objective of categorizing them based on the ethical issues presented in each scenario. The researchers hypothesized that the students who had gone through ethical training would be able to ignore surface-level, irrelevant information and categorize the scenarios by deeper ethical considerations

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and that the students who had not had ethical courses would be distracted by the surface information in the scenarios and not see the deeper ethical issues. The analysis of the study demonstrated that students who had completed ethical training were able to weed through the distracting, surface-level information and correctly conceptualize the deeper ethical issues in the scenario triads. When presented with scenarios without surface-level, distraction information, all participants could conceptualize the ethical considerations. Limitations of this study include the utilization of psychology students from one graduate program. This research provides support for the proposed study in the selection of participants who have completed an ethics course. These students should have the ability to ignore surface distractions and the novelties of social media when addressing the ethical issues that may underlie the personal and professional use of social media.

Burkholder and Burkholder conducted a study in 2014 investigating the attributes that counselor educators gave to counseling students in field study who engaged in unethical behavior. This large-scale qualitative study involved 72 participants who had participated on a remediation committees that had addressed ethical violations of graduate counseling students. Participants were asked two questions, one of the perceptions of why students engaged in unethical behavior and the second on the perceptions of what may have prevented the ethical misconduct of students. Data was collected through and online survey service and not in direct interviews.

Burkholder and Burkholder reported two primary themes, Attribution and Prevention. Sub-themes for Attribution included the person, educational factors, and performance. Prevention sub-themes included, education and training, gatekeeping and screening, monitoring, personal growth, and support. The researchers noted that

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counseling faculty attributed ethical misconduct in terms of both internal and external locus of control (Burkholder & Burkholder, 2014). Internal attributes being the person and performance with examples of personality issues and tendencies towards perfectionist behavior respectively. External being educational factors with examples such as poor advisement or ethical training. Discussing Prevention themes, the researchers describe these subthemes as pedagogical and program design implications for faculty to consider (Burkholder & Burkholder, 2014). The researchers invite the faculty to engage in program reflection, and study as a means to address the best manner in which to limit ethical misconduct of students. Burkholder and Burkholder also present to faculty that ethics education go beyond the imparting knowledge to students, but must also include empowering students to express concern, fear, and anxiety about all aspects of counseling and client care so that students feel safe seeking help before ethical issues arise. Ethics education must go beyond the known and help teach students how to anticipate the unknown and maintain ethical behavior. This study provides support for the proposed research in its demonstration of the importance of counselor educators for clinical and ethical education, and professional ethical competence.

Private vs. Public Identities

Behnke (2008) was serving as the APA Ethics Director when he wrote about the "narrowing of personal and professional lives." Citing the APA Code of Ethics, Behnke reminds psychologist that the code of ethics only applies to the activities that are a part of the professional identity of the practitioner. Behnke recognized that the internet and social media was a force that was pushing the identities of the practitioner together and changing how society experiences private vs. public. The availability of information

about the practitioner has become increasingly more available via the internet and social media platforms provide opportunities for individuals to remain connected to family and friends, to share antidotal information of their daily lives, engage in discussing issues of the day (Crawford, 2009). Crawford goes on to explain that this engagement may be too revealing for (medical) professionals whose patients may not understand the context of the information shared.

Conflict between the professional and personal identities of counselors is not limited to the digital environment. In their 1997 study, Schank and Skovholt explored the ethical dilemmas of dual- relationships of practicing psychologists in rural communities. Using a qualitative design, researchers interviewed 16 professionals practicing in small communities in rural areas of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Four themes emerged from this study a) the reality of overlapping relationships, b) overlapping of business or professional relationships, c) overlapping relationships on the psychologists' family, and d) working with one or more family member as clients or with others who have friendships with individual clients.

For professionals in rural communities, there is unavoidable complexity to maintaining completely segregated professional and personal identities. Researchers discuss the governing ethical codes seem to be written in the vacuum of urban professionals and do not consider what the needs of rural setting practitioners or practitioners who work with special populations to which they belong (Schank & Skovholt, 1997). This study examines specifically dual-relationships and discussion does not include processes rural professionals use when making decisions about how to proceed when navigating dual relationships. This research is also limited in that it

participants were all psychologists and the article was written before explosion of personal digital technology and social media. This study provides support for the proposed study in that it is a qualitative exploration of ethics for helping professionals with special environment considerations and speaks to the complication of segregated professional and personal identities for counselors. The proposed study seeks to explore decision-making processes of counselors who disclose personally in the public forum of social media.

Prior to the revision and adoption of the ACA Code of Ethics in 2014, counselor educators, counseling supervisors, practicing clinicians, and counseling students had to navigate the ethical questions that evolved from the introduction and integration of social media by themselves. Birky and Collins (2011), psychologists practicing in a counseling center on a college campus, sought to discuss maintaining ethical boundaries in the digital age. Specifically, they discussed the blurred line between the private and professional identities. The authors began by cautioning mental health professionals that private postings in the public sphere of social media makes available to colleagues, trainees, clients, and others within the community personal information that they might not wish to share. As practicing professionals, the authors wanted to encourage dialog with colleagues and trainees about the use of social media with clients and others, and how to apply the then-current ethical codes to the phenomenon of social media. Birky and Collins (2011), reminded readers that "both the public and the profession hold the counselor to a standard of professionalism that limits personal freedom in some circumstances." The authors contended that the mantle of 'counselor' transcends the professional sphere into the private or personal sphere, regardless of the environment.

The counselor is observed as a counselor first and as a person second by clients and members of the community the counselor serves. This article is relevant to the researcher's question of categorization of disclosure. If counseling students accept the mantle of 'counselor' and recognize that all disclosure is viewed first by clients and the public through the lens of the professional, then how do counseling students understand and categorize disclosure?

Awareness of available counselor information by counselor

Lehavot, Barnett, and Powers (2010) surveyed psychology graduate students about engagement and behavior in social media. The study investigated students' engagement with fellow graduate students, faculty, and clients in social media. The population was specifically recruited from student members of APA Psychotherapy and Psychologists in Independent Practice divisions because of the researchers' interest in the clinical practice of psychology. The student members of state associations in California, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, and Texas were identified for this study, as well as students at the lead investigators' home institution, the University of Washington. The student population was categorized as clinical PhD (33%), non-clinical PhD (12%), PsyD program (40%), master's program (8%), and other psychology graduate programs (7%). A significant majority (82%) considered themselves student psychotherapists. This study specifically looked at how these students were engaging in online social media, their privacy settings, access, and time spent on social sites. The researchers viewed this study as a good representation of the future of psychology practitioners' use of social networks.

Through both survey and qualitative questionnaire, Lehavot et al. examined the impact of social media use on the educational and therapeutic experience by psychology students. Student participants were asked to report whether they had conducted a search for client information on the internet or through social media. In the study, 27% of the participants reported searching for information about a client online (Lehavot et al., 2010). Lehavot et al. described this behavior of students as being automatic, in that students do not think critically about the impact on the therapeutic relationship. Participants also reported using client searches as a means to determine the honesty and authenticity of clients in session. Researchers observed that this rationale violated two of APA's ethical principles: Principle A: Beneficence and nonmaleficence (care, and to do no harm to the client and therapeutic process), and Principle B: fidelity and responsibility (building rapport and maintaining trust with clients). When engaging in client searches, participants do not allow the client's informed consent or to consider the impact of online disclosures to the therapeutic relationship. Seven percent of the participants reported their clients searching for the counselor information, scanning counselors' profiles, and reviewing counselors' pictures. While some participants indicated that the clients' searches were to 'confirm credentials' or to be a better-informed consumer of services, some participants reported feeling uneasy at the volume of personal information available to the clients.

In addition to information about client/counselor searches, participants reported engaging in some privacy behavior, using pseudonyms or limiting access to postings. Participants restricted access to postings to a pre-approved friends list on MySpace (81%) and Facebook (60%). Participants hid their real name on MySpace (22%). Because

Facebook initially required an educational institution-affiliated email address, the use of pseudonyms was not practiced on the site because potential users were limited to students or educational personnel. Some participants acknowledged that they had no or limited privacy settings (34%) and that profiles were open to most networks of social media users. Participants were asked if there was any information or photos posted that they did not want fellow students, faculty, or clients to see, (Lehavot et al., 2010). Respondents said that yes, there were postings that they did not want fellow students to see (6%), faculty to see (13%), or clients to see (37%). Lehavot and associates highlighted that within engagement of social media, participants acknowledged that there are some postings not appropriate for specific populations, including clients.

Researchers reported that student psychologists look for client information "automatically" and without consideration of clinical and ethical implications. "For graduate students who have grown up with the internet as part of their everyday life, there may be a lack of awareness regarding potential impact of the [online] behavior" in professional settings (Lehavot, Barnett, & Powers, 2010, pg. 162.) Many respondents reported client searches as a means to "establish the truth" of what clients might be engaging in. Seven percent of the respondents reported clients informing participants of searching for information about the student practitioner. While it may seem that curiosity drives clients to search for information about psychologists, it is also important to remember that clients are also consumers of service and that internet searches are a part of making good informed choices about practitioners. Researchers also noted that clients might also look for information that will aid in trust development and building a relationship with psychologists.

The Lehavot and associates study highlights how technology encroaches on the psychology profession and relationships within it. Since this study was conducted, the ACA offered revisions in the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics to address the situation of practitioners searching for client information (Section H.6.c. Client Virtual Presence); however, the governing organization cannot control the actions of clients seeking help. It is important that students are aware of the information they are posting and the access to this information that others may have. The study also does not address the situation wherein client information is found inadvertently through the use of social media. Today, social media has the ability to suggest new "friends" based on geographic location and other common friends. This study does offer suggestions to educators and supervisors on conversations to have with students about social media use; however, it is unclear whether those conversations are occurring and impacting the awareness of students.

Lehavot et al.'s study was limited to psychology graduate students who likely had ethical education as part of their undergraduate program. Consequently, it did not answer the question of whether these issues would also be found in counseling programs. While umbrelled as helping professions, psychology, social work, and counseling are governed differently, and individuals are licensed and practice differently in each state. It is not possible to generalize from psychology graduate students to those in counseling programs. What this study highlights is the ingrained behavior of digital natives regarding the use of social media as a means to gain information about individuals with whom they work. This study is relevant to the proposed study as it begins the conversation on the availability of counselor information to clients and raises the question: If there are postings not appropriate for some populations, why are students

making those posts? The proposed study seeks to expand Lehavot team's discussion of how counseling students address the possibility of clients searching for counselor information and how the counseling students might be proactive in protecting information about themselves that is not for client consumption.

Participants in Taylor et al.'s 2010 study of the ethicality of psychologists' use of social networking sites, participants ranked as highly ethical the disclosure behavior of posting photos or videos of themselves, friends and family on social media sites for private use. Participants then ranked boundary behaviors, such as searching for client information and discussing physiologist's online behaviors with client as not ethical. In Taylor's study, participants were not asked about the potential harm or dangers of clients' access to counselors' online profiles. Participant rankings of disclosure behavior do not reveal how they came to choose which pictures or videos were selected for posting or how clients access to these images may impact the therapeutic relationship. This proposed study will explore the decision-making processes used by study participants and their understanding of professional responsibility to the therapeutic relationship when clients disclose their access to counselors' personal digital identity.

Tunick, Mednick, and Conroy (2011) surveyed 246 professional psychologists who work with children. This study was an investigation of child psychologists searching for underage client information via social media. Participants were recruited through APA listservs for Child Clinical Psychologists and Pediatric Psychologists. While the authors did not indicate the number of participants on the listserv, they reported that 246 participants, with an average age of 37.4 years, returned completed surveys. The authors

noted that the average age of participants was over ten years younger than the reported average age (49.5 and 47.6 respectively) of the two APA divisions targeted for this study.

Tunick et al. reported that 65% of the respondents participated in social media and that 70% of those check their social media site several times a day. A majority of these participants reported using privacy settings to restrict public access to participants' personal social media profiles. However, 25% reported being approached online by clients and former clients to be 'friends' on social media. This study offers important support to the proposed study as it shows that students and younger professionals are engaged in social media and that, despite efforts to maintain privacy, there is still potential for clients and former clients to find counselors' private social media profiles. Tunick et al.'s study does not explore what processes or resources participants engaged when using social media. The proposed study looks to explore the decision- making process and to investigate what resources counseling students use or wish existed when addressing ethical issues that arise when engaged in social media.

DiLillo and Gale (2011) surveyed 854 students enrolled in clinical, counseling, and school psychology doctoral programs in the United States and Canada. Using a self-created internet usage questionnaire, researchers investigated the attitudes of students regarding the use of search engines and social networks to search for personal information about clients, documented frequency of searches of clients by students, and assessed whether student therapists informed clients of searches. The mean age of participants was 28.07 years old.

Researchers discovered that 27.4% of participants believed that it was never acceptable to look for client information on search engines, while 4.5% of respondents reported that it was always acceptable to do so (DiLillo & Gale, 2011). A majority of respondents, 68.2%, indicated that they found some level of acceptability in using search engines to look for client information (DiLillo and Gale, 2011). In the utilization of social media searches for client information, 42.1% of participants indicated that it is never acceptable, while 2.9% of participants responded that it was always acceptable. Again DiLillo and Gale (2011) discovered that a majority of participants, 54.9% of reported some level of acceptability of using social media to search for client information. Participants also reported whether they had informed clients of their searches. Of the 97.8% of participants who reported engaging in some kind of internet search for a client, 82.1% reported informing the client of search engine searches, and 82.5% informed clients of social networking searches. DiLillo and Gale's study provides valuable insight into how ethical issues may arise from searching for client information. This study does not discuss the potential for client harm or ethical considerations from the client searching or observing counselor information. The proposed study seeks to begin the dialog on the counselor's engagement in social media and the availability of those disclosures to clients.

Ginory, Sabatier, and Eth, (2012) surveyed 182 psychiatry residents and fellows reported to be actively engaging in social media, specifically 85% (155) with current active profiles, 10% (19) having public profiles, and 5% acknowledging that it would be inappropriate for a patient to access a physician's social media profile. The study's limited population of only psychiatry residents and fellows again highlights their minimal

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awareness and limited training on how to engage ethically within social media. Ginory et al.'s study did not ask participants to explain potential issues that would arise from the information patients may acquire from viewing the survey participants' social media pages.

The increased use of social media has generated new challenges for professionals in helping fields, especially those who work intimately with individuals at vulnerable stages of life (Kellen, Schoenherr, Turns, Madhusudan, and Hecker, 2015). Governing bodies and ethical codes have lagged behind in the development of concrete policies to aid professionals in navigating the ethical issues that have arisen from the explosion of social media use. While the ACA has outlined clear guidelines, there is still some ambiguity in other existing codes about the incidental boundary, dual relationship, and self-disclosure that arises not only from professional use but also from personal use of social media (Kellen et al., 2015). To increase awareness of ethical issues involved in professional and personal use of social media and to help professionals and students reflect on the decision-making processes used in addressing ethical issues, Kellen et al. provided guided questions to aid in essential discussions about professional and personal use of social media by counselors. The open-ended, guided questions range from use of social media and connection/communication with clients through social media to potential liability issues for counselors who use social media. In conjunction with the use of vignettes or case studies, these guided questions are intended to raise awareness of the unanticipated ways social media complicates the therapeutic relationship. The work of Kellen et al. provides support to this proposed study in the stress they place on engaging counseling students in discussion about ethical considerations and use of social media

and an increased awareness of their behavior online. This proposed study seeks to explore

the awareness of counseling students to the potential issues of personal information

disclosed on social media that is available to clients.

The intent of the researcher is to examine the meaning counseling students make

of the ethical codes governing both their professional and personal identities. The

researcher seeks to explore how counseling students understand the integration of

professional roles in personal settings. There is limited research exploring the integration

of identities by counseling students. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring ethics

knowledge and application beyond professional practice and toward the personal, albeit

observable, roles of the counselor.

2.2 Ethical Decision-Making

Measuring ethical reasoning abilities has been a struggle for researchers in the

counseling field (Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004). Ethical decision-making models are the

processes used by individuals who face dilemmas wherein there is no clearly defined

right or wrong answer (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007). Ethical decision making is not

a purely cognitive and linear process that follows clearly defined steps. Ethical decision

making is also "discursive," and intuition, prescientific reasoning, and conscious logical

debate have to be part of the process (Kuntze et.al, 2002). Literature exists that explores

models of ethical decision making and discusses the 'how to' of model implementation

by counselors and counseling students and the integration of ethical decision-making

models in ethics education. However, a gap in the literature exists in exploring if or how

counseling students use ethical decision-making models in various environments, including the digital.

The ACA, APA, and NASW ethical codes advise that counselor self-awareness, as well as the cultural and religious values of clients, are considered in ethical decision-making processes (ACA 2014; APA 2010; NASW 2008). Ambiguity, contradictory language, and sometimes silence in ethical codes contribute to the angst of counseling students in developing a consistent approach to ethical decision making in the face of ethical issues (Ametrano, 2014; Bradley & Hendricks, 2008). Ethical codes may require some level of professional identity and maturity for effective interpretation and implementation to practice. For the counseling student, still young in professional identity, ethical codes can seem cumbersome and may be only used cursorily. Instead, often intuitive reasoning is used as the compass for ethical practice.

Ethical Decision Making Principles, Virtues, and Values

Kitchener (1984) contended that intuition, critical evaluation, and ethical principles were the foundation of ethical decision-making. At the intuitive level, an individual's beliefs about right and wrong are integrated with knowledge of ethical codes. This intuitive level is the immediate and pre-reflective response to ethical issues and is created from the accumulation of ethical knowledge and experiences. Kitchener stated that it is in this basic level of ethical reasoning that individuals will first make decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas. When individuals are called on to evaluate or justify ordinary moral judgments, they move to a critical-evaluative level of reasoning. This level of reasoning is comprised of three tiers of graduating justification from general to

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abstract. The first tier is comprised of the ethical rules, codes, and laws that govern a profession. Beyond the ethical codes, justification will move on to a web of connected principles: nonmaleficence, beneficence, autonomy, justice, and fidelity. These principles can be simplified to the ideas that counselors do not engage in intentional harm, contribute to client health, respect the individual's freedom and choice, are fair, and are faithful to the relationship with the client. If an ethical conflict exists between these principles, counselors move to finding the greatest balance of good over evil. Kitchener's work is salient to this proposed study as it highlights the significant role that intuition plays in ethical decision-making and provides support to the investigation on ways counseling students view appropriate and inappropriate self-disclosure in the digital age. It may well be that the intuition of digital natives does not include a consideration of ethical issues in self-disclosing through social media.

Meara, Schmidt, and Day, (1996) presented that before individuals Kitchener's principles how an individual approaches decision making is influenced by individual virtues. Meara et al. offer five specific characteristics of virtuous agents. Virtuous agents are those who are "a) motivated to do good, b) process vision and discernment c) realizes the role of affect or emotion in assessing or judging proper conduct, d) has a high degree of self-understanding and awareness, and e) is connected with and understands the mores of his or her community and the importance of his or her community in moral decision making, policy setting, and character development and is alert to the legitimacy of client diversity in these respects" (Meara et al, 1996, pp. 29). Meara et al. go on to describe four specific virtues that virtuous agents employ in ethical behavior, prudence, integrity, respectfulness, and benevolence. The researchers posit that individuals who inherently

have these virtues or employ these virtues in congruence with professional knowledge, skill, and mission, that these agents will make ethical decisions (Meara et al., 1996). Meara et al. discuss that it is not the decision-making process that guides the practitioner to an ethical decision, rather it is the virtues of the agent. Researchers the researchers do not specify if these are virtues that are developed from childhood or if these virtues can be learned and instilled as part of counselor training and developed through professional practice. Meara et al.'s work is salient to this proposed study as it promotes the inherent or learned character virtues as elements to the individuals' approach to ethical decision making and behavior. This article provides support for investigation on ways counseling students view appropriate and inappropriate self-disclosure in the digital age.

Ethical Decision-Making Models and Process

Cottone and Claus (2000) conducted a review of literature related to Ethical Decision-making models looking for commonality in models, theoretical grounding for models, and empirical support for ethical decision-making model use. Commonality in the models included some type of problem identification, application of the governing legal or ethical code, self-awareness of consequences of conflicting solutions, and evaluation of outcome. Within these commonalities, the order in which they present in the models differ.

Cottone and Clause discovered that while some commonality existed in Practice-Based Ethical Decision-Making Models, very little empirical research supporting the development or the use of these models existed. Researchers offered that the lack of research on ethical decision-making models indicates an immaturity to the study of

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ethical decision-making. Cottone and Clause's review provides support to the proposed study in that it justifies the exploration of processes used by helping professionals and students when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Bradley and Hendricks (2008) open their discussion of ethical decision making by expressing their belief that good, ethical decision making begins with knowledge and understanding of the implementation of ethical codes. Using the ACA 2005 Code of Ethics and the IAMFC 2006 Code of Ethics to guide the discussion, Bradley and Hendricks use case studies to highlight potential ethical dilemmas that arise when counselors are not confident in their knowledge of ethical codes or responsibilities to clients. Their article highlights the responsibility of the counselor to know and understand professional ethics and points out that 'Ethics is the salient factor in determining whether clients are physically or psychologically harmed '(pg. 261).

When codes of ethics are silent on issues facing counselors, ethical decision-making models are tools that can be employed to facilitate resolution to problems that minimize the potential for risk and harm, not only for the client but also for the professional's practice. Lack of knowledge or clearly-defined guidelines within ethical codes does not absolve counselors from the consequences of ethical violations (Bradley & Hendricks, 2008). Rather than rely on 'common sense,' the authors encourage counselors to adopt standard procedures for addressing ethical issues before they escalate to legal and professionally damaging problems. The ACA Code of Ethics has outlined guidelines for professional use of social media, including the protection of client information and privacy in the virtual communities of social networks and the expectation of clearly defined boundaries within social media. However, counseling

students may have little appreciation of the issues that can arise from information being disclosed on social media and available for client consumption. The Bradley and Hendricks article is relevant to this proposed study as it draws attention to areas of silence or ambiguity of ethical codes for counseling students developing standard practices for handling potential issues that arise in the still-emerging digital environment.

In 2014, Gonyea, Wright, and Earl-Kulkosky studied the decision-making process and inevitable dual relationships of marriage and family therapists practicing in rural communities. Citing the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) Code of Ethics (2001), the researchers postulated that the codes language "avoid dual relationships at all costs," created unavoidable ethical conflict for practitioners who practiced in settings where dual relationships were unavoidable. Using qualitative design, the researchers interviewed 15 therapists by phone or at the annual division conference. The researcher's analysis process was guided by grounded theory, comparing data collected from the first interview to data in the second interview and continuing the comparisons in all 15 interviews. Four themes emerged from the study a) professional judgment, b) level of benefit or detriment, c) context and nature of the relationship, and d) supervision and /or consultation (Gonyea et al., 2014). Participants noted that in rural settings practitioners cannot maintain anonymity and that personal social interaction likely involves some layer of dual-relationship (Gonyea et al., 2014).

Gonyea and associates reported that dual relationships are more than duality in rural settings. For practitioners in rural settings, dual relationships are often the simplest to navigate and often there are relationships between client and therapist that are unseen until the two are engaged in a therapeutic relationship. This study provides support for

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the proposed study in that it articulates the difficulty in maintaining anonymity in environments with seen and unseen client relationships. This study also supports investigating decision-making processes in considering the ethical issues of self-disclosure.

Levitt, Farry, and Mazzarella, (2015) discovered four themes that guided counseling professionals in ethical decision making. Using a phenomenological qualitative design, the researchers interviewed six participants with a minimum of five years professional experience. Participants were provided an ethical dilemma vignette and then asked a series of open-ended questions to investigate their reasoning process. From the study, four themes and eleven categories emerged.

The first theme of "personal values" centered on the professional stance of "counselor, know thyself" (pg. 88). Participants entered the decision-making process influenced by their own identities, sense of morality, and beliefs of right and wrong. From this first theme, three categories were created: interconnectedness with code of ethics and professional guidelines, second nature approach to decision making, and informed and reflective decision making. Interconnectedness with code of ethics and professional guidelines refers to the participant's simultaneous awareness of personal beliefs and professional responsibilities. The second nature approach to decision making refers the split-second or automatic nature of decision making. Participants could not articulate the steps involved in the decision-making process; rather they made instantaneous decisions. The third category of informed and reflective decision making was different from the previous themes, as participants were able to see that decisions were shaped by personal values, but guided by professional guidelines. The second

theme, "Client's best interests," refers to the participant's decision-making that kept client welfare as the primary goal of the choices made. Two categories, beneficence, and nonmaleficence emerged. Participants acknowledged that decisions made were based, in part, on the best interest of the client and also sought to avoid client harm. The third theme, transparency in decision making, refers to its honesty and openness. Counselors seek to make decisions openly and engage the client in the processes of decision making. They achieved this transparency using the categories of consultation/supervision, review of ethical codes, referrals, and communication with the client. In category six, consultation/supervision, all participants acknowledged the need to avail themselves of professional guidance. This professional dialog can help the practitioner to view problems from different perspectives and may result in alternative solutions or strategies. In category seven, review of ethical codes, participants used the code of ethics as a framework for ethical decision making and reference for ethical decisions. In categories eight and nine, referrals and communication with client, responses were very specific to the vignette presented. Participants acknowledged discomfort in the referral process, acknowledging that without adequately explaining to and transitioning a client, the referral process could cause harm. The very communication of the ethical dilemma could create additional issues.

The final theme that emerged was of training and practice. Within this theme, two categories developed. Category 10 was a reliance on the code of ethics. The final category, category 11, focused on the situation wherein counseling training programs did not always translate into real-world practice. This study closely resembles that proposed in both design and subject considerations. The Levitt study evaluates the ethical decision-

making process as it relates to vignettes on dual relationships and confidentiality and uses professionals in practice as participants. The proposed study, however, is different from Levitt et al.s in that it focuses on the ethical decision making related to the online disclosures of counseling students.

2.3 Self-Disclosure

In their review of the qualitative literature on counselor self-disclosure, Henretty and Levitt (2010), discuss four issues as they relate to the study of counselor self-disclosure. The first issue is the lack of consistency in the definition of counselor disclosure. Authors of studies on self-disclosure have varied definitions, including counselor self-revelation, disclosures of high and low intimacy, and positive and negative information. The second problem Henretty and Levitt discuss is that the literature predominantly sees counselor disclosure in terms of frequency, attempting to draw linear relationships between counselor disclosure and positive and negative outcomes. The third and fourth issues highlighted by Henretty and Levitt are the limited applicability of counselor disclosure to the therapeutic alliance and the lack of consideration of situational and contextual variables within the therapeutic alliance that may affect the counselor's decision to disclose. Henretty and Levitt's literature study provides support for the proposed study in its focus on the relevance of studying of counselor disclosure. The study also offers evidence of the lack of literature on counselor disclosure outside of the therapeutic relationship. This proposed study seeks to begin the conversation on counselor disclosure outside of therapeutic relationship, specifically for disclosure in the digital sphere of social media.

In the 2014 study by Harris and Kurpius of 315 counseling, counseling psychology, clinical psychology, school counseling, and school psychology, masters and doctoral graduate students, researchers investigated the types of self-disclosure and potential client disclosure on social media. Of the 226 respondents who answered survey items related to disclosure, 8.9% endorsed posting positive feelings about an unidentified client's thoughts or feelings in a session, 5.3% endorsed posting negative feelings about an unidentified client's thoughts or feelings in sessions, and 18.2% posting positive thoughts and feelings that indirectly referenced a client. Participants (33%) also reported using the internet to search for client information, (Harris and Kurprius, 2014). Participants (19.5%) reported using social media and 29.2% reported using search engines. The average age of the Harris and Kurpius study participants was 28.4 years. This quantitative study again speaks to the pervasive nature of social media usage, but also to the somewhat casual way digital natives engage in the digital world, even in posting information from their professional lives. Comfort and years of familiarity with technology and digital social platforms increased the likelihood of a participant searching for client information, (Harris and Kurprius, 2014). Harris and Kuprius's study provides relevance to this proposed study in highlighting the engagement of graduate students from helping professions in social media and the prevalence of posting about clients. This study does not explore the perspective of the counseling students' decision making process or understanding of the potential harm to clients by this type of disclosure. This proposed study seeks to investigate the decision making process of counseling students in their online disclosures and if they consider the potential harm posed to clients.

Categories of Self-Disclosure

Helbok, (2003), categorizes disclosure outside of the therapeutic relationship as visibility. Referring to clinicians who practice in rural communities, Helbok looks at the ethical issues that arise from the visibility of clinicians in the community. Helbok believes that counselor anonymity is easier to maintain in urban settings, and unintended counselor disclosure is within the control of the counselor. In rural settings, counselors are much more visible outside of the counseling room. In communities with one grocery store or school system, there is greater likelihood that counselors will be seen with their families at school functions and shopping for dinner. Helbok suggests that clinicians maintain awareness of their public behavior within their private life to avoid misinterpretations or conclusions drawn by clients. Helbok's article supports the proposed research in articulating that whether in private session or in public, a counselor has the potential of being observed by clients and that these public observations are disclosures. Social media is a public forum and disclosures in this medium are potentially available for clients to observe and draw conclusion from without the counselor to frame context.

Social media has generated new means of boundary violation in therapeutic practice (Zur, Williams, Lehavot, & Knapp, 2009). A long-held belief is that therapist self-disclosure of personal information should only occur when therapeutically beneficial to the client. Irrespective of benefit or harm, social networking potentially makes therapist personal information readily available to clients, for "Self-disclosure that is clinically appropriate in one context may not be in another." Zur et al. terms as

"transparency" all information available to clients about therapists, regardless of how or where it is acquired.

Zur, Williams, Lehavot, and Knapp, (2009) discuss intentional and unintentional disclosures in their article. The internet has changed the dynamics of transparency because of the amount of information willingly disclosed on social media sites. Zur et al. state that, with little effort, clients can find such personal information as a home address and children's schools. Clients can see a therapist's family vacation photos and videos, or through a paid online service, get phone records, social security numbers, and tax returns. Zur identifies six ways clients can potentially look for information on their psychologists. Ranging from the benign perusal of a practitioner's own professional website and progressing to the more intrusive of joining social networks under assumed identities for the purpose of following a psychologist, too, finally, the most intrusive, by hiring firms to conduct barely-legal invasive searches boarding on cyber stalking. The internet has become the primary source for clients looking for information about their therapist (Lehavot, 2009; Zur et al., 2009). Zur et al. provide support for this proposed study in its definition of disclosure as transparency and the discussion of the means in which clients can discover information about the practitioner that may not have been intended for the client.

Barnett (2011) defines three types of self-disclosure: deliberate, unavoidable, and accidental. Deliberate self-disclosure occurs in the therapist's intentional discussion of personal information to the client. Disclosure shared at the onset of the therapeutic relationship to build rapport, share additional qualifications, or used as part of a therapeutic intervention; deliberate self-disclosure is differentiated from unavoidable and

accidental by the intentionality of the counselor to disclose. Unavoidable self-disclosure arises through the choices counselors make their appearance. If counselors choose to wear a cross or Star of David, wedding rings, or any other forms of outward personal expression, that choice may indicate some of the counselor's personal identity that is not verbally disclosed. Accidental self-disclosure occurs when clients observe the counselor out at a public event or when a counselor does not hide a reaction to clients' disclosure in the counseling session. Barnett's explanation of the types of self-disclosure suggests that a counselor is likely disclosing something, be it intentionally or unintentionally. This article provides support for the proposed study in the articulation of intentionality of disclosure. This study seeks to investigate the intentionality of disclosure by counseling students.

Effects of Self-Disclosure

Knox and Hill (2003) describe seven types of counselor disclosure: facts, feeling, insight, strategy, support, challenge, and immediacy. While the authors support counselor self-disclosure, they caution that disclosure should be monitored and not used as a replacement for other valuable counseling skills. Knox and Hill also warn about the level of intimacy involved in counselor disclosure. They articulate concerns about counselor disclosure that is too intimate or too detached. Disclosure that is too intimate may cause discomfort, and disclosure that is too detached may lack sufficient emotion to convey authenticity, relevance, or connection to the client. Knox and Hill offer relevance to the proposed study, particularly in the exploration of intimacy of counselor disclosure. Within the context of the therapeutic relationship, a counselor may be more mindful of the level of intimacy of disclosure; however, in the counselor's personal life, the use

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social media and considerations of intimacy may be different. Within the counseling session, the counselor can help the client to contextualize and shape the client's judgment on the information shared. This proposed study seeks to investigate the awareness of counseling students of how their disclosure online could be interpreted.

Hanson (2005) explored counselor self-disclosure from the perspective of clients. After interviewing 18 participants, Hanson reported that in the categories reflecting helpful disclosure, clients felt connection and closeness, trust and safety, a sense of being deeply understood, a feeling that the counselor has the ability to relate to the client and a sense that the therapist would take responsibility for mistakes. When participants described unhelpful disclosure, clients reported lack of trust of the counselor and a lack of feeling safe. Clients who had not experienced counselor self-disclosure reflected feelings of not being connected to the counselor and that the lack of connectedness was harmful the therapeutic alliance. This study is relevant to the proposed study in that Hanson's results demonstrate the significance of counselor self-disclosure in the building and maintaining, as well as potential harm to, the therapeutic relationship.

Self-disclosure benefits rely on the skillfulness of the therapist using the intervention with a client (Carew, 2009). In her study, Carew examined theoretical background of the clinician's use of self-disclosure as a therapeutic intervention. Participants in Carew's study were practicing professionals in a psychological therapy master's program in England. These professional counselors all had backgrounds in psychology, social work, nursing, or occupational therapy. Conducting four focus groups, Carew's, 20 participants were categorized based on a theoretical model that was psychodynamic, cognitive behavioral, systemic, and person-centered. From the coding

process, four themes emerged: willingness to disclose, classical training influenced service to the therapeutic relationship, and restriction of therapist self-disclosure as impractical. Of the 20 total participants, 19 admitted to having used self-disclosure with clients.

The significance of Carew's study is the inconsistencies in the perceptions of beneficial and harmful self-disclosure. Participants in focus groups could not come up with consistent definitions of acceptable disclosure, indicating that what may be beneficial to one client is harmful to another. In social media, there is a limit to the control participants have over the information posted or how self-disclosure is interpreted by the persons reading/seeing those posts. For clients to see personal information, thoughts, social activities, or even the way a clinician engages with family and friends, without context may create feelings of insecurity in the therapeutic relationship. Outside of a session with a client, clinicians have no way of gauging how clinician self-disclosure is being received. This proposed study seeks to discover what online disclosure may be helpful or harmful to clients who may discover a participant's online profile.

Few studies investigate counselor self-disclosure from the perspective of the client. Audet and Everall (2010) explored the implications of counselor self-disclosure on clients. The authors interviewed nine participants with an average age of 35.7 years and individual counseling sessions ranging between five and 100. Three higher order themes emerged: early connection with therapist, therapist presence, and engagement in therapy. Within these three higher-order themes, two categories of twelve subthemes emerged. Subthemes were categorized as either facilitating or hindering the relationship. In theme one, early connection with therapist, the authors discuss counselors' disclosure as

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facilitating comfort and feelings of leveling or balancing the power differential within the therapeutic relationship. The authors also discuss counselor disclosure as hindering the therapeutic relationship, with clients feeling that the counselor disclosure resulted in clients feeling confusion about the role of the counselor and minimizing the role of the counselor. In theme two, therapist presence, clients reported feelings of counselor facilitation through disclosure, specifically feelings of attunement and understanding/non-judgement. One participant reported hindering feelings of misunderstanding when a counselor had elaborate and frequent disclosure. In theme three, engagement in therapy, participants reported feelings of facilitation when counselor disclosure promoted openness and authenticity, and that this openness made them feel comfortable in taking the risk to share themselves. Clients also felt connection and closeness, and that counselor self-disclosure created feelings of deeper relatability within the therapeutic relationship. Some participants reported that some counselor disclosures hindered connections and left the client feeling overwhelmed with the intimacy of disclosure.

Audet and Everall's study of counselor self-disclosure of nine different participants with potentially nine different counselors demonstrates that counselors use self-disclosure differently, with varying degrees of effectiveness, and it is perceived and received differently from client to client. This study looks at counselor disclosure within the controlled setting of the counseling session. The setting is controlled in that counselors have the ability to potentially see or read how their personal disclosure is received. The proposed study looks at counselor disclosure outside of the therapeutic relationship and without the counselor ability to observe how disclosure is received and

how professional considerations impact what counseling students disclose in public forums.

In Gibson's 2012 article, she discusses the internal conflicts of practitioners who use counselor self-disclosure as a therapeutic intervention. Gibson points out that there are not articulated guidelines on the use of counselor disclosure, other than the ambiguity of ethical codes that require salience and promotion of therapeutic goals. The counselor is left to independently determine the value of the disclosure. Gibson's article looks at counselor disclosure within the context of the therapeutic relationship. The proposed study intends to investigate the disclosure that occurs outside of the therapeutic relationship and how counseling students decide what to disclose on social media when considering the potential for clients to see what is revealed.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter provides empirical support for the study of ethical decision making in the digital age. The literature reviewed is significant in understanding behavior in respect to ethical issues; however, there is limited research that investigates ethical decision making by counselors and counseling students. Environmental context, be it rural communities or a digital setting, is significant to how practitioners navigate ethical situations. The literature gives voice to the extensive use of technology and social media, but does not explore the impact of technology and social media on the way counseling students, digital natives, understand self-disclosure. This study seeks to begin to fill a gap in the literature surrounding ethical decision making by counseling students who have been raised in the digital age explosion.

This study looks to investigate and fill gaps in the literature that examine the cognitive processes used by counseling students in the digital age. Specifically: What considerations are present when counseling students disclose information on social media? This question lends itself best to qualitative inquiry. While many studies discussed in this chapter have provided guidance on applying current ethical codes for licensed practitioners and educators in the helping fields, and quantitative studies have discussed the widespread use of social media by students, practicing professionals, and the general population, there are no studies that look at the cognitive processes behind the behavior of social media use by counseling students.

Chapter 3 will outline the design of this proposed study. Chapter 4 will be discussing the data collected and analyzed. The final chapter, Chapter 5, will include the discussion of the study results, directions for further study, and the conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a discussion of the methodology used in this study of ethical decision making regarding counselors in- training's self-disclosure on social media. A description of this study's method begins the chapter and is followed by the research questions and discussion of the researcher's role. Discussions of participant selection, data management, and analysis will lead to the considerations of validity and trustworthiness. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary and a transition to the remaining chapters of this study.

Traditional definitions of self-disclosure no longer only refer to these occurrences in counseling sessions. The availability of willingly and sometimes unwillingly disclosed information about individuals on social media sites has changed the ways in which we come to know people (Tiereny, 2013). Ethical dilemmas can arise when practitioners do not critically consider or anticipate potential issues (Harris & Kurprius, 2014). Gaps in the use and understanding of social media between supervisors and faculty, persons who have lived with and without social media, and counseling students, who have had access to social media most of their lives, may leave the latter blind to potential troubles in the personal use of social media (Osman et al., 2012).

This study utilized a qualitative methodology to explore counselors in- training's understanding of ethical considerations of self-disclosure in the digital age. The researcher sought to understand how counselors-in-training apply the ACA Code of Ethics to personal use of social media. Qualitative methods strive to explore in-depth meanings of the human experience and are intended to generate rich observations that are not easily reduced to numbers (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). The rational for a phenomenological qualitative study was to provide understanding of how counselors-in-training make meaning of ethical behavior while engaged in digital platforms of disclosure.

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods are intended to explore in-depth meanings of the human experience and generate rich observations that are not easily reduced to numbers (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). Qualitative studies allow the researcher to investigate the cognitive process behind an observed behavior. A holistic methodology, qualitative research involves discovery, and the researcher is the primary device for collecting and analyzing data (Patton, 2002). Qualitative approaches involve purposeful description, explanation, and interpretation of collected data. Qualitative methods allow the exploration of diverse issues and the participants to share perspectives within the context of an environment or phenomenon (Priest, 2013). Qualitative researchers want to achieve a comprehensive understanding of human behavior and the cognitions that govern those behaviors (Cresswell 2003). Leedy and Ormrod (2001) claimed that qualitative research is less structured in description because it formulates

and builds new theories. However, within qualitative research, there are descriptions and specific design structures.

Inductive by nature, qualitative researchers strive to discover, as opposed to the substantiated nature of quantitative research (Cresswell, 2003)**.** In phenomenological qualitative inquiry, the researchers aim to discover and gain understanding through the perspectives of participants (Priest, 2003). Participants are encouraged to share stories and experiences in the hope that meaning can be given to these experiences (Creswell, 2003; Priest, 2003). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insight into counseling students' understanding of boundaries, disclosure, and dual relationships within the digital world.

Qualitative inquiry is not limited to phenomenological studies. The ethnological method also utilizes the collection of experiences. Its guiding assumption is that any human group, interacting together, will evolve into a culture (Patton, 2003). While a study of the culture of a particular social media platform might have unveiled ethical behavior understanding, this study was interested in the individual's understanding, experience, and narrative regarding ethical behavior within the phenomenon of social media. Case studies are an intensive analysis of a singular unit, individual, group, organization, or society (Patton, 2003). To understand how counseling students individually defined the specified ethical behavior of self-disclosure, the researcher conducted individual interviews with a purposeful sample to collect rich data for the exploration of the meaning and experience of self-disclosure on social media (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how counseling students make meaning of personal self-disclosure in the context of the digital world and social media. This study was an investigation of interpretations of ethical dilemmas that potentially arise when information is inadvertently shared or discovered by the counselor in the digital medium of social networks. The effect of these inadvertent disclosures on the boundaries established by the counselor and the potential for unexpected dual relationships has yet to be studied in-depth. This study is intended to discover whether counseling students **were** translating what may have been described as real-world interpersonal boundary issues to digital world interpersonal boundary issues.

This research was guided by the ethical codes of the three dominant governing bodies of the mental health professions, the ACA, the APA, and the NASW. It is driven by two primary research question and two sub-questions:

1. What are counseling students lived experiences of self-disclosure in the digital age?

2. What is the reasoning process of digital natives enrolled in counseling programs in distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure?

3.2 Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Patton, 2002). Understanding the positionality of the researcher is a critical aspect of the approach. The researcher of this study was a doctoral candidate with more than ten years of professional experience in higher education. An active participant

on social media, the researcher sits generationally just between digital immigrants and digital natives. She is a counselor by education and training and was in the process of transitioning to the role of counselor educator. The researcher believes that each individual has a reality and truth that is socially constructed from the influences of family, friends, and his or her own experiences. These realities and truths are important because of the inherent value of the individual. The researcher believes that knowledge can be generated cooperatively between the participant and the researcher.

The researcher was passionate about this topic because of the anonymity in the use of social media. There is no viable way to positively identify an individual on social media (Reamer, 2009). Participants are completely at the mercy of the authenticity of those with whom they engage online. A counselor has no way to know if the individual with whom she or he is communicating through social media is really a client, or if it is a family member fishing for information about what is divulged in therapy sessions (Reamer, 2009). Counselors-in-training who are not thoughtful in how they behave in social media may, without malice, violate ethical codes and place clients in harm.

The researcher is an active participant in social media. Bias that potentially could arise is the participatory satisfaction the researcher finds in the engagement of social media (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). To compensate for any bias that might emerge from the researcher's use of and presence in social media, she journaled to document thoughts and actions from this study. Journaling allowed the researcher to be reflective in the research process and to document experience in the field (Saldana, 2013).

3.3 Context of the Study

The context of this study was counseling education programs in the southern mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. that are accredited by CACREP. Graduates from these programs may have earned either a Masters of Education (MEd) or an Educational Specialist Degree (EdS). Particular program specializations were not required for participation in this study.

The typical sample size in a qualitative study is between five and 25 participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). For phenomenological studies, the literature suggests six to eight participants; the fewer the participants, the more in-depth the interview (Cresswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). In their research on women at risk of HIV in two West African countries, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2005) observed that data saturation had occurred after 12 analyzed interviews. For their study, Guest et. al. had recruited and interviewed 30 participants. In Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's study participants had to meet three primary criteria, age, type of sexual activity, and frequency of sexual encounters. Recognizing that the most likely population where all primary criteria were women engaged in sex work, researchers targeted sex workers for their study. Researchers coded interviews as they were transcribed and tracked the addition of new codes created as each interview was analyzed. For their study, Guest et. al. had recruited and interviewed 30 participants. At the conclusion of the study, in a post hoc analysis of the investigator's code book, researchers discovered that no new codes or additional substantive data were collected beyond the twelfth transcribed interview (Guest et al., (2005). The last eighteen interviews served only as validation of the data collected in the first twelve.

Qualitative researchers must consider ethical issues in determining sample size (Francis, Johnson, Roberson, Glidewell, Entwiste, Eccles, and Grimshaw, 2010). For sample sizes too large, ethical issues exist in the wasting of participants' time or exposing them to undue stress and anxiety. For sample sizes too small, researchers risk insufficient data to draw sound conclusions and meet standards of transferability and rigor (Francis, Johnson, Roberson, Glidewell, Entwiste, Eccles, and Grimshaw, 2010). For this study, 13 participants were recruited to participate through purposeful sampling methods. This sample size provided the researcher with the opportunity to observe similarities and variances between individuals, while not dealing with an overwhelming amount of data. This sample size also aligned with recommended guidelines for phenomenological studies in the literature (Cresswell, 2003; Patton, 2002).

The researcher used basic communication and active listening skills to develop rapport with participants. She behaved in a professional manner and respect cultural boundaries and gender issues when appropriate. Acknowledging the power differential in the researcher/participant dyad, she made an effort to minimize the differential by rapport building throughout the interview. Inclusion in the study was voluntary, and participants could end their involvement at any time.

3.4 Measures for Ethical Protection

Institutional Review Board

Before commencing this study, the researcher secured approval to conduct study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB-approved research protocol was one measure of protection for the participants. The researcher had also participated and

passed required human subjects research training as required by the Office of Compliance at the University of South Carolina.

Protection of Participants

Participation was voluntary, and participants could end the interviews at any time. Participants were informed of the confidential nature of participation, potential risks of research, and the availability of resources should they experience any discomfort or harm from the participation in the research study. Privacy of all participants was respected. Participant numbers were used, and specific institutions' names and locations were excluded from presentations of this study. Only generalized regional identifiers were used. Final presentation of this study include excerpts of interviews; however, all identifying information was removed, and only general demographic identifiers, such as gender, ethnicity, and years in graduate program, were included in the reporting of findings. In all stages of the interview, participants were reminded of confidentiality and asked to not to use the names of others while sharing narratives. Instead, participants were asked to use "my friend," "my colleague," or "my acquaintance" to describe others with whom participants have shared experiences. Identifiable information was maintained electronically in password-protected files.

Risks

All research has the potential for risk. While efforts are made to minimize risk to participants, it is important to identify potential areas of harm. A potential risk of this study was, if through the course of participation and personal examination of behavior, a participant discovers that he or she was unethically engaged in social media by disclosing

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information from class or clients or friending clients from practicum or internship sites, or direct violation of the ethical codes by searching client information. When participants admitted to these unethical or ethically questionable behaviors, the researcher paused the interview and alerted the participant to the potential violations of ethical codes. The researcher also encouraged the participants to seek guidance from faculty and site supervisors for advice on the best ways to untangle themselves from these ethical violations and to receive guidance on how to avoid these situations in the future.

Benefits

The qualitative research method allows the voices of participants to be heard and their experiences known (Patton, 2002). Counselors-in-training had the opportunity share experiences in social media during the study and consider how those experiences impacted the way they engage with or handled client interaction in the digital world. Results from this study have the potential to impact ethical education for counselors-in-training, counseling supervisors, and current clinicians for whom digital ethics was not a part of their initial training.

<div align="center">

3.5 Data

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The researcher utilized steps as outlined by Cresswell, (2003). Qualitative research is an inductive process of organizing data, investigating preliminary interpretations, classifying, and finally synthesizing themes. Organizing the raw data will include the development of a database of codes in Microsoft excel. The raw data will include interview transcripts, field notes, analytic memos, researcher journals, and

member-check emails. Identifiable information was removed, and participant numbers replaced names prior to the coding process.

Data Collection

Prior to the collection of any data, permission to conduct research was sought by the IRB at the University of South Carolina. With IRB approval, the researcher prepared an introductory email and an Invitation to Participate email for distribution to students in pre-identified CACREP accredited counselor education programs in the Southern Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Participants were interviewed using a guided, semi-structured protocol.

Criteria for Selecting Participants. Once the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study, the researcher began recruiting participants from CACREP-accredited counseling education programs. Emails were sent to CACREP liaisons and program directors in pre-identified universities in the southern mid-Atlantic region in the United States asking for dissemination of Invitation to Participate email to students for this study (Appendix A). Emails included a brief description of the study and the supervising faculty member's name and contact information. The Invitation to Participate was disseminated at the discretion of the CACREP liaisons' discretion (Appendix B). To be considered for inclusion, prospective participants had to be enrolled in a graduate (master's level) counseling education program, be core complete in their counseling training, be active on one or more social media accounts for over a year, and been born between 1985-1995.

The researcher experienced inconsistency in program definitions of 'core complete.' Some identified institutions defined core complete as the completion of classes for candidacy, some programs defined it as completion of program specific core classes, and some programs described core complete as being a completion of all course work. The researcher abided by the participating institution's definitions of 'core complete' and ensured that the participant had completed the stand-alone ethics course prior to accepting them into the study.

The researcher received invitations from some CACREP liaisons and program coordinators to visit their campuses to recruit in-person. Upon receipt of this invitation, the researcher made arrangement to visit practicum and internship classes to ensure capture of 'core complete' students for solicitation into this study. Researcher scheduled visits to campuses at the convenience of programs coordinators and faculty.

Interviews

Interview questions were developed by the researcher based on research of ethics, ethical decision-making, disclosure, and the ACA Code of Ethics. Questions were intended to address counseling students' ethical decision making in the use and participation on digital platforms of disclosure. They were open-ended and offered interviewees an opportunity to give rich detail about how and why they participate and self-disclose on on digital platforms of disclosure. In-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face in semi-private environments of the participants' choosing or via telephone. Interviews were audio recorded to allow for optimal interaction between researcher and participant.

The researcher with the assistance of a paid transcriptionist, transcribed verbatim interviews conducted for this study. Participants were asked permission for audio recording and transcription. Interview transcriptions were sent to participants for review prior to the beginning of the coding process. Participant numbers were used for the privacy and protection of participants. Files will be marked and password-protected with participants' numbers, and at the conclusion of the study, recordings were destroyed. Once the interviews were transcribed and reviewed by participants, the researcher began the process of coding.

Researchers bring unique perspectives to the development of the interview in qualitative studies. Influenced by academic discipline, professional experience, and a theoretical lens, interview guides are unique to the study and developed with consideration of context of the inquiry, situation/phenomenon, study participant, and the researcher (Perry, 2013). The interview guide for this proposed study was developed from sample questions offered by Perry:

1. People have different reasons for engaging in social media. Can you tell me what brought you to the social media world?

2. How do you define disclosure?

   a. Does that definition change with the context of the environment?

3. Can you tell me how you decide what to disclose online?

   a. What influences that decision?

4. Tell me about your experiences with disclosure?

5. Can you tell me about any changes you have made in your posting habits?

6. What are your expectations of how your digital presence is received?

7. What are similarities and differences between your online and in-person self-disclosure?

8. How do you address client friend requests?

9. Other than your participation in this interview, describe any conversations you have had with faculty, supervisors, practicing professionals, or colleagues in your program about engagement and disclosure in social media?

10. What else would you like to share that has not been addressed?

Data Analysis

The goal of a phenomenological study is to create a narrative to the phenomenon of the lived experience (Priest, 2003). The analysis of qualitative data requires continual reflection on the data, immersion in the data, and intimacy with the participants' narratives (Cresswell, 2003; Priest, 2003). When interviews were transcribed the researcher used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process as described by Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008) for data coding and analysis. The IPA method of analysis was developed to allow for rigorous exploration of subjective experiences and social cognitions (Biggerstaff and Thompson).

Transcription of participant interviews was verbatim and included notation of non-verbal cues, vocal hesitancies, and remarkable speech dynamics. The first stage of analysis in IPA involves in-depth reading of text. The researcher 'bracketed' assumptions and beliefs as a means of maintaining authentic presence in the data text of the participant. The researcher also utilized a peer debriefer. The second stage of IPA involves rereading of the text and beginning to identify themes that capture qualities of the interview. Identified themes are reviewed, and connections within text and sections of

interview are linked. IPA is cyclical in nature and this process continues throughout all interviews with transcripts being revisited as new themes from additional interviews emerge.

At the completion of the initial coding of transcribed interviews, the researcher sent clean transcriptions to two coding assistants. The researcher and coding assistants reviewed each transcript line by line and used open coding and InVevo to capture participants' experiences and feelings. The researcher and the coding assistants coded the transcripts separately and then met to discuss codes and emerging themes. The researcher and coding assistants came to consensus of code clusters and identification of master themes through this process.

The third stage of analysis involves structuring the analysis by clustering themes and concepts in order to identify master themes and categories that potentially propose ordered relationship between themes and master themes. The final stage of IPA is the creation of a master list or table of themes and master themes. Themes are matched with quotations from participant interviews that both provide evidence of theme and capture the essence of the participants' thoughts and emotions about experienced phenomenon explored. At the conclusion of the analysis process, the researcher emailed coded interview transcripts and code lists to participants via email to solicit feedback of themes and interpretation of participant's interview. No participants provided feedback on their coded transcripts.

Trustworthiness

      To maintain trustworthiness and transparency in the research process, the researcher used member checking, peer debriefing, and an external auditor. Member checking involves emailing coded transcripts and a list of themes that emerged from the coding process to participants, inquiring about the accuracy of her interpretation of their responses (Burkholder& Burkholder, 2014). Peer debriefing consists of soliciting a colleague's feedback on the data analysis and the researcher's biases and understanding of the data. An external audit is conducted by a colleague who will review participant responses, individual codes lists, the master code list, individually-coded responses, and classification of comprehensive themes. This will ensure dependability and confirmability of the study (Burkholder& Burkholder, 2014). The researcher asked colleagues from the counselor education and supervision doctoral program to act as the debriefer and auditor. These colleagues are familiar with qualitative research, have participated in and conducted qualitative research, and identify as qualitative researchers. Participant privacy was maintained throughout this process, as these colleagues did not have access to identifiable information.

Analytic Memos

      Following each interview, the researcher will use field notes and other relevant reflections to create analytic memos (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). She - continued to write memos and journal throughout the coding process. Participant numbers were   used to protect participants. Analytic memos are used to "document and reflect on coding processes and code choices; how the inquiry process is going; and

emergent patterns, themes, and categories" (Saldana, 2013). Analytic memos and field notes will be used in maintaining transparency in the process of conducting this study.

Demographic information

Minimal demographic information was collected. Program specialization, length of time in counseling program, and social media platforms used will be the entirety of the demographic information collected. This information was collected at the beginning of the interview and stored in password-protected files on the researcher's computer and an external storage hard drive. At the conclusion of the study, identifying information was erased.

Demographic information will be collected in an interview format. This initial stage of the interview is seen as an element of rapport building between the researcher and the participant. These questions are:

1. What social media platforms do you use and how long have you been using any form of social media?

2. At what age did you begin using social media?

3. What is your counseling specialization (MFT, School, Mental Health, Rehab)?

4. How many semesters have you completed in your program?

5. In what semester did you complete counseling ethics?

The purpose of collecting this demographic information was to identify the types of social media platforms used by participants, type of professional counselor they wish

to become, where participants are in their training, and when participants completed formal ethics training in their counseling coursework.

3.6 Conclusion

Qualitative inquiry allows an in-depth understanding of the cognitions of counseling students when using social media and their ethical concerns regarding self-disclosure in the digital age. Gaining this snapshot of their deep understanding can help counselor educators and supervisors create curriculum and training to guide and inform new counselors' adoption of a professional identity and to caution behavior on social media. The remaining chapters will provide findings of this study, beginning with the data analysis in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasoning process of counseling

students' disclosure in the phenomenon of social media. This study was an investigation

of ethos influences applied to counselor self-disclosure and counseling students' ability to

discern appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure. The study was intended to explore

lived experiences of counseling students who are translating what may have been

described to them as real world disclosure issues to digital world disclosure. The

foundation of this research was rooted in the following questions:

1. What are counseling students lived experiences of self-disclosure in the digital
   age?
2. What is the reasoning process of digital natives enrolled in counseling programs
   in distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure?

To capture the essence of the meaning and understanding participants had with

disclosure, participants were asked to describe their experiences with disclosure and how

they personally defined disclosure. Throughout the interview, participants were also

asked to describe their individual thought process as it related to what they personally

disclosed online and what influences or experiences contributed to their decision-making

process. The findings from these transcribed interviews are explored in depth in this chapter.

The chapter is organized in descriptions of the process of the study, data generation, gathering, and recording, then moves to data tracking and emerging themes. Discussion on the evidence of quality precedes the research findings of the study followed by the summary.

4.1 Process

Data Generation

The researcher prepared an Invitation to Participate email for distribution to students in pre-identified CACREP accredited counselor education programs in the Southern Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. These identified programs had to meet two specific criteria: 1) They had to be CACREP accredited and 2) a stand-alone counseling ethics class had to be part of the required counselor education curriculum. The Invitation to Participate email was included in an introductory and request email sent to CACREP liaisons and program coordinators at the identified schools. These email requests spurred invitations for the researcher to visit three campuses for on-campus participant recruitment and generated 13 participants. Data generated from this research and reported in this chapter is from participant responses to the interview guide outlined in chapter 3.

Participants. The researcher conducted 13 individual interviews with participants. The interviews were conducted at a time and location of the participants' choosing, 11 interviews were conducted in-person, and two were conducted via phone.

Participant demographic information is reported as the participants identify. Within the 13 participants, 10 female participants identify their racial and ethnic group as either African American (n= 4) or Caucasian (n=6) and three male participants who identify their racial and ethnic group as African American (n=2) or Caucasian (n=1). All participants identify as counselors-in-training within two distinct training tracts, Clinical Mental Health (n=10) or School Counseling (n=3) and participants all identify as being towards the end of their training either in Internship (n=7), Practicum (n=4), or Pre-Practicum (n=2) at the time of their interviews. As requirements for licensure can vary from state to state participants identified their state of training, Georgia (n=5), North Carolina (n=3), and South Carolina (n=5).

Data Gathering

During the course of each interview, the researcher asked each participant to respond to questions outlined in chapter three. Participants shared their experiences of social media and disclosure both in-person and through digital platforms. As each experience is unique, all narratives contributed to the themes reported in these findings. Few codes and themes captured all participants; dominant themes are those that capture seven or more participants.

Data Recording

Interviews were recorded by the researcher using a two digital voice recording devices, a digital voice recorder with a lavalier lapel microphone attached to participants collars was used as the primary recording device and a voice recording application on the researcher's cell phone was used as a backup recording device. Once confirmation of

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complete and usable recordings from the primary recording device was established, digital files were removed from recording device to an external storage drive and deleted from the recorder. Recordings on the cell phone were also deleted.   Recordings from the primary recording devices were used for the transcription and analysis for this research study.

4.2 Systems for Tracking Data

Upon the completion of interviews the researcher and a paid transcriptionist transcribed interviews verbatim. The interviews yielded 10 hours and 40 minutes of audio data and 110 pages of verbatim interview transcriptions. Upon completion of each transcribed interview, the researcher listened and re-read each interview to ensure accuracy of transcription and capture additional vocal cues. Transcribed interviews were also screened and edited to remove all identifiable participant information, remove names of friends, colleagues, faculty, and supervisors mentioned in the interview, and to remove directed references to schools and universities.

The researcher and coding assistants then conducted line-by-line coding of the interviews using methods described in chapter 3. The coding assistants were both peer colleagues from the Counselor Education program. Both assistants identify as counselor educators, qualitative researchers, and active users of several social media platforms, however, neither of them have conducted research on ethics, decision-making, or disclosure. Coding assistants presented their codes and analysis prior to the researcher in order to maintain objectivity and minimize bias. The assistants and researcher codes, code clusters, and themes were similar. Researcher kept notes on hard copies of

transcribed interviews. At the completion of the coding process the researcher solicited an additional reviewer to review the transcripts, codes, code clusters, and themes to ensure that all salient data had been included and that themes were consistent with coded data and research questions. This final reviewer was also a colleague from the Counselor Education program with experience in qualitative research. However, their scholarly work is predominantly quantitative.

Coding

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process as described by Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008) for data analysis outlined in chapter 3. The cyclical nature of IPA meant that each interview was initially coded and reviewed and potentially recoded subsequent to additional interviews. The researcher and coding assistants reviewed each transcript line by line and used open coding and InVevo codes to capture participants' experiences and feelings. Within the coding process, direct participants responses and quotes were identified that captured the essence of the meaning and experience of the participants. Once the transcripts were coded, codes with participant statements began to be clustered together to identify emerging themes. Themes were then clustered to create Master themes. These master themes and subthemes are discussed in the findings section.

4.3 Evidence of Quality

The quality of the research study and data was ensured through the methods: bracketing and journaling, trustworthiness, member checking, and coding assistants for triangulation.

Bracketing and Journaling

To compensate for bias that could have emerge from the researcher's use of and presence in social media in this study, the researcher engaged the practices of bracketing and journaling throughout the data collection process. Bracketing is the act of putting aside the researcher's assumptions and preconceptions about the phenomenon studied so as to stay present in the meanings and experiences shared by participants (Smith, et al., p.14). To achieve this, the researcher solicited to aid of a colleague to interview her using the interview protocol of this study. In this process, the researcher was given space to articulate her experiences and her meanings with disclosure in the digital age so as not to be distracted and to maintain presence with the participants the researcher interviewed. Journaling allows the researcher to be reflective in the research process and to document experience in the field (Saldana, 2013). The research journal gave space for the researcher to document her experience and feelings about her research, participant solicitation, and a place to begin to explore initial thoughts of the data.

Trustworthiness

Interviews were recorded using two digital recording devices. Audio of the interviews was repeatedly listened to through the transcription process to ensure capture of all data. The researcher listened to each interview while following transcribed interviews to ensure data accuracy. To maintain trustworthiness and transparency in the research process, the researcher used peer debriefing, external auditor, and member checking. Researcher sought feedback from peer debriefer on the data analysis and the researcher's biases and understanding of the data. Researcher also used an external

auditor to review participant responses, individual codes lists, the master code list, individually-coded responses, and classification of comprehensive themes.

Member Checking

Transcribed interviews were emailed to participants for their review. Participants were given five days to review and clarify any statements. Participants were asked that if they were making any changes or additions to their responses that they bold and italicize these corrections or additions so that the researcher would note the change. The researcher only received five approval emails from participants indicating no changes to the transcripts. No other participants responded to the emailed transcript. Once participants had had the opportunity to review and respond to transcripts, researcher removed all identifiable information from transcripts.

Coding Assistants

Upon completion of the transcription process, transcripts were provided to two pre-identified coding assistants. The coding assistants were both colleagues from the Counselor Educator program at the University of South Carolina. The researcher and the coding assistants coded the transcripts separately and then met to discuss codes and emerging themes. The researcher and coding assistants came to consensus of code clusters and identification of master themes through this process.

4.4 Findings

Counseling students from across the southern mid-Atlantic region participated in individual interviews and asked to share their experiences of disclosure in the digital age.

The collected data was analyzed and systematically searched for common themes and sub-themes. Codes with assigned text were clustered into themes, themes with assigned codes, and texts were clustered into Master Theme groupings. In the analysis of the data five master themes emerged: Disclosure, Considerations and Influences of Disclosure, Awareness, Professional and Personal Identities, and Guidance. These themes and sub-themes are discussed below.

Disclosure

Disclosure as a construct of the study easily became a theme as most of the individual interview were around the understanding and meaning of disclosure. The subthemes of definition, in-person, and on-line naturally emerged from the participant's descriptions and experiences of disclosure.

Definition. Participants all initially defined disclosure in terms oral or written words shared. When asked about environment and context the definitions became broader as participants began to articulate that the environment did not impact the definition of disclosure, rather the depth or volume disclosed changed.

Participant #10 articulated the willingness of sharing information in her definition:

> *I define disclosure as giving a person information, um, about yourself that you voluntarily give. To me, the meaning does not change. I mean, as far as the information I verbally disclose, it's different. It varies...*

> *Confidentiality*. Participants further shared that disclosure also implies the personal or confidential nature of information shared between people.

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Participant #3 explains suggestive meanings to disclosure:

I guess just discussing something personal with someone. Or something confidential.

I think it's (disclosure) *got some connotations.*

In-person. Participants all related that their in-person interpersonal relationships were

where they found support when they disclosed.

Participant #2 captured it best:

Like, that's just not where I find my support system, is through social media. It's

not where I, you know, draw on my assistance, and self-esteem, it's not linked to

it.

Intimacy and Connection. Participants related that with in-person relationships

and disclosure there is stratification of closeness or intimacy within the identified

relationship.

Participant #2 describes confidence in relationships where she has trust and security in the love

they have for her:

So, I know if I'm talking to my mother, my boyfriend, a really, really close friend, I'll say

any and everything that's on my mind, because they're gonna love me regardless, that

whole unconditional love deal, it's gonna be fine.

Participant #12 speaks about the level of closeness within the relationship that determines

what she shares in-person:

So in person self-disclosure with... I mean anybody that I am really in person with I guess

it would just depend on the level of well like the level of friendship or relationship you

know, like how well I know a person. What I share casually in line at Walmart is way

different than what I share with my best friend or husband.

Participant #1 shares that her connection with people in-person includes trust and context of her life:

Definitely like in person is someone that I most likely would trust, have more of a

connection with and, you know, we need to know maybe other things about what's going

on.

Participant #10 talks about her selectivity and reciprocation in her relationships:

I'm very selective with who I disclose to. My friends, close friends that is, um, it's pretty

easy to disclose. It is a tight circle, but those are the ones that I feel like really, really

know me. And I feel like I really know them. So I feel like it's reciprocal.

Participant #5 talks about reaching out to someone when she really needs to share:

If I wanna talk to someone about how I'm feeling, I'll probably text or call somebody and

actually have conversation with them instead of just posting my opinion about like the

election for example.

Congruence. In this process of putting out their best self, some participants shared that in this editing what they are sharing online is incongruent to their true life experience.

Participant #5 talks about her authenticity and the unrealistic perfection shared on social media:

I try to be super authentic with my posts because I don't think it is real to share only the good curated version of your life. It is my perfectly edited life… That it makes your life look like a series of pieced together happy moments and nobody is like that. I think it contributes to this idea that we all have to meet ideal standards. How can we "connect" [Air quotes] *with people who seem to be only ever perfectly happy?*

Participant #10 describes fabricated feelings of connection and transparency:

All of this "connection" [Air quotes]*… um there is really a false sense of transparency. You think that what you are seeing or reading is real, but it is edited and photoshopped.*

Online Disclosure. Some participants struggled with and came to consciousness that disclosure online was disclosure.

Participant #3 was very honest in her initial thoughts:

Are you kind of linking like what we put out there on social media?... cause I don't really-- you know what I didn't really think about this before. I mean… um what I put out there I just stuff about me I don't care about who knows. So I mean, I know people who put their whole business out there... I have just never thought about disclosure being so public.

Participant #4 took ownership of her lack of realization:

I don't know; I'll be honest I haven't done a lot of thinking. This is probably an error on my part since it is so pervasive and just how we live now. Uhm, that I should do more thinking about how I would handle 'cause I... A lot of my... I have a split between my clients they're either my age or much older and the ones who are my age are offenders who cannot have social media, so it's not really come up for me. [laughter] *But, wow, um*

sure clients could find me if they looked hard enough… And now I am thinking, like what

would they find…

Participant #6 experienced a new awareness as part of the interview:

I'm thinking about that because you, um, you know, um, I have not even thought about. I

know I'm getting ready to become a real adult. It's a real job in a real professional phase,

and I need to make to be not that I'm say anything anyway but that is, um, that clients

don't need to know, um, my Instagram and I need to be private and maybe I don't need to

be, you know, hashtags anybody can see your picture based on a hashtag even just makes

you think. I'm glad we had this talk.

Participants did not outline specific processes for how they chose what to post or disclose online. They spoke more in generalities, and of these generalities, three subthemes emerged, what they consider before posting, the influences on those considerations, and what their posting generally reflect. All of the participants shared deep awareness to the interpersonal consequences of online postings.

Lack of Control. Participants shared experiences of not having control of information or interpretation of information once it was part of the digital environment.

Participant #5 talked about the loss of control of her posting in a moment when she was not in control of her feelings:

I don't really get along with my mother-in-law. Am I gonna put that on my Facebook,

Twitter, Instagram? No. I did it once on Twitter and then my husband's cousin saw and

threw me under the bus. He took a screen shot of my ranting tweet and emailed it to her.

Because I've realized that, yeah, that what I said was ugly and I said it in a moment of

anger. But when she read it, she doesn't necessarily know how I meant it. It was still a

hateful thing either way. It wasn't like I said she was great and I loved her. But I said it in

like one of the most upset moods I've ever been at someone 'cause she was very

meddling. But the next day, I was like, "Ugh, well, I really don't hate her." I just was

really annoyed at her. But she will forever see that written out. And so it showed me how

powerful words are especially the written word cause I can explain something to her and

say, "Hey, I really didn't mean it like that." But if it's written out, like it's a dangerous

thing.

Participant #12 described not controlling how people interpret what you say or the context of the situation you are in when you post:

I feel like people take things posted on social media and just run with them and interpret

them in their own way. I just don't want things to be interpreted from more than what

they are and I know that within social media, within online platforms or really with even

just with texting you can interpret things however you want when it is on paper especially

with online with how things can get interpreted and then spread so quickly I just I want to

be aware of what I am putting out there for others to interpret how they are going to.

Incongruence. Participants shared a desire for only a positive persona to be reflected online. For many of them it is with respect to their personal boundary, not wanting to divulge too much information, for others, it was about want to be seen as a source of positivity and inspiration.

Participant #2 talked about the volume of bad as her reason for only sharing good:

There is so much negative, I think that's probably what leads me to post on more

positive things and more uplifting type of things, versus "I had such a bad day!" I

never do that, because I kind of feel like this isn't kind of what people want to see

anyway. So ... I am very, I edit a lot from who I am online.

Considerations and Influences of Disclosures

Participants reported asking themselves questions in the moments immediately

preceding posting online. They conceded that not a tremendous amount of time is spent

on this process, consequences must be obvious and come quickly as they are considering

what they are sharing online. Experiences that spawned deep awareness was the

prevailing influence to what participants chose to disclose online. Awareness was so

powerful that it emerged as its own master theme. It is impossible to discuss influences

without discussing self-awareness and the development of personal boundaries that grew

out of the experiences of participants' disclosure on digital platforms.

Participant #6 shared at times a pause and reconsideration of posts:

I don't know. I guess I have never really thought about what makes me… why I do that. I

don't know. I mean, um… I think about… I guess, really, I mean I think about how it

looks and what people might think, cause there have been times like I have gone to post

something and then stopped 'cause I thought there might be trouble or drama. But it

happens so fast…

In these quick considerations, participants reported asking themselves a combination of

internal questions that reflect positive reception, negative reception, and impacts of their status or

reputations to the people who see their postings.

Positive Outcomes. Participants' ultimate desire in their postings is positive reception. They consider if what they are posting is inspirational, uplifting, or happy in terms of personal news or achievement.

Participant #2 explained a desire for her digital presence to be a place for inspiration:

> *I want my digital presence to be a positive. I don't want people to see me in like crisis or always bashing someone or something. I want them to feel like the see inspirational stuff from me.*

Participant #10 explains that what she posts is reflective of her positivity:

> *Um. I'm a very positive person. I want people to see me in a positive light. So I think that's probably what leads me to post on more positive things and more uplifting type of things.*

Negative Outcomes. A participant shared a desire to keep from harming or offending anyone or themselves from their digital presence.

Participant #5 shared concerns about offending:

> *Is this offensive? Could it be offensive to anyone? Is it a cute puppy or is it like something that's controversial? So I kinda really just try to run through a couple questions like is that appropriate, is that something I would want someone in my family to see, is it controversial, is it going to offend people. I'm really just trying to be mindful of those things. And I think I have a pretty good understanding of what's offensive to people. I mean I know that maybe some of the things I say could still be offensive, but I just try to keep a lot of opinionated posts off of the internet.*

Participant #8 shared concerns about the lasting nature of digital disclosure:

> *So it's a good thing to consider whenever you're writing something that's going to be, you know, potentially there forever, um, in some form or fashion. So, um, yeah, just definitely like took that up a notch to like, could this be anyway, you know, taken wrong and hurt someone or whatever?*

Participant #11 discussed the practical consideration of trouble:

> *I, uh, I-- I've-- I have to ask the question like will this get me in trouble? If somebody sees this-- if somebody sees this, what would they think about me? Uhm, what will my image be if they see that? And there's been a few times I've almost pressed the share post button and I-- oh, wait a minute, let me pull that back cause I don't want the image, uhm, with me. Even though it was funny, I thought it was harmless but, you know.*

> ***Status/Perceptions.*** Participants related sentiments of loss and potential damage to relationships, their status, and reputations.

Participant #2 explained a desire not to tarnish how others perceive her:

> *So I do care about how other people perceive me, so I make sure that I'm trying to put - support something positive. So that no one can say something horribly ugly about it, and then there's proof, [chuckles] you know, of that I did something horribly ugly or something.*

Participant #3 offered concerns about reprimand or loss of employment:

> *For myself? Well, now that I am entering the professional world, pretty much anything that I think it'd get me in trouble, I might me lose the job or just have somebody to look at kinda funny, I wouldn't put that out there.*

Maturity and Growth. The theme of self-awareness encompasses participants identified growth and maturity as they experienced the disclosure and the explosion of the digital world.

Participant #8 explained that like in other areas of her life her consciousness of her online presences has grown too:

> *But definitely, I've increased awareness of what it means, who looks at it. Um. And yeah, just ... I mean, growth in the same way that I've grown in other areas.*

Participant #10 reported an awareness of maturity and growing:

> *Maturity. I mean, like I said, I've always been mature. But the older I get, the more mature you become, the more experiences that you have I feel like, not necessarily for everyone, but for me. So, um, I just feel like growing up is ... Um. And just kind of learning people and how people can be, that it's not good to tell everyone what's going on, every detail of your life.*

Awareness

Participants shared a deep level of awareness as it related to their experiences of disclosure on-line. Awareness is woven very intricately and influences the process of how and what participant share. Much of this developed awareness came from personal or observed negative experiences on-line.

Surroundings and friends. Participants spoke about understanding not only who they were disclosing to but also who might be disclosing about them. Through the medium of social media, participants have experienced disclosure about themselves as well as what they have disclosed.

Participant #7 referring to a college classmate humiliated and shamed after videos of her drunk and dancing at a party shared:

> *You got to watch your surroundings and everything because the more years go on, the more cameras are being out, and more accessible to people and everything like that from ten years ago. So, basically, just kind of watch out for your surroundings and your friends and who is tagging you, because people are always on their phones taking pictures and you might be the next, you know, um, Facebook sensation. It could be negative or positive, you know?*

Participant #11 described being recognizable as an undergrad as raising his awareness:

> *You know, being a college basketball player away from home, really having to be careful who I'm associated with because at any moment, I can be associated with this one person and, you know, we just happened to be talking or whatever and maybe we're someplace we are not supposed to be, and someone sees us or someone posts that we are somewhere… next thing you know we're in some trouble. Because I was with them, I'm in trouble now, and I had no plans or ideas to do whatever it is that got us in trouble, so just to make sure, I'm keeping myself safe from everything.*

Participant #13 shared concerns about who you know online and the power you can give away to those people:

> *You have to be careful and be mindful of whose posting pictures of you and what they're tagging you in because anybody now that is on your friend's list can tag you in a photo that might be inappropriate, it can put you in a bad light, so it's really important to be aware of you know, what your friends are saying about you, what they might be posting about you, posting of you, whether it's true or false.*

Audience. Participants shared an awareness of who may see on-line disclosure and considered family and potential employers as part of their personal barometer about what to share online.

Participant #2 discusses that in not knowing or remembering all of the people in her digital networks she withholds sharing personal information:

> *I don't remember the majority of my Facebook friends. The people who follow me on Instagram. I don't know these people, same thing with Twitter. I mean they are just random people, and I don't know that these random people need to know personal information about me.*

Participant #5 refers to her father as part of her audience:

> *My dad is my Facebook friend, and he's like super nosy, and he likes to peek around on stuff. So if I don't want my dad to see it, I wouldn't post it.*

Participant #9 talks about what is good for some of her audience may not be received well by others who find her postings:

> *If you wouldn't want your grandma to see it, don't post it. You know. Um, and I could be in different context with different people. 'Cause obviously some people are really close to their grandmothers, they might not care what they see. You know, but, you know, I kinda think of it as, if I wouldn't want someone that's hiring me to see it, then I'm not gonna post it. And now, you know it's just crazy how employers and you know, your future boss, and like, anyone can find anything you ever do in Facebook. So, now, I'm just a lot more um, cautious about what I put on it.*

Judgement. Participants acknowledged feelings of judgment and being judged by others from online postings.

Participant #2 described feelings of hurt knowing things about friends she followed:

> *I got tired of hearing people's opinions on Twitter, and was like, "This is too much information, or I wish I did not know that about you," and I found myself having trouble still liking people and wanting to interact and be their friend when I knew that some of thoughts they had were in my opinion, like, offensive. Judging their choices and in some cases unfollowing and blocking them and then avoiding them all together.*

Participant #6 shared her recent experiences from her job after posting in response to the police shootings:

> *I have posted videos in support of 'Black Lives Matter' and you know in support of reforming our justice system and change in our society in general and some people do not view that as a positive. Especially in my workplace…They think you know negatively of those things, and I shouldn't say those things… I work with a lot of white people, and they are conservative, and some of them have changed how they talk to me, and I think it is because of my posts.*

> *Oversharing.* The feeling of too much personal information out to be seen or consumed online was echoed by all participants. There were shared awareness and sensitivity to the idea of oversharing.

Participant #12 described observed behaviors of her online friends:

I have observed some other people disclose way too much information. They are just they

have zero like they are not conscientious of disclosing information to others.

Participant #5 shared her thoughts and what investigation she has done on the issue of

oversharing:

I think people that have an oversharing tendency on Facebook and are not sharing in

their life. And this is just me saying that statement. But I actually read a lot about it, that

people who post more tend to be more narcissistic, and they're not getting their needs met

personally with their interpersonal face-to-face relationships like we're talking now. So

they go to the internet to get that need to fill their ego almost.

Professional and Personal Identities

Participants shared an understanding of professional and personal identities.

Participants articulated attempts at maintaining separation of these identities.

Professional. Participants shared ways in which social media could be tools in their

professional practice.

Advocacy. Many of the participants discussed how their digital platforms could be

used as platforms for advocacy. A place where they could bring others to an awareness of

issues that may be impacting clients but that could have broader community implications.

That the digital world in a natural space for the intersection of personal and professional

identities.

Participant #6 shared that she sees social media as a way to bring awareness to people

about issues of oppression or services that the community and be involved in helping

others:

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I think that it (social media) could be a place for me to advocate for my clients. If my

clients have a particular issue that um… is of social interest and I don't necessarily have

to say you know, "John came into my office today, and he is upset with this. So I am upset

with this, and this is what…" I can put out there, "Hey, this petition is going on." Or,

"Hey, this law is getting ready to be passed." Or, "Hey, this is going on." People that

you live within every day are affected by it you should know about it, and you should read

about it. So I can educate people um… based on issues that my clients are going through

um… and that could be helpful for them because now people are learning about these

problems um… and they are still safe.

*Modeling***.** Three participants of this study were training to be school counselors while three participants training in clinical mental health were working in educational settings with students and families. These six participants mentioned using professional personas on social media as a tool to reach students and families, to observe online behaviors and rhetoric to bullying and other social issues in the school, and to model appropriate ways to share online.

Participant #8 shares her desire to use Facebook as a resource site for parents and students.

I would like to have as a resource, you know, counseling tools and articles on parenting

or whatever a Facebook page for parents and students, a professional page and share

absolutely nothing personal on it. Where I can friend students and parents, keep an eye

on what students are doing and sharing online. Like in the school where I am at so much

drama is started and stirred on social media. I feel like if I could friend my students,

maybe I could stop some of it before it starts. We talk a lot about social media in

classroom guidance and teachers begging for us to remove social media from the

students IPads, every student has a school issued IPad… it is just hard in school.

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Participant #11 discussed how social media was the medium a student used to seek help:

> *Social media has been very helpful and it-- if with stopping, uhm, well, not really*
> *stopping but seeing potential things happen in, uhm, I know I just not wanna-- I worked*
> *as a graduate-- assistant in housing here the last couple of years, and so I worked*
> *primarily with freshmen and it's been a- Yes, but it's a little harsh. They are something*
> *else but it--it was a few occasions where somebody would post some pretty cryptic, pretty*
> *suicidal-ideation-type stuff on Facebook and just because we were on it, and they*
> *disclosed it, we were able to catch it, and you know talk them out, give to them to the*
> *resource and counseling center or things like that so I--I it can very helpful.*

Personal. Participants discussed reasons for personal engagement in social media platforms.

Connection. Participants all describe connection to people as draws to and reasons for social media. The connection they describe is passive in that this connection is limited to what they see and infer not from personal interaction.

Participant #1 describes keeping contact too far away friends and family:

> *I get to, you know, keep contact with friends that have moved away in different states,*
> *families that live farther away umm, so places to see like pictures and things like that.*

Participant #5 describes initially connection with people in her everyday life and further shares how that has changed to include people she no longer sees regularly:

> *It seemed kinda silly at the time cause we're all in the same room like, "Oh, I'm gonna*
> *be your friend, but I'm five feet away." I was kinda like hmm, this is not gonna catch on.*
> *But it did and the longer I had it, the more I was able to connect with people that were no*

longer physically part of my life but people I still wanted to keep up with. So for me,

continuing to follow what my friends were doing if I couldn't talk to them every day,

family members, people that live farther away. I have a lot of cousins that live across the

country. I love to see what they're up to but I don't call them every day. So for me, it was

more of that. Just to be able to keep up with people that I knew personally.

Participant #13 was the only participant the mentioned social media as an active communication tool:

I joined as a way to stay connected to those people to reach out and to have a way to stay

in touch.

Participants also agree that with so much connection there is also a complication. Participant #8 shares:

Well just making relationships, in general friendships and romantic relationships, just

more difficult. There is too much of us (gesturing all of us) *online.*

Peer pressure. Participants describe varying levels of peer pressure to join or start using social media. All the participants came to social media at a time in their lives, mid-to-late teens, when inclusion and acceptance by peers were important.

Participant #2 describes feeling left out:

Honestly, I felt left out, because, um, my first social media experience was Facebook, and

I had friends, I had friends on the East Coast, whose schools were already on Facebook,

and my school wasn't.

Participant #4 was very matter of fact in following what others were doing:

I was younger, so everyone was doing it, so why not.

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Participant #11 describes succumbing to his peers and joining social media:

>*I was the only one that did not have it. I didn't really care too much about but, you know, my teammates and everybody, "Oh, you need to get in, need to get it." "It's, you know, you talk to people, you talk to a few back home, easier without having to be on the phone, texting or calling" and things like that, so I started there.*

Curiosity. The phenomenon of social media sparked in participants' curiosity of what it was about and what friends and family were doing.

Participant #4 shares how she uses social media to feed her desire to know the happenings in others' lives:

>*Probably curiosity of what my friends and family are up to is why I mainly keep up my Facebook and Instagram. I can stay informed about them, and they can keep up with me.*

Participant #9 owns her nosiness and to just see what is happening:

>*I just kinda get on it these days to be nosy. See who's doing what with who. Who's having a baby, whose life is chaos? Some people put everything out there.*

The shared curiosity is not limited to friends and family; participants admitted that the knowledge of available information through social media sparks curiosity in their clients and students.

Participant #4 describes later about searching for her clients:

>*I have Facebook searched my clients before. To see... Because, like I get curious about something. Like, I wonder what her Facebook looks like. And they're public, and you can see everything. I was questioning things one of my clients*

said to me, I didn't feel like she was telling me the truth or the whole story. So I

looked her up.

Participant #7 shares searching for a student's parents:

I have looked up my students' parents before. Like when I feel like there is shade

in what they (student) *is describing to me, I will look up like Mom or something*

on Facebook to see like what might be going on. I don't want to get my student in

trouble for telling tales, but if there is something going on, I want to know and

maybe help.

Information Silo. Participants described their current use of social media beyond connection to family and friends, but also a means of keeping up with news and current events. Social media platforms, but specifically Facebook have become places where participants can go and filter for themselves information.

Participant #6 describes using social media as a means of collecting information for consumption:

I also use it to keep up with what is going on in the world. Basically, I feel like the news

is biased a lot of times. You know you have this network provides this and this network

who provides that, and the people who work there are limited to what they can say, and

social media is like you get raw emotion as it is happening and it is unedited, and I would

you know rather get it there and make my own opinions rather than have it on TV and

someone has already formulated the opinion and are probably trying to persuade me to

that opinion.

Participant #12 shares how social media allows her to control what she sees:

I do have Pinterest, and I use that for everything. I use that sort of like just reading

magazines. I can pick and choose who I follow and what I see. Even on other sites like

Facebook. I can control what information I get, by who I like and follow.

Promotion. The subtheme of promotion emerged as participants describe

additional reasons for maintaining presence on social media platforms.

Participant #5 discloses her commercial use of social media:

I also am an artist, so I sell my artwork, and I use social media separately from my

personal page to sell my artwork. So that adds another dimension to all of this to me. So

now I feel like that aspect for me is somewhat promotional so I use that to showcase what

my artwork is doing. And so I have that separately totally from my personal page as well.

So I have kind of dual use.

Participant #7 describes using social media to reach out to new populations to promote his non-

profit and summer camp:

I got on Facebook last summer; I had opened up my own summer camp. A non-profit

organization, and then that (Facebook) *really helped me reach out to the parents, reach*

out to new populations to let them know I have a camp going.

Participant #8 uses social media as a means to journal/encourage/solicit encouragement in

marathon training.

I should totally use an Instagram account just for my running journey. So I created it.

And every day that I run, I have an app that tells me how far I go, how ... You know,

whatever. And I have been documenting my journey. And it puts on there all of my stats.

So hashtag [marathon training method]*, click it. And everybody else who's using it and*

hashtagging it are right there too, which I've never used Instagram in this way. I've never

even used hashtags in it like for any purpose other than just like joking kind of little thing

at the end. So that allowed me to meet people who were experiencing ... I mean, I met a

girl who's training for the same race. She's training, using the same plan, and we're on

the same day. You know? So every day, we do the same workout, and we share what

that's like for each other. You know? When my workouts are really crappy, she

encourages me. When she also works-out, I'm like, oh my gosh, you're inspiring me. This

is awesome. Like, I can do it if you can do it kind of. So that community that enabled to

come out of that gave me support that I just wouldn't have otherwise.

Boundaries. Participants noted that through experiences online, they had created

personal boundaries that help them rise above negatives to online postings.

Participant #13 describes boundary development this way:

> *What influences that is I, I see with my own experience with the social media; I'd see the*
>
> *effects of from people that share what I consider to be too much information. And for me,*
>
> *what created that I guess you know, the boundary was that there certain people that I*
>
> *interact with on social media that I, to be honest, I don't want them knowing that about*
>
> *me.*

Participants who work in schools, educational environment or who work with

children, especially addressed the challenge and sometimes feelings of 'push back' from

parents when participants deny requests from parents out of a need to maintain a

professional boundary.

Participant #7

> *I coach kids and work at a school, and I have had Mom's like want to friend me on*
>
> *Facebook, like my personal page… Uhm, I'm like uh no, and then they like "why you*

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don't wanna be friends?" and like "What you hiding?" and it is like I am not hiding

anything, I just want some space between us… like I just want us to have this like

professional relationship.

Participant #8

I have had parents reach out to me on social media, and I just direct them to my email

address and office number. And if they try and Friend me or follow me, I just ignore it.

But my privacy settings are pretty tight, but I did figure out that if I list my school as

where I work, I will pop-up in the 'people you may know' section of Facebook, so I

disassociated myself from my school and I don't even follow my school on social media

anymore. I don't want parents or students to think I am not available; I just want space

between counselor me and personal me.

Guidance

Participants discussed the guidance from faculty and professionals in the field for considering disclosure and the consequences of digital presence.

Curriculum. All participants talked about the void in their curriculum as it relates to online disclosure and social media.

Participant #3 reflected on her experience:

None of the classes I took. And not as much as professors touched on it more, but uhm, I

don't really recall it being a big case. It would be a good idea to talk about it. It would be

'cause I don't, I don't, I don't know if it's happening and I'm just missing them, uhm, but

it would be good for, you know, to be a core of everywhere. Even if it's just like a

conversation that the teacher brings up, it's not really part of our curriculum.

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Participant #4 sounded frustrated in sharing her concerns:

> *You know, social media isn't even brought up in school, in our curriculum at least. Which is troublesome in a way because of how prevalent social media is, especially if we wanna be counseling adolescents, or young adults or teenagers. Teenagers are on social media all the time; my little cousin is way more proficient at like Snapchat and Facebook than I am… there is no telling what clients might find.*

Participant #9 described a conversation that was more tangent than instruction:

> *Like one of my professors is like, "Don't like stuff on Facebook?" She was like, you know, don't disclose anything. Don't say your personal opinion. Don't, don't post anything. Because anything you do, can have association with anything. She was like, I mean, she even said, "I wouldn't even like someone. I wouldn't even like something." But you know it was like ten minutes in a skills class, it wasn't in Ethics, and it hasn't come up in Internship. Like, is it even mentioned in the Code of Ethics?*

Participant #12 explained that students are at the mercy of their faculty in what is covered and discussed and what is not. She identified a potential disconnect between older and younger faculty:

> *I think that what we discuss in ethics depends on the professor's, because, you know, you have some professors who are pretty old school, um, who probably don't care about that they don't have knowledge of social media. But then we've got younger professors who use social media every day. I mean, I had 1 professor put her Facebook in class to show us the funny video her friend shared, um, in this program and she's a fabulous professor but she, you know, she's very aware of social media. Um, but then the one that taught my*

ethics class he probably would not have... even thought about that as being, you know, a

part of, a part of like confidentiality, and this self-disclosure things like that.

Supervision. All participants were in some field placement or experiential learning environment at the time of their interview. All of them, in addition to their faculty, had site supervisors and other professionals who were in position to offer guidance and counsel as it related to their digital presence.

Participant #1 shares that in her site, a hospital setting, they have clear rules and those rules were part of her orientation:

> *In my orientation we were told, like it is a rule, you are not supposed to share any*
>
> *contact information with patient, or to friend a patient in the social media. But they are*
>
> *teenagers (patients). They don't listen. So, when the patients go home, and they friend*
>
> *me, you know, I just ignore it, they aren't patients anymore, but it is just gray so, I*
>
> *ignore.*

Participant #5 discussed an experience with a coworker who violated the written policy:

> *The policy was pretty clear like it said, 'All interaction between agency staff and*
>
> *clients on any non-agency digital medium is strictly prohibited." And what it*
>
> *meant was email… you can email using your agency email, but that is it… no*
>
> *texting, no Facebook, no social media. Period. So the new girl, and she is the*
>
> *reason I no longer 'friend' anyone I work with, is going along and I notice on*
>
> *Facebook that a picture I commented on had comments from current clients in*
>
> *our agency. Current clients! So the next day at work, I pull her aside, I and just*
>
> *think that her profile is public and anyone can see, and I just tell her like the*

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policy and that she need to lock up her profile, like with the privacy and security

settings. And she is like "ok," so a few days later I start getting "Friend"

requests from clients and when they come in for like there weighing and stuff, I

tell them that I can't like it is against policy. And they start telling me that my co-

worker friended them, so they thought it was ok. I went back to my coworker and

said, you know, 'look you gotta stop this, or I am going to the supervisor.' I did

end up going to my boss, and the co-worker did not stay very long after that, but it

was like a month before friend requests stopped. I think part of the problem was

that, yes we had a policy, but I had to find it, it was not like my boss said 'Oh

here, don't friend our clients', I am really sure that until me no one had talked to

my coworker about the policy.

Participant #13 describes his lack of awareness about policy and how after he had an

issue no written policy has been introduced:

As far as I'm aware, there is no written policy in my agency. And you know, I

have gotten requests on Facebook from clients who have found me and I went to

my supervisor and he said you know, don't respond and then bring it up in session

and say, "I see that you've added me on Facebook and although I'm flattered and

honored that you did so, I wanted to be understood that this is considered a professional

relationship and I can't, I ethically can't accept." And that worked out really well,

but you know we have had new people start and new interns come in, I have been

there three months now, and I still have not seen a policy or heard a conversation

about this in staff meetings. Our agency works with a lot of adolescents; I can't be

the only one this has happened too?

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Client 'Friending.' All of the participants admitted to having experienced at one time or another a friend request from a client, student or student's parent. The participants shared how they handled these requests even in the absence of guidance.

Participant #2 shares that she ignores the requests:

> *Like I have hundreds of requests from my students, and I just ignore it, like I don't accept or reject. And I don't bring it up to them, and if they ask me, I just lie and say I am not on Facebook or Instagram that much and haven't seen it. We don't have a policy, and when I started teaching there, everybody gave me different answers when I asked what I should do. Some people were like, accept if you want to accept, and others were like 'you should shut down your Facebook,' so I just started ignoring the requests.*

Participant #9 shares how her students want to be her friend and even though she has been given no specific policy she handles it this way:

> *I deal with this quite a bit. And it kind of sucks a little bit because I have to make all myself private, or as private as I can get it. Um, I coach um, like 13-14v year old, and they, want to be my friend on Instagram and Facebook, and everything so bad. The club that I coach for like they don't have a specific policy or rule, but I just feel like, you know, it is just not appropriate. So, I just tell them when they friend me, that it is just too much and I want to just be coach and student, I keep it light, but I just have like a one-on-one conversation with them.*

4.5 Summary

The researcher came to this research with the purpose of capturing the lived experience of counseling students' real world disclosure and digital world disclosure and also exploring the reasoning process of counseling students' disclosure in the phenomenon of social media and to investigate the ethos influences applied to counselor self-disclosure and counseling students' ability to discern appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure. The researcher sought to answer theses research questions:

1) What are counseling students lived experiences of self-disclosure in the digital age?
2) What is the reasoning process of digital natives enrolled in counseling programs in distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure?

The exposure of the lived experience of these participants will contribute to dialog and discussion for Counselor Educators and Supervisors as it related to guiding counseling students and new professionals in navigating personal and professional digital personas and presence. The discussion of the results and implications will continue in detail in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasoning process of counseling

students' disclosure in the phenomenon of social media. This study was an investigation

of ethos influences applied to counselor self-disclosure and counseling students' ability to

discern appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure. The study was intended to explore

lived experiences of counseling students who are translating what might have been

described to them as real world disclosure issues to digital world disclosure.

The two research questions the researcher sought to answer are:

1) What are counseling students lived experiences of self-disclosure in the digital
   age?
2) What is the reasoning process of digital natives enrolled in counseling
   programs in distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure?

The researcher utilized a phenomenological inquiry conducted in-depth interviews

with thirteen participants. Participants were recruited from pre-identifies CACREP

programs in the southern mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The researcher

conducted individual semi-structured interviews that resulted in ten hours and forty

minutes of recorded data and one hundred ten pages of transcribed data. This chapter is

discussion of the researcher's findings. This chapter is organized to begin the

interpretations of the researcher's findings, continuing on to the implications of this study, and the recommendations for further study. Discussion of the limitations precedes the researcher's reflections and conclusion.

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

Through the analysis process, transcribed interview data was coded and assigned specific text from participants' responses that captured the essences of the experiences of participants. The codes were organized into clusters of commonality and themes. The theme groups, from those theme groups master themes emerged. The current inquiry found that the master themes of disclosure, considerations, and influences of disclosure, awareness, personal and professional identities, and guidance, emerged as commonalities in the described experiences of participants. These experiences have affected the process participants use to determine appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure. This section reviews the themes in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Disclosure

Disclosure was a construct of the study and investigated by asking participants to explore their experiences and meanings of disclosure. As a master theme, disclosure emerged from the clustering of codes to the subthemes of definition, in-person disclosure, and on-line disclosure. Participants discussed disclosure in two forums, in-person and online. They also shared controlling what and to whom they disclose in both forums, and recognized the greatest control in the disclosure process in the in-person contact. Participants revealed that what they share in-person is in many ways very different than what they share online. The participants of this study cited the intimacy of the

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relationships, confidentiality, and personal congruence as components to their in-person disclosure. Participants shared that in their online disclosure they significantly edited and their postings are congruent to only a part of who they are, on a whole the post are incongruent with the experiences of their daily lives.

Definition. Participants in this study reflected their definitions and meaning of disclosure. Participants were asked to define for themselves 'disclosure' and then asked in a follow-up if that definition changes with the environment in which they are disclosing. Participant's defined disclosure as information voluntarily shared from one individual to others. Participants articulated that the definition of disclosure does not change with the environment, rather the content disclosed changes with environment and the context of the relationship to the person(s) disclosed. Barnett's (2011) identified this type of disclosure as deliberate, noting that there is intentionality behind disclosed information and preparedness for the consequences and reactions of how the information is received and disseminated beyond the intended audience.

Participants did not show knowledge of Barnett's two other categories of disclosure unavoidable and accidental (2011). Lack of demonstrated knowledge suggests an incomplete understanding of all dimensions of disclosure. Unavoidable and accidental disclosures are both elements of disclosure offered for reaction, interpretation, and redistribution. Failure to acknowledge the risk of involuntary disclosure and the reactions from audiences are consequences to impaired therapeutic relationships.

In-Person Disclosure. In their in-person disclosure, participants demonstrate a complete understanding of their personal and professional roles as the giver and receiver of

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information. Participants demonstrated confidence in the intention and consideration of the consequences of disclosure in controlled environments and gave credit to this confidence to training as counselors. Through training in skills and ethics, counseling students are taught the value and the consequences of counselor disclosure in the counseling relationship (Gibson, 2012). Participants all related that in-person interpersonal relationships were where they found support when they disclosed. In this study participant associated the following with their experience and understanding of in-person disclosure: connection and intimacy, confidentiality, and congruency.

Connection and Intimacy. Participants share that the greater the feelings of trust and safety shared with the person they disclose to, the higher the sensitivity of intimate and personal information they share, and the greater the confidence that what they disclose will remain confidential. What contributes to those feelings of trust and safety is the reciprocity of personal and intimate disclosure from the individual's participants disclose. Participants' reflections on the feelings of trust and safety and the reciprocity of shared information echoes the findings of Hanson (2005) who shared that clients develop feelings of trust and safety when counselors disclose to them in the building of the therapeutic relationship. The literature also discusses the intimacy of the relationship between the counselor and client. Audet and Everall (2010) discussed that clients had confidence in the connection and closeness of the therapeutic relationship and counselor when counselors disclosed in session. Participant clients' shared with counselor disclosure the therapeutic relationship began to feel intimate.

Confidentiality. Regardless of the environment or medium once information is shared it is available to anyone who the recipient discloses. Therefore it is incumbent on

the personal ethics of the individual confided in to keep this confidence. In counseling, we identify this as confidentiality and give ethical guidance in how we treat the information we receive as counselors. Participants seem to understand in both their professional and personal identities the responsibility of keeping information shared with them confidential. Participant three explained that for her, disclosure is often personal and has some connotations to confidentiality.

A disconnect exists for participants' understanding of confidentiality with their admission to sharing experiences and feelings of friends and clients with others while maintaining identifiable information to themselves. Harris and Kurpius (2014) reported that counseling students endorsed sharing of experiences, thoughts, and feelings, of unidentified clients to others outside the therapeutic relationship. The dissemination of any received information outside of the intended audience or clinical team without real consideration and intent shows immaturity of ethical judgment about all disclosure.

Congruence. Related to, and a reflection of, the control participants feel in their in-person disclosure is congruence of what they disclose to who they are. Participants discussed that they were much more likely to be authentic and congruent to themselves in their in-person disclosure, rather than in their online disclosure. Specifically, participants were much more likely to disclose personal tragedy, fear, anxiety, or having a bad day in person, rather than to disclose such negative personal information online. The literature supports the significance of the feelings of authenticity and relatability of disclosure in fostering strong connection within the therapeutic relationship (Audett & Everall, 2010; Hanson 2005; Knox and Hill, 2003). It is not a distant leap to accept that congruence in disclosure in any relationship thus fosters strength and feelings of safety and trust.

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Online Disclosure. Some participants struggled with and came to consciousness that disclosure online was disclosure. The literature categorizes online disclosure as transparency or visibility, all information available to clients about therapists, regardless of how or where it is acquired outside the therapeutic relationship (Helbrok, 2003; Zur et al., 2009). However it is labeled the literature agrees that online platforms are public spaces and that information shared by the counselor or about the counselor is no longer under any control after it is disseminated online (Levahot, 2009; Levahot et al., 2010; Zur et al., 2009).

Participants admitted to having not thought about what they posted online as disclosure, took ownership of their lack of awareness, and in this new awareness considered personal actions they needed to take to be more private online. This new awareness suggests that while they may engage in some privacy settings they do not practice consistent management of these settings on all digital platforms. Lehavot et al. (2010) found similar behaviors in participants in their study about graduate student engagement in social media. In Lehavot et al.'s study, participants' limited access to information available to unknown audiences and using pseudonyms as means to maintain privacy. In the current study participants share only using privacy controls available to them from the digital platforms used, while one participant admitted to using no privacy controls. Participants have connected lack of control and incongruence to their experience of online disclosure.

Lack of Control. Experience has taught participants of this current study that they do not enjoy the intimacy and security of trust when they disclose online. The internet is a public place, (Lehavot, 2009; Tiereny, 2013) and as such, there is no control over how

information is received or disseminated once shared. Participants of the current study

discussed awareness and knowledge of the lack of control and context of information

shared online. Participant five shared her experience when she posted something online

in anger and the hardship her posting put on a specific relationship when it came to light

through a third party. Participant twelve discussed the assumed context observed of

posting online. Lack of control emerged from all participants' acknowledgment that

experiences of online disclosure like these directly influenced their online posting habits.

    Incongruence. In concession for the lack of control and the lack of feelings of

trust and safety in the digital environment, participants acknowledge editing their daily

lived experiences to only the most positive and sharing that edited identity online.

Participants shared how they edited or selectively withheld aspects of their everyday

experience to ensure that only their most positive persona viewed. For many of them, this

editing was in respect to personal and or professional boundaries or not wanting to

divulge too much information or overshare, and for some, it was a desire to be seen as a

source of positivity and inspiration. Participant two described a desire to combat the

amount of negativity she saw online. Incongruence emerged as all participants discussed

that the carefully selected and edited parts of themselves that they shared online was

incongruent to their real lived experiences. The literature describes that disclosure

received as inauthentic or disingenuous creates feelings of disconnect and lack of

understanding to the experiences of the client within the therapeutic relationship (Audett

& Everall, 2010; Hanson 2005; Knox & Hill, 2003). Participants in this current study did

not share concern or awareness of the potential for feelings of disconnect from their

online audience, or the potential harm to the therapeutic relationship if clients should find participants online identities.

Considerations and Influences of Disclosure

In counseling and other helping professions, students are taught to create relationships of trust and safety for clients and to have confidence in disclosing. In part how we achieve these feelings of trust and safety is to disclose, information about ourselves sparingly and with intention to our client's. The purpose of this disclosure may be to normalize a client's experience or feelings and create alliance and to connection with the client. While there is no consistent definition of appropriate or helpful disclosure (Henretty & Levitt, 2010), counseling students are guided in the ambiguity of disclosure with skills and ethics training and exposure to ethical codes (Gibson, 2012). Counselors anchor feelings of safety and security for client disclosure in the rules that govern confidentiality and openly share those rules with clients. Students are taught how to use disclosure as a tool for learning how to consider how that disclosure could be received and reacted on and the consequences of those reactions on the therapeutic relationship (Carew, 2009). In the current study, the discussion of disclosure is predominate of disclosure in participants' personal lives with some connection to their burgeoning professional identities. What emerged from the interviews was the decision process itself, influences to the decision process, and considerations of consequences of disclosures online.

Process. Measuring the decision-making process has been difficult for researchers, it is not a linear process with clear steps; it is intuitive, and conscious logical debate (Dufrene

& Glossoff, 2004; Kuntze et al., 2002). Ambiguity, contradictory language, and sometimes silence in ethical codes contribute to the angst of counseling students in developing a consistent approach to ethical decision making in the face of ethical issues (Ametrano, 2014; Bradley & Hendricks, 2008). In the current study participants did not articulate a decision-making process, rather their discussion centered on outcomes.

Participants do not demonstrate knowledge of ethical codes, required in the first level of integrating right and wrong with knowledge of the governing ethical codes Kitchener's 1984 principles model of ethical decision making. In the second level of Kitchener's model the ideas that counselors do not engage in harm, contribute to client health, respect freedom and choice, are fair, and faithful to the client relationship. Participants in the current study did not articulate consideration of clients or students having access to online disclosure, and so clients are not a consideration in their decisions about what to post online. The last phase of Kitchener's model is the overall balance of good over evil. In this phase, there is some overlap to the process of participants but only in so much as their considerations stop in what is good for them and their relationships online. When voids in ethical knowledge exist, individuals fall back on intuitive moral reasoning (Robson et al., 2000).

Influences. The major influences on the disclosure of counseling students in this study are self-growth and maturity, participants' boundaries to prevent over-sharing, considerations of harm to themselves and their online 'friends' or audience, and how they are perceived by known unknown audience, specifically employers. Participants shared that the volume and intimacy of information they share online has reduced with age and growth. Osman, Wardle, and Caesar, (2012) found that the more advanced in training and

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professional development the individual the less engaged in social media and the less likely they were to post personal information.

Considerations of consequences. Participants shared consideration of the reception of information shared, specifically will the posting offend someone, is it hurtful to anyone, will it damage the status of the participant, and could it be the cause for termination or not employing them. These considerations are to limit harm and damage to the participants themselves and their online 'friends' and to control for how they are perceived by the known unknown others, specifically employers, who may discover their online identity. These limited considerations demonstrate a false sense of control of the audience who has access to the online identities of participants. In disclosure on digital platforms, the participants' have an incomplete understanding of ethical practices as evidenced by their lack of awareness of clients and students as part of the unknown audience to digital disclosure.

Awareness

Participants in this study showed high levels of awareness. In their in-person disclosure, participants articulated high awareness of their needs and the needs of others in the acts of disclosure. Participants offered awareness in the intention and of ethical responsibilities as givers and receivers of information. Participants shared significant awareness in understanding their surroundings, audiences, and feelings of judgment. The literature supports awareness as an important element in the ethical practice of counselors (Anderson & Guyton, 2012; de las Fuentes et al., 2005).

Surroundings. Experience in the digital world has created heightened awareness in participants' in their surroundings and friends, both in-person and online. The literature discussed the awareness of counselors in special environments such as rural communities and college campuses (Birky & Collins, 2011; Gonyea et al., 2004; Schank & Skovholt, 1997). These studies specified the need for counselors to practice and engage in their environments with awareness and intention to avoid ethical conflicts. While participants in the current study do not articulate feelings of risk in public, they do articulate that almost everyone in their surroundings has a camera and immediate accesses to some social media platform. Slips in behavior or disclosure that could be deemed by anyone as offensive, or have negative consequences for the participant, could be available for consumption not by participants' own disclosure, but by others' disclosure in any medium. Participants do not control for this in their daily lives beyond being aware, by being on guard in public places, and by being vigilant in the screening of the company and friends they keep.

However, even in this vigilance, participants are not completely vigilant in online networks. Some participants admitted to having online 'friends' that they do not remember how or when they met. Participants heightened sense of awareness of their surroundings and friends brings further attention to the lack of awareness of the consequences of their disclosure online. Participants have an awareness of an unknown audience, an audience that may see their digital personas and whose reaction to the digital presence may have consequences. Participants do not include clients and students in the unknown audience. Not accounting for the potential of clients and students discovering digital personas demonstrates limitations of awareness of the known unknown audience.

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Audience. In the discussion of disclosure, participants demonstrate understanding of the different audiences that they disclose to in-person and online. In-person they articulated a hierarchy of relationships that accounted for how participants determined the level of personal disclosure they would offer. Audience or online 'friends' play a significant role in the considerations of what participants choose to disclose online. Participants shared consideration of the reception of information shared, specifically will the posting offend someone, is it hurtful to anyone, will it damage the status of the participant, and could it be the cause for termination or not employing them. These considerations are to limit harm and damage to the participants themselves and their online 'friends' and to control for how they are perceived by the known unknown others, specifically employers, who may inadvertently discover their online identity.

Clients and students are not part of the known unknown audience participants account for in their online disclosure. Participants' awareness has not transcended from their personal person to continuation in professional person. Part of this limited awareness of consequences of clients as the known unknown audience, is the false sense of security participants feel by engaging privacy and security settings online and the belief that in using security settings they have control of disclosed information. Participants do not account for their online 'friends' and audiences ability to disclose about them in the digital media too or trust that their online 'friends' and audience have similar values of appropriate and inappropriate disclosure.

Feelings of Judgement. Participants reported feelings of judgment. Judgment, as described by the participants, is negative reception of information shared. They expressed awareness of feelings of being judged by their postings and feelings of judgment towards

their online 'friends' and audiences for observed posts and oversharing tendencies. Participants express awareness that part of the judgment they feel and impose is directly related to the inability to control how information received in the digital world. With interpersonal disclosure, participants articulate that relationship intimacy, context, and vocal inflection, can all impact the reception of information in addition to the level of trust in the individual disclosed. In the digital environment, context is assumed and interpreted by the recipient. To control for judgment, participants engage privacy settings, edit the number and content of posts, and consider harm and reception of information for themselves and known and unknown audiences.

Professional and Personal Identities

Participants discussed awareness in themselves of professional and personal identities. As burgeoning professionals, they discussed developing individual practices of demonstrating professional competence and professional identity. Participants expressed understanding of how they present themselves as professionals' in-person and some awareness of how they present themselves as professionals online. Participants spoke of their professional and personal identities online. Behnke (2008) discussed that social media was contributing to the "narrowing of personal and professional lives" as social media was changing how society experienced private and public. Social media is a public space an individual enters while simultaneously remaining in the security of their private lives (Behnke, 2008; Giffords, 2009; Lannin & Scott, 2013). Participants in the current study discussed the tool and resource social media could be for professional counselors, the personal ways they use and engage with social media, and the boundaries they create to protect their professional and personal identities.

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Professional. Participants identify two specific ways social media could be used as a tool for professional counselors, advocacy, and modeling. Most participants identified ways that their digital presence had been used or could be used to promote awareness of issues affecting clients, students, and marginalized populations to participants' online 'friends' and audience. Participants shared that the size of their online audience and the speed in which information can be delivered through social media and digital technologies are important factors in the viability of social media as a tool for advocacy. Participants training to be school counselors or who had experience in educational settings discussed developing a professional social media presence. These participants identify this as a space for students, parents, and colleagues, to find resources and for these counselors to have opportunity model appropriate online behavior and observed the online behaviors of students for signs of bullying, abuse, or isolation among students.

Belief that there are appropriate professional opportunities to use the digital presence further highlights the lack of consciousness of the participants in the consequences of blurring the personal and professional identities online. While establishing a professional online presence is approved by the ACA Code of Ethics, it is still creating a space where an incomplete persona of the counselor is available for review and there are still unintended consequences to how that information is received. Disclosing on digital platforms for professionally identified intent must be done with high levels of awareness and with articulated policy.

Personal. All participants spoke about their use and experience of social media on a personal level. All participants spoke of feelings of peer pressure when they first joined social media platforms. Participants shared that when they were younger the need to be

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"in" included inclusion in social media and to follow the posting habits of peers. In personal growth and maturity, participants expressed that their posting habits have changed in volume and content. Osman et al. (2012) discussed similar findings, participants in their study shared that the greater the feeling of maturity and the higher the education and training their participants had the less engaged participants were in social media. Researchers in Osman's study defined engagement as a number of individuals' personal posts. Most participants shared that they still use and see social media as a means to remain connected to friends and family. While some participants acknowledged that connection was a reason to stay engaged on social media, they described it as a false connection in recognition of the inauthentic way they portrayed themselves online, and the belief that others in theses participants social network did the same. No literature reviewed for the current study explored counseling students' feelings of pressure to join or connection to others on social media.

Curiosity. Participants shared that part of the enjoyment they have of social media is the easy access to information shared by friends and family, and the appeasement of their curiosity about the lives of friends and family. Some participants admitted to using the internet and social media to look up client and student information. Participants who engaged in this behavior did so, out of curiosity, to find clarity in situations described by clients or students, and to determine the truthfulness of a client in their disclosure. Research by DiLillo and Gale (2011) found similar behaviors. An acknowledgment from participants of the ethical acceptability of such searches for client information, and not sharing such searches with clients. Participants in the current study admitted to having a lack of knowledge about the ethics and the violation of client and student privacy by

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searching for client or student information online. Lehavot et al. (2010) reported similar findings in research on psychology graduate students' engagement and behavior in social media. Researchers reported that almost a third of their participants engaged in client searches through digital mediums and did so without concern for consequences of violation to client privacy. Lehavot's team called this behavior automatic and described the lack of awareness as symptomatic of having grown up with the internet as a part of their everyday life.

The participants in this current study demonstrated awareness of information about clients online but had not previously made the connection to the same availability of information about themselves online. When confronted about client or student curiosity about the counselor, many participants verbalized a new awareness and admitted to having never considered the volume of information about themselves as disclosure, the availability of information to clients online, or considering what they would do if confronted by a client with information acquired from online platforms. Many participants had believed that they had controlled for such instances in the utilizing of security and privacy measures to protect the boundary of their online identity. Similar to respondents in Levahot's (2010) research, participants in the current study acknowledged that implementation of privacy and security settings was acknowledgment that some information shared online was not appropriate for specific populations including, clients and students.

Information silos and promotion. Participants shared that their use of social media had evolved as space to collect and promote information on causes close to them personally or business opportunities participants were actively a part of, and events.

Participants discussed these information silos as being created through their personal behaviors online. Pulling from regularly visited sites and tailoring information collected to participants likes and promotion through sharing, information on social media platforms had become personalized to the participants and reflected participants' values and beliefs. Literature reviewed for the current study did not address engagement in social media in this manner.

Participants do not demonstrate knowledge or awareness that in publishing commentary online there is the potential for conflict and harm to clients. Whether value judgment is present or not, in the redistribution of information, clients, and students have an opportunity to see counselor values or assume perceived values on information shared. Participants exhibit naiveté in believing that the engagement of privacy and security features on social media will be an adequate boundary to protect against clients and students accessing information about counselors available online. This furthers the findings of the disconnect of participants awareness of the consequences of information they promote or disseminate through sharing behaviors online for public consumption.

Boundaries. Participants discussed creating and maintaining boundaries between their personal and professional identities. Literature reviewed discussed the complexity of these boundaries, but also the importance of boundaries for ethical practice for counselors. Birky and Collins (2011) reminded mental health professionals that the mantle of 'counselor' transcends the professional sphere into the private or personal sphere, regardless of the environment. The counselor is observed as a counselor first and as a person second by clients and members of the community they serve.

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Participants of the current study talked about personal boundaries created to guard against sharing too personal or intimate information online. They reported boundaries that help guard against too much information being available online and even offer consistency in the enforcement of boundaries. Participants believed that the implementation of these boundaries and privacy features impose control of the availability of information in an environment where there actually is no control for any user. There is not control in the digital environment because you cannot limit the rebroadcast of information or the reaction to that information.

Guidance

Guidance emerged as a master theme in this current study from the clustering of themes and codes from participants' discussions on disclosure on digital platforms. Participants shared a void in their educational experience and a lack of consistency in their experiential learning sites. Burkholder and Burkholder (2014) reported in a study investigating the attributes of counseling students who engaged in unethical behavior, findings into two categories, attribution, and prevention. Researchers noted that counselor educator participants attributed unethical behavior to poor ethical training and advisement. Prevention of unethical behavior, as reported by the counselor educator participants, was directly related to pedagogical and program design. Lack of knowledge or clearly-defined guidelines within ethical codes does not absolve counselors from the consequences of ethical violations (Bradley & Hendricks, 2008). Ultimately the responsibility of knowledge falls to the counselor educator and practicum/internship supervisor in their capacity as gatekeepers to the profession of counseling.

Curriculum. All participants shared a lack of exploration of ethical issues related to personal digital presences of counselors online. A participant articulated it best by describing how what is included in counseling ethics instruction is at the discretion of faculty in the classroom. Faculty, who are digital immigrants, may have limited awareness of the consequences of disclosure on digital platforms and may not include ethical considerations of online behavior and disclosure in ethical discussions. Faculty who are digital transplants may be more aware and familiar with digital platforms of disclosure and might be more inclined to include ethical considerations of online behavior and disclosure in ethical discussions. Several participants shared feelings of insecurity and knowledge that there was much about ethical behavior that they knew they did not know, including a lack of knowledge in specific direction for virtual presence in the ACA code of ethics.

Osman et al. (2012) reported that participants looked to governing bodies, faculty, and senior professionals for guidance and assistance in the development of professional judgment and ethical behavior in areas that seem outside the professional sphere but have the potential for consequences in the professional sphere. Osman et al. also provided support to the identified disconnect between faculty, counselor supervisors, and students, and the need for conversations related to professionalism and ethical behavior in the digital world. Anderson and Guyton (2013) reported that 70% of their participants agreed with concerns of professional and ethical ramification of digital presence for counselors. As a quantitative study, which did not explore participants' reasoning or explanations, Anderson and Guyton did not have opportunity for participants to articulate what the professional and ethical ramifications were.

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Supervision and Consultation. What participants have experienced at their sites is a lack of consistency in articulated direction and policy as it relates to online concerns. Specifically, when clients seek to use social media as a means to communicate with counseling students or friend counseling students either during the therapeutic relationship or after the conclusion of the therapeutic relationship. Participants described having to seek out policy of their sites or in instances where no written policy was available to seek guidance from their site supervisor on how to address these issues. Even after these instances arose, participants in sites with no written policy reported having no knowledge of policy written and shared across the agency, or in instances where policy was available no conversation in staff meetings to remind all counselors of the policy. This void and inconsistency in their education and in their experiential learning sites may have contributed to this stunted awareness of consequences in disclosure in digital mediums.

Client and Student 'Friending.' Most of the participants in the current study reported experiences of contact with clients and students through digital mediums. A participant acknowledged that even with privacy and security setting in place, clients found him online because of his online association with the agency of his internship and online involvement with organizations that support the population he worked within the agency. In all instances of this contact, participants sought guidance from site supervisors on best practices to address the situation. The literature reviewed for the current study discussed the prevalence of these instances is occurring. Tunic et al. (2011) reported that 25% of participants reported clients and former clients attempting to 'friend' them.

Participant's from this current study reported inconsistent information on addressing issues arising from all interactions with clients and students online. Strategies reported by participants include ignoring friend requests until brought up by client or student, redirecting client and students to approved methods of communication, and rejecting and then bringing up online contact in session and explaining the professional nature of the therapeutic relationship. Strategies presented by the participants support the need for students and gatekeepers to have opportunity and space to reflect on the implications and consequences of engagement with clients and students on digital platforms.

5.2 Implications

This study was intended to explore the lived experiences of counseling students who are translating what may have been described to them as real world disclosure issues to digital world disclosure. Participants in the current study demonstrated a lack of consciousness to the consequences and ethical considerations of clients and student exposure to counselor disclosure in digital mediums. Participant's beliefs that the implementation of security and privacy features and the editing of the volume and content of postings imposes control of the dissemination of disclosure is false. Users of social media cannot control the reception of information or the further dissemination of information by social network audiences.

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasoning process of counseling students' disclosure in the phenomenon of social media. Participant's discussion of the reasoning process they engage is more of a self-preservation intuitive process than a true

decision-making model. Participants of the current study consider the outcomes of their disclosure on social media as it relates to harm to themselves and their online 'friends' or audience and how they are perceived by known unknown audience. Participants lack awareness of clients or students as part of the known unknown audience.

This study was an investigation of ethos influences applied to counselor self-disclosure and counseling students' ability to discern appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure. The major influences on the disclosure of counseling students in this study are self-growth, and maturity, audience and environment, and boundaries participants' create to prevent over-sharing. Participants also consider harm to themselves and their online 'friends' or audience, and how they are perceived by the known unknown audience. It is difficult to measure the impact of education and training as an influence on participants due to the lack of articulated direct connections participants make.

Knowledge Generation

The current study contributes to the emerging knowledge of ethical concerns in the digital world and the conversations of ethical education for counselors in training. The differences in experiences of the multigenerational participants in the counseling profession have contributed avoidance of discussions on topics of digital disclosure. Digital immigrants who are seasoned clinicians, counseling supervisors and senior counseling faculty have shown reluctance to changing behavior and exploring best practices in ethical practice of digital disclosure. This avoidance contributes to a continuation of ethical confusion and/or limited use of the digital toolbox. This avoidance may be symptomatic of a lack of knowledge of the practical application of these digital

platforms of disclosure and an uncertainty of who to turn to to get the knowledge they need or the ethical context in which to utilize these digital platforms. As counselors are trained to meet clients where they are emotionally, so to do counselor educators meet students where they are in understanding the counseling relationship and ethical practice.

Literature reviewed provided foundation for the exploration of ethics education, ethical decision-making processes, and counselor disclosure. While literature specific to counseling students was limited, the ethical considerations for disclosure issues are applicable to all helping professions where professional boundaries are important to maintain a quality therapeutic relationship. This study contributes to the research and knowledge bases through the documentation of the understanding and experiences of counseling students in the Southern Mid-Atlantic region relating to their ethical considerations and understanding of disclosure issues in the digital world. When helping professions begin to practice outside of societal norms, or in violation of societal confidence, society will abandon the profession and services and fill those voids in other ways. Society is dependent on counseling professionals and experts to create best practices that protect clients in vulnerable stages of clients' lives. For the protection of the integrity of counseling profession and the society served, conversations on ethical disclosure in the digital age cannot be from a reactive posture. In the area of ethical training, collaboration between seasoned counseling professionals, counseling educators and supervisors, and seasoned users of digital platforms of disclosure is imperative. To bridge the gap in transcendence of ethical disclosure behavior, all generations of counselors must take part in establishing best practices.

Professional Application

The goal of this study was to explore whether counseling students are translating what may have been described as real world, interpersonal disclosure issues to digital world, interpersonal disclosure issues. Participants in this study exhibited an incomplete understanding of ethical issues surrounding disclosure issues in digital mediums. Participants' awareness of ethical issues and consequences of disclosure in digital platforms has not transcended from their personal persona to continuation in their perceived professional identity. Part of this stunting in awareness of consequences of clients as the known unknown audience, is the false sense of security participants feel by engaging privacy and security settings online.

Counseling educators need to branch out from dependence on ethical textbooks and ethical codes. Exposure and training in the reading and application of code are important and should not be sacrificed. Bringing in practicing clinicians to discuss real ethical issues creates an opportunity for cooperation between the academy and the professional community. These cooperative efforts produce a rich environment for students to gain understanding that real life ethical dilemmas have high levels of complexity in establishing solutions.

Counseling supervisors can not depend solely on the classroom for the ethical education of students and graduate interns. Continuation of ethical training is an ongoing component of professional development and practice. Beyond modeling professional development and ethical practice, counseling supervisors can contribute to the ethical training of students and graduate interns through exposure to ethical dilemmas in

practice, bringing students and interns into consultation conversations with seasoned practitioners, and transparent conversations about counselor disclosure in the digital age.

Leadership in governing bodies, licensure boards, and faculty departments must be aware of the differences in multigenerational experiences with digital media. Training and requirements for licensure should reflect exposure in ethical practice in digital platforms of disclosure. At every phase of counselor education, supervision, licensure, and professional development the ethics of virtual presence must be examined and discussed to ensure accurate understanding of the risk and rewards available. This process should be conducted the same way that historically the ethics of privacy and counselor disclosure have been addressed and within the context of digital natives, digital transplants, and digital immigrants. Failure to do so will open practitioners, their supervisors, their employers, their licensing agencies, and those charged with their education to criticism and potential contingent liability.

Social Change

The literature reviewed for the current study discussed that ethical codes are often written in the vacuum of urban practice, an environment where anonymity of counselors is easier to maintain. With the availability of information about counselors accessible online, practicing counselors in any environment will continue to have difficulty maintaining anonymity. Governing bodies should take steps in future revisions of the ethical codes to address this lack of anonymity and write ethical codes from a place of protecting too much exposure to the counselor and the counseling practice.

The slow reactive evolution of ethical codes dictates that practicing clinicians and supervisors must be prepared to self-govern. This self-governance leaves society at the mercy of the personal ethics of practicing clinicians. Societal confidence in the profession of counseling is tied to its belief in governing bodies maintaining high standards of training and practice and staying relevant to social and technological changes. These leadership entities must seek to bridge their own lack of contemporary experience through constant inquiry, survey, and interview of active clinicians and educators.

An individual's poor experience in a counseling relationship has the capacity to sour them from ever seeking help again or encouraging friends and family from seeking help in times of need. These sour experiences contribute to any erosion of the value and trust of society in the counseling profession. The mantle of counselor is one that is not removable when outside the counseling room. To accept the mantle is to recognize that there is a shared ownership in the reputation and societal trust in the profession of counseling, and as a clinician, you act accordingly.

Digital platforms of disclosure have empowered individuals to affect the public's opinion of businesses and entire industries, by providing space from which an individual can share a poor experience or bad customer service. Counseling is not immune to the potential of this damage. Governing bodies have a responsibility to provide training and guidelines to help counselors and the profession navigate the pitfalls of bad public relations practices.

In the academy, there is a historical tendency to teach counseling ethics from the ethical perspective of dilemmas in the confines of the clinical sphere. Ethical practice of

counseling does not occur in a vacuum; Often ethical dilemmas arise where multiple

disciplines are players in the clinical assessment, treatment, and intervention of a client.

Expanding ethical training to include practicing clinicians and stakeholders from other

disciplines allows students to see the vastness of counseling practice and the real world

role counselors play.

Engagement with the digital platforms of disclosure creates issues not only for

counseling students and professionals. It is not unreasonable to assume that counselors in

their everyday practice could encounter individuals who have experienced harm from

engagement with social media. The integration of these platforms into our everyday lives

has the capacity to contribute to clients feelings of angst and anxiety related to online

relationships. Counselors with competency have an opportunity to help clients navigate

or eliminate these relationships and to model maintaining digital relationships and

disclosure in appropriate context.

5.3 Limitations

Limitations exist in all research. The researcher identified five areas of limitation

for the current study. To maintain study manageability, the researcher limited the

geographic region of the current study to the southern mid-Atlantic region of the United

states. The researcher used two levels of purposeful sampling to identify the study

population. The first level involved identifying CACREP accredited programs in the

region and then evaluating those accredited programs for programs that required a

standalone counseling ethics courses as part of the core counseling curriculum. The

invitation to participate in the current study included four additional criteria participants

had to meet, including but not limited to core curriculum completion in participants

counselor training. The final sample population came from three of the identified

programs on four campuses. This was in part due to the timing of the study. The

researcher sent out first requests for participants in early summer. Low response rates

from program coordinators and students are likely due to the intermittent availability of

faculty over the summer. Program coordinators who did respond invited the researcher to

coordinators campuses to solicit in-person for participants. Researcher only visited

practicum and internship classes to ensure core curriculum completion of all recruited

participants.

The second identified limitation is the researchers own inexperience in the

research process. This is the first solo project of this size for the researcher. Inexperience

creates opportunities for mistakes that could compromise the rigor and trustworthiness of

research. Completion of research courses, assisting colleagues in research projects and

employing coding assistants helped reduced researcher inadequacy.

The third area of limitation identified by the researcher is participant anxiety.

Participants can experience anxiety due to a lack of knowledge of the research process

and attempts to protect information and experiences not willing to share. To address

issues of participant anxiety, researcher made sure participants understood that

participation was voluntary and participants could refuse to answer questions or end

involvement in the current study at any time. Participants were also allowed to select the

time, place, and mode of interview for their comfort. Additionally, the researcher

attempted to build rapport with participants in the interview and address questions and

concerns about participation in the research process. The researcher also created

transparency by providing the participants with transcribed and coded interviews and the with the opportunity to clarify responses.

The fourth area of limitation identified by the researcher is the potential for interaction with researcher influencing responses from participants. Qualitative research is dependent on the accurate self-report of participants. To address this issue, the researcher limited affirming facial expressions and body language. Researcher maintained neutral expressions and body language.

The final area of limitation is the potential for researcher bias. The researcher actively engages in digital platforms of disclosure and finds satisfaction in that engagement. To control for researcher bias, researcher used coding assistants in the analysis process. The researcher also bracketed all personal experiences and beliefs of engagement in digital platforms of disclosure to be present in the capture of the experience of participants. The researcher also engaged in reflective journaling to ensure presence in the interview and analysis processes.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

Counseling Students without Standalone Counselor Ethics

All of the participants in the current study came from CACREP programs with standalone counseling ethic class as a part of the counseling core curriculum. This researcher recommends further study to explore the reasoning process of counseling students' disclosure in the phenomenon of social media, investigate influences applied to counselor self-disclosure and counseling students' ability to discern appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure, and explore lived experiences of counseling students who are translating what may have been

described to them as real world disclosure issues to digital world disclosure. Study with this population may assist in the establishment of best practices in ethics education and training.

In counseling programs where ethics is infused across the curriculum, there is the potential for greater diversity in the experiences of faculty in the digital age. Where ethics training is the responsibility of all faculty, students can benefit from the multigenerational approach to ethical training. Students may have greater encounters with ethical issues in academic settings not necessarily specific to ethical training.

Counseling Students Training to be School Counselors

Participants from the current study included persons training in both clinical mental health and school counseling. This researcher recommends further study of the reasoning process of counseling students' disclosure in the phenomenon of social media, investigate influences applied to counselor self-disclosure and counseling students' ability to discern appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure, and explore lived experiences of counseling students, training to be school counselors, who are translating what may have been described to them as real world disclosure issues to digital world disclosure. School counselors practice within a system of stakeholders, administrators, teachers, parents, and other children where disclosure issues can reverberate in multiple audiences with different consequences. School counselor practice in an environment with a population that has greater applicable knowledge of digital technology. Lack of understanding of the systemic issues and the potential expertise of students creates a higher risk for ethical violations**.** Research with this population may demonstrate higher levels of awareness of ethical considerations of counselor disclosure online. This population may also have higher levels of awareness of known unknown audiences by the nature of the environments they practice. School counselors will also have greater opportunities to model appropriate digital disclosure and educate students and stakeholders in maintaining appropriate digital behavior.

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Governance

This researcher recommends study of the selection process and qualification standards required by governing and licensure bodies. Investigating the how governing and licensure bodies select individuals to these committees may reveal a lack of multigenerational diversity in the bodies. The absence of digital natives and or digital transplants minimize opportunities for relevant discussion of ethical issues in digital disclosure.

Counselor Educators

This researcher recommends further study of the process of topic selection of counselor educator ethics faculty. This research may reveal issues of avoidance to conversation of ethical issues where faculty has limited experience and expertise in digital mediums. Understanding these deficiencies may also help governing bodies create opportunities for professional development for counselor educators.

Technology in the Counseling Experience

Technology will continue to expand the availability of resources for individuals in need. This researcher recommends research in the area of distance counseling. The profession of counseling should be driving the discussions of ensuring quality counseling resources in areas underserved, where expertise or competence in specific counseling areas is not available, or in geographic areas previously unavailable. Creating best practices in digital presence practice can contribute to creating avenues to reach people who need counseling services and have not reached out for these services.

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Intent

Exploration in user intent in the engagement of digital platforms of disclosure is an area of interest for future research for this researcher. What is the purpose of disclosing all details of your lived experience? Why use a platform where presence is incongruent and incomplete? Previous research has uncovered issues of low self-confidence and self-esteem from engagement in digital platforms of disclosure. Investigating intent could contribute to discussions about how to combat those issues for practicing clinicians.

5.5 Reflections and Conclusion

The purpose of conducting this research study was to explore the reasoning process and counseling students' understanding of disclosure in the digital age. Living in a time where constant disclosure is encouraged through technology and celebrated through practices of re-dissemination of shared information, understanding how counseling students, digital natives, reconcile appropriate and inappropriate disclosure is important for counselor educators and supervisors. In the profession of counseling, it is imperative to a healthy therapeutic relationship that the counselor be seen as an unbiased, empathetic source for unconditional positive regard. When clients have unfettered access to information about their counselor, that may affect the feelings of safety and connection in the therapeutic relationship, unintended damage, and harm can be done to the client, the relationship between the client and counselor, and ultimately erode public trust in the profession of counseling.

When I began this research, I believed that counseling students would be applying their knowledge and experience in the digital age and considering implications of their digital presence to clients. What I have discovered is that counseling students are far more dependent on the expertise of faculty and supervisors. Counseling students are deficient in applying real world issues to digital world realities. Digital natives come to the counseling profession with only two-way voluntary contractual digital relationships. They are conditioned to accept or reject digital relationships on the basis of "my interest only."

This study not only implies a need for evaluation of ethical training but also training in critical thinking and analysis. Counseling students need to be challenged in their understanding of the risks associated with counseling practice in the digital age. Participants in the current study shared a lack of intentional conversation about digital presences in either their educational training or their experiential learning sites. The introduction of the digital toolbox for communication and commerce has also created new opportunities for relationship overlap. The digital world provides visual articulation of pre-existing and new social networks. Digital natives will have further opportunities for public education, marketing, collaborative conversations previously unavailable due to distance and socio-economic limitations. Counselor educators and governing bodies have an obligation to begin to explore how as a profession we prepare future counselors for clinical practice in an age of ever-changing technology.

This research is not a call for the prohibition of the use of digital platforms of members of the counseling profession. Such a prohibition would not inhibit the availability of information about counselors to clients and would limit potential benefits

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of the digital toolbox. I would rather see this research as the beginning of a new cooperative effort for creative and innovative approaches to ethical training for successful counseling practice in an era of accelerating technological change.

As this study comes to a conclusion, I have a new awareness and appreciation for the difficulty facing counselor educators and supervisors and counseling students. These groups have trained in two different world experiences. In conversations with the program coordinators and counselor educators at the SACES conference, I gained valuable insight to why these disconnects in ethical training exist. I experienced enthusiasm from the participants in the interview process, eager to share their experience and to have confidence in their ethics training so that they can practice successfully. I found equal interest from counselor educators for outlines and advice for how to begin conversations with their students. I have also experienced enthusiasm from counseling supervisors and directors of counseling agencies eager for orientation to these new ethical topics and practices. I hope this momentum continues and is evident in future scholars research and dialog.

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APPENDIX A – LETTER TO PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Dear Department Chair or Program Coordinator:

I am Katherine DeWitt, a doctoral student in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of South Carolina. I am reaching out to you because you have a CACREP accredited Counselor Education program. I am conduction a study on the ethical decision-making process of counseling students (MEd or Eds) in the digital age. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of my PhD degree under the supervision of Dr. Joshua Gold and is approved by the University of South Carolina Internal Review Board. Please pass the following recruitment e-mail on to students currently enrolled in your graduate program. I sincerely appreciate your assistance with recruiting study participants.

Informed Consent
(Invitation to participate in research study)

Exploration of appropriate and inappropriate e-disclosure: A qualitative investigation of the decision-making process of counselors in training.

Principle Investigator for This Study: Katherine H. DeWitt, M.Ed., PhD candidate, Counselor Education and Supervision, University of South Carolina

Current Graduate Counselor Education students are invited to participate in this dissertation research study. Eligible participants must have completed at least one stand-alone counseling ethics course and have profiles on any social networking platform. This study is being conducted through the Counselor Education Program within the College of Education at the University of South Carolina. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of my PhD degree in Counselor Education and is approved by the University of South Carolina Internal Review Board.

You are asked to participate in an individual private interview. You will be asked questions designed to discover your understanding and perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate personal and professional e-disclosure and what process you use to decide what disclosers to make on social media. If you feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions, you may choose to not answer and still participate in the study. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. Interviews will take pace in a mutually agreed upon location and should last about an hour.

Your private interview will be confidential and will be audio recorded. The interviews will only be transcribed by the researcher, Katherine H. DeWitt. Your name or any other identifiable information will not appear on the recordings or the transcript of your interview. Only the researcher will have access to your contact information. Once the transcription is complete the audio recording, and individual contact information will be destroyed. As part of the data analysis, other researchers may review the coded transcript of your interview, but only after all identifiable information has been removed.

At the conclusion of your interview, you will have time to discuss your interview with the researcher if you wish. You will also be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and the codes assigned to your responses. You will have the opportunity to clarify your responses if you feel the researcher has misinterpreted your remarks. Because your contact information will not be retained, if you would like to

know the findings of this research the researcher will provide you with contact information and a timeframe so that you may inquire at the appropriate time.

There are no anticipated risks to the participants of this study. Participation is voluntary. You are free to not participate, and you may quit or withdraw from participation at any time, for any reason, without negative consequences or penalty.

You will have an opportunity to ask questions about this research as stated above. You may contact Katherine H. DeWitt at (903)- 363-2884 or email at dewittk@email.sc.edu. For more information about this research study you may contact Dr. Joshua Gold, University of South Carolina, (803) 777-1936; JOSGOLD@mailbox.sc.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095.

APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. People have different reasons for engaging in social media. Can you tell me what brought you to the social media world?

2. How do you define disclosure?

   a. Does that definition change with the context of the environment?

3. Can you tell me how you decide what to disclose online?

   a. What influences that decision?

4. Tell me about your experiences with disclosure?

5. Can you tell me about any changes you have made in your posting habits?

6. What are your expectations of how your digital presence is received?

7. What are similarities and differences between your online and in-person self-disclosure?

8. How do you address client friend requests?

9. Other than your participation in this interview, describe any conversations you have had with faculty, supervisors, practicing professionals, or colleagues in your program about engagement and disclosure in social media?

10. What else would you like to share that has not been addressed?