EXPLORING THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE
IN REHABILITATION COUNSELOR EDUCATION

By

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my husband, Max M. Reghabi and our children, for the faith and support they have provided me.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the ethics of social media use in rehabilitation counselor education programs. Program coordinators from 81 U.S. education programs accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) were solicited to complete a survey regarding the ethical dilemmas or problems they encountered with respect to social media used by graduate students, faculty, and administrative staff. Of the 81 program coordinators, 28 (34.56%) completed the survey. The survey asked program coordinators to report whether their program, department, or university had a social media policy, as well as whether they had encountered any social media-related ethical dilemmas. Finally, the survey asked program coordinators about their ethical beliefs regarding the use of social media in rehabilitation counselor education. The results found that 13 (46.43%) of the program coordinators had encountered at least one ethical dilemma related to graduate students’ misuse of social media in the past year. The most frequently cited dilemma was students’ “befriending” of faculty members on social networking sites such as Facebook. An examination of the data revealed no association between the type of social media policy employed and the probability of reporting an ethical dilemma. Program coordinators reported that the ethical use of social media will continue to be a challenge in the future, and the results of the present study could thus be used by rehabilitation counseling educators to develop policies and practices to better promote and regulate the appropriate use of social media in rehabilitation education programs.

Keywords: social media, rehabilitation counseling education, ethics
CHAPTER ONE

Growing from its initial application as an academic network, the Internet has become a widely used technology around the world (Miorandi, DePellegrini, & Chlamtac, 2012). In the United States, 93% of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 have used the Internet (Moreno, Jelenchick, Cox, Young, & Christakis, 2011). Recently, the Internet has evolved to include new interactivity options for its users. Web 2.0 tools, which first emerged between 2004 and 2006, have facilitated new online activities in the form of tools such as social networking sites, wikis, podcasts, and blogs (Harris & Rea, 2009). These tools have increased online social interaction, particularly for individuals who are isolated due to their geographic location. Individuals with disabilities, whose circumstances may have previously prohibited them from interacting with others, can now connect with people on the Internet at any time and from nearly any location. Online social networking is occurring at an accelerating rate, and the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have made it possible for individuals to stay connected with family and friends regardless of location and circumstances (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

In line with the increase in social media use among the broader population, rehabilitation counselors are also using social media at an increasing rate (Garcia et al., 2016). However, the ethical standards that govern rehabilitation counseling have developed at a much slower pace (Lehmann & Crimando, 2011). Due to the rapid pace of technological development, it has become difficult for practitioners, as well as faculty and students in the field, to determine appropriate ethical standards for social media use (Lehavot, Barnett, & Powers, 2010). In fact, using social media may inadvertently expose rehabilitation counselor educators and students to exceedingly complex ethical dilemmas. Indeed, Lehmann and Crimando (2011) argued that the
use of social media by rehabilitation counselors for private and professional purposes has both positive and negative ramifications.

The positive aspects of social media use include increased access to knowledge resources and opportunities to network with peers (Lehmann & Crimando, 2011). For example, rehabilitation counselors can find information about disabilities and accommodations for the clients they work with on different social media sites. Rehabilitation counselors can also consult with peers about how to work with individuals who have different disabilities about which they had no prior knowledge. Although the positive applications of this technology are evident, there is also a need to understand the negative ramifications and potential ethical risks associated with social media use in rehabilitation counseling.

Negative ramifications include an increased risk of breaching the privacy and confidentiality of clients. Furthermore, there is a potential for other issues related to boundary violations and dual relationships to develop, particularly when rehabilitation counselors e-mail clients from a home computer or accept becoming “friends” with clients on Facebook or other social networking sites (Lehmann & Crimando, 2011). Unfortunately, ethical issues could arise when professional boundaries become blurred for clients and rehabilitation counselors in the online space. Bearing these concerns in mind, the potential negative consequences and ethical risks of social media use are now addressed in the professional ethical standards recently issued by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, the Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCC, 2016; henceforth referred to as the Code).

Rehabilitation Counseling

Rehabilitation counselors help persons with disabilities achieve their personal and
professional goals, enabling those individuals to become or remain self-sufficient members of society (Rubin & Roessler, 2001). The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that national employment rates for rehabilitation counselors will grow 20% from 2012 to 2022 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). The needs of modern society will require professionals in the rehabilitation counseling field to be able to assist clients in using digital devices and assistive technology aids. These professionals must continue to empower, counsel, serve, and assist individuals with disabilities despite the changing technological landscape.

The Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) has historically been responsible for accrediting graduate rehabilitation counseling programs. Students who graduate from accredited rehabilitation counseling programs obtain employment across a wide spectrum of professional positions, including as (a) vocational rehabilitation counselors, (b) alcohol and substance abuse counselors, (c) case managers, (d) transition specialists, (e) family and marriage counselors, (f) forensic rehabilitation specialists, (g) life care planning specialists, (h) job placement specialists, (I) mental health counselors, and (j) vocational evaluators (CORE Accreditation Manual, 2015).

As of March 2016, there were 81 CORE-accredited rehabilitation counseling programs in the United States (Council on Rehabilitation Education, 2016).

The CORE accreditation standards require that the education for rehabilitation counselors include instruction in the ethical provision of rehabilitation services; the psychosocial aspects of disability and cultural diversity; human growth and development; employment and career advancement; counseling approaches and principles; group work and family dynamics; and methods of assessment, research, and program evaluation (Council on Rehabilitation Education [CORE] Accreditation Manual, 2015). CORE recently became an affiliate of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) to support graduates
of rehabilitation counseling education programs in gaining access to state licensure as professional counselors through the CACREP accreditation in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling. The merger between these two major accrediting bodies, the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), will be completed on July 1, 2017. The merger is important because it will influence accreditation standards in general, as well as policies related to social media.

**Social Networking Sites**

Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social networking sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211). These web-based applications provide individuals the opportunity to contribute to online conversations using Internet technologies. Social networking has been described as a collective and systemic form of Internet correspondence (Myers, Enders, Ruddy, & Zelikovsky, 2012; Pham, 2014). Individual’s use social networking sites for a variety of reasons, such as to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, find information, seek diversion, and pursue entertainment (Anderson, Fagan, Woodcut, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2012). Many users of social media employ these sites to communicate with people whom they have previously met or to meet new people (Anderson et al., 2012).

The explosion in social networking sites has occurred because of technological advances in the use of collaborative, virtual software that facilitates the inception, sharing, and broadcasting of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Such sites may include
social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn), virtual media publications (e.g., WordPress sites, blogs, Wikipedia), content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Instagram), web chat rooms and forums (e.g., Yahoo Messenger, Google Hangouts, Skype), microblogging sites (e.g., Twitter, Tumblr), live streaming sites (e.g., Livestream), and virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life). The most commonly used social networking sites in the United States are Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Millennials, 2014). In 2015, Facebook reported having more than 1.44 billion monthly active users of its products worldwide, a 13% increase from monthly active users in 2014 (Facebook, 2015). The Pew Research Center reported in September 2014 that 71% of Internet users have a Facebook profile, along with noting a significant increase in the use of other platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. Based on these numbers, social media use is rapidly increasing, and 52% of adults use at least two or more social media sites yearly (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015).

Facebook is the most widely used social media site in America. Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in 2004, originally developing it as a means for Harvard students to connect with one another (Krivak, 2008). Today, Facebook has been redesigned so that new users need only provide an e-mail address in order to create an account. Users construct a public or semi-public profile and then create a friends list—a network of other users with whom they share a connection (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Once signed up, users can view and track connections via posts made on a timeline, which functions as a virtual bulletin board. This feature allows all users to share messages visible to anyone within their network. Besides posting and sending messages, users can post and send multimedia content and engage in private chats or instant message with specific people from their friends list. They are also able to pass quick judgment on messages, posts, and social groups by using a “like” feature (Facebook, 2015). This
accessibility has enabled Facebook to grow to the point where some authors believe that students cannot imagine its absence in their daily lives (Debatin, Love-Joy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009). Krivak (2008) found that the number of Facebook users has doubled every 6 months since January 2007, equating to a 3% growth rate per week.

Facebook statistics show that users spend an average of 20 minutes per day on the site (Facebook, 2015). Additionally, these statistics demonstrate that, collectively, users spend an average of 20 billion minutes on the site daily. Millennials, typically defined as the generation born between 1980 and the early 2000s, have an average of 250 friends each on the site (Facebook, 2015). Debatin et al. (2009) examined Facebook use, specifically within the university population, and found that many postsecondary students check their Facebook accounts daily and spend up to 15 minutes on Facebook every time they log in. Many university students maintain Facebook accounts throughout their graduate careers and into their professional lives (Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, & Chang, 2010; Thompson et al., 2008).

Considering the growth in social media as a form of communication, it is highly likely that a significant number of rehabilitation counseling students use Facebook and other social networking sites. The majority of social networking websites are multilingual, free to use, and available worldwide; they provide an accessible means for individuals to connect, send messages, and share media with others around the world for both professional and personal reasons (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). With this in mind, there is a need to examine the ethics of social media use in rehabilitation counselor education.

**Purpose of Study**

This research examined ethical dilemmas related to social media use in rehabilitation counselor education programs. At present, no known research exists regarding rehabilitation
counseling students’ social networking habits and related issues. The intent of this study was to increase awareness about the ethical problems that may arise through the use of social media in connection with rehabilitation counseling education programs. The online survey findings from this study will provide relevant and informative data and helpful instruction to rehabilitation counseling faculty. As part of their education, rehabilitation counseling students are in the process of acquiring knowledge about how to adhere to high standards of professional behavior, but they may not fully understand the ramifications of unprofessional, unethical, or illegal postings on social networking sites (Chapin & Bryne, 2013). Researchers have indicated that rehabilitation counseling educators and their students should be surveyed on the ethical dilemmas—such as boundary, confidentiality, and privacy issues—that have emerged with the increasing popularity of social media (Chapin & Bryne, 2013; Lehmann & Crimando, 2011). Without further research, it is unclear if the 81 CORE-accredited rehabilitation counseling programs are properly addressing issues related to professional judgment and the appropriate use of social media by faculty and students. The results of the present study will offer explicit directions to help rehabilitation counseling students utilize social media ethically and appropriately in their personal and professional lives (Guseh, Brendel, & Brendel, 2009).

Ideally, this research will increase faculty and student awareness of social media misuse in an effort to better guide students toward responsible use and reduce potential ethical violations. Chretien, Greysen, Chretien, and Kind (2009) concluded that when specific Internet policies regarding the use of social media were established in medical schools in the United States, more cases of unprofessional and unethical usage among students were discovered and subsequently addressed. Chretien et al. (2009) recommended formal policies to promote ethically sound regulation of social networking behavior in the education and training of medical
doctors. Similarly, the purpose of this research is to address the problematic and unethical use of social media in the education and training of rehabilitation counselors.

**Statement of Problem**

Social media can create new ethical dilemmas in rehabilitation counseling education programs that researchers have yet to identify. These situations may include, but are not limited to: (a) neglect or abuse of basic ethical standards such as the inadvertent abuse of clients by rehabilitation counselors, which may include breaches in privacy and confidentiality; and (b) unintended self-disclosure by rehabilitation counseling students (Chapin & Bryne, 2013). Studies of higher education for health professions have indicated that professionals in training have difficulty distinguishing between private and public personal information within an online setting and are unable to recognize the effects that their social networking behaviors have on their professional occupations (Cain, Scott, & Akers, 2009; Chretien et al., 2009; Coe, Weijs, Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2011).

It is particularly critical that rehabilitation counseling students be taught about the ethics of social media use prior to engaging in practicum or field training with clients (CORE Accreditation Manual, 2015). Without proper training, a scenario might arise in which a student posts a comment online about his or her experience during a practicum, unaware that posting information is a violation of the ethics of both client autonomy and confidentiality. As an illustration, consider “Lori,” a rehabilitation counseling graduate student who felt excited about working with a deaf client from Indonesia. After their first counseling session, Lori posted her sentiments on her Facebook page, including the fact that she had worked with a client who was deaf and from Indonesia. One of her friends asked, “Was your client’s name Kim?” A small Indonesian community had developed in their rural area and this friend was able to identify
Lori’s client. This incident constituted a clear violation of confidentiality. A post like this could be damaging to clients. In the field of rehabilitation counseling, it is necessary for clients to trust their rehabilitation counselors and be comfortable enough to disclose sensitive information. Individuals, who participate in rehabilitation counseling, often feel vulnerable. Therefore, confidentiality is essential to rehabilitation counseling, because it helps clients and rehabilitation counselors build trusting, productive relationships.

The use of social networking sites by professionals should ideally increase public awareness of and confidence in the profession (Greysen, Kind, & Chretien, 2010). Therefore, it is important to develop ethical training on the appropriate use of social media in rehabilitation counseling practice. As stated in the CRCC Code, the needs of the client should come before the needs of the professional. According to Kaplan, Wade, Conteh, and Martz (2011), it does not matter what form of communication rehabilitation counselors use: what is important is what is best for clients. Regardless of the communication method, the protection of client rights and welfare should always be the primary ethical consideration.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The primary obligation of rehabilitation counselors is to their clients, and one perspective that can be used to understand the potential impact of social media use on professional practice is the therapeutic alliance. Bordin (1979), defined *therapeutic alliance* as the collaboration between clients and counselors based on their development of an attachment bond, an agreement between client and counselor on how to achieve effective tasks of therapy, and a shared commitment to the mutually established goals of counseling. Bordin presented, the objective of such an alliance depends on a correlative understanding regarding what exhibits the client’s pressures, frustrations, and displeasures. Along these lines, the intent of therapy is to examine
and alleviate the client’s distress. Bordin was of the opinion that the way in which the evolvement of the goals are accomplished in therapy will differ depending upon the rehabilitation counselor’s theoretical approach. In a seminal study, Wampold (2001) concluded that 70% of positive client change was due to common factors associated with the working alliance, such as listening and setting goals. Bordin (1979) and Wampold (2001) have both theorized that a working alliance promotes essential change in clients and that its development depends on the level of collaboration between clients and counselors.

In rehabilitation counseling practice, social media has the potential to affect the working alliance significantly because it has become a preferred mode of communication in society. Rehabilitation counselors’ use of social media may influence the therapeutic alliance through direct communication with clients as well as indirect posting of content. As such, when rehabilitation counselors use social media professionally or privately, they need to be aware of how such activity may relate to the therapeutic alliance with their clients. Specifically, rehabilitation counselors need a set of standards to ensure that their online behavior will not cause harm to clients or compromise either their own privacy and confidentiality or their clients’.

To be effective, counselors should not only be knowledgeable about professional and ethical standards but also understand clients’ expectations and values with respect to the use of social media. Rehabilitation counselors who violate clients’ expectations and values may evoke hostility even if they do not breach an ethical standard. The purpose of ethical codes is to guide the roles and responsibilities of counselors and clients (Corey, Corey, & Callahan, 2015), and the central concern is that client’s rights are protected. Careful use of social media that does not violate ethics or client’s expectations will allow rehabilitation counselors to be more effective by protecting both the therapeutic alliance and the rights of clients.
Although the CRCC *Code* offers guidance that promotes specific ethical behavior, it is unreasonable to expect the *Code* to address every potential ethical dilemma that rehabilitation counselors may experience (CRCC, 2016). To be effective, the *Code* must be general enough to operate in a wide assortment of rehabilitation counseling settings (Tarvydas, 2012); it cannot diverge from its central mission to address every single ethical dilemma that might arise in practice. Indeed, previous versions of the *Code* did not specifically indicate how rehabilitation counselors should use social media sites; however, the newly revised 2016 version of the *Code* does offer guidance on this topic. Although the *Code* is intended to give compelling yet flexible guidelines to professionals (Barros-Bailey & Saunders, 2010), it is ultimately the responsibility of individual rehabilitation counselors to apply the *Code* and operate ethically and professionally, especially in newly emerging digital spheres (Lehmann & Crimando, 2011). For rehabilitation counselors to behave professionally when using social media, both among colleagues and with clients, new ethical standards must be set. Focusing on the perspectives of program coordinators from accredited rehabilitation counseling programs, the purpose of this study is to collect information on the use and misuse of social media by graduate students, faculty, and administrative staff.

**Definition of Terms**

**Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE).** CORE accredits graduate programs that furnish academic preparation for an array of professional rehabilitation counseling positions (CORE Accreditation Manual, 2015).

**Ethical Codes.** Ethical codes establish the rules that govern a given profession (Kitchener, 1984).
**Ethical Principles.** Ethical principles are intended to guide, inspire, and help professionals conduct business honestly and with integrity (American Psychological Association [APA] Ethics Code, 2010).

**Ethical Standards.** Ethical standards are enforceable rules for conduct normally developed by professional associations to guide the behavior of a specific group of professionals (APA, 2010).

**Ethics.** Ethics are agreed-on rules or standards established by a profession that define what is acceptable or “good” practice (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2007, p. 500).

**Millennials.** Millennials are the generation born between 1980 and the early 2000s. Unlike previous generations, this group has had consistent access to social media throughout their lifetime (Millennials, 2014).

**Net Generation.** The Net Generation is defined as a subsection of the population born between 1983 and 1991; members of this generation grew up in an environment that constantly exposed them to computer-based technology. It has been suggested that this generation’s methods of learning differ from those of previous generations (Sandars & Morrison, 2007).

**Rehabilitation Counseling Program Coordinators.** These coordinators teach a variety of core subjects in the rehabilitation and clinical mental health counseling curriculum in alignment with CORE/CACREP. Their responsibilities include the recruitment of students, the management of curricular standards, and the development of relationships with external agencies in the field (CORE Accreditation Manual, 2015).

**Social Media.** Social media is a term attributed to websites that use collaborative virtual applications that make possible the inception, sharing, and broadcasting of online, user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).
Summary

In pledging to abide by professional commitments, rehabilitation counselors should strive to maintain public trust, which is absolutely necessary to successfully incorporate social media in the arena of rehabilitation counseling. As the use of social media increases, researchers must examine how the profession might responsibly employ social media. It is especially important to consider how rehabilitation counselors present private and professional identities on social media. Students in rehabilitation counseling programs must understand how to use social media competently without violating ethical guidelines. To achieve this aim, rehabilitation counseling education must prepare students more proactively for professional life by explicitly addressing the issues associated with social media.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

To date, there has been no research conducted to discern issues related to the potential misuse of social media within rehabilitation counselor education programs; however, this has become an emerging topic in allied health and medicine. The intent of the present study was to measure how frequently rehabilitation counselor education programs experience issues resulting from student, faculty, and administrative staff misuse of social media. In turn, this research may assist rehabilitation counseling educators in teaching students to navigate effectively when using social networking sites so as to circumvent professional ethical mistakes and not cause harm to clients. This chapter reviews literature regarding the ethics of social media use in graduate-level allied health and medical programs.

To find relevant citations, searches of medical and scientific databases were conducted with a specific focus on social media and rehabilitation counseling education. Electronic searches of the literature were accomplished using search engines and databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, and PsyInfo; these search engines and databases assisted in locating peer-reviewed articles published between the years 2007 and 2016. The keywords or keyword combinations used for this study were: social media, rehabilitation counseling education, and graduate students.

Studies were selected based on the following criteria:

- Participants were in the health care and counselor education fields.
- Participants were graduate students.
- The research was empirically based.
- Researchers used a survey, mixed method, or case study methodology.
The next section covers the different themes captured by the literature review. The themes include overarching ethical issues that can inform the development of policies and practices to promote the ethical use of social media in a rehabilitation counseling education program. The chapter concludes with an overview of the CRCC (2016) *Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors* concerning the ethical use of social media.

**Overarching Ethical Issues**

Ethical behavior does not simply happen; rather, it must be learned. Faculty may find it difficult to pattern correct use of online social networking or provide feedback regarding ethical online behavior due to uncertain guidelines or standards on how to use social networking professionally (Pham, 2014). To overcome possible knowledge gaps, faculty members should acquaint themselves with the various forms of social networking websites and tools, as well as the implications of using them (Myers et al., 2012; Pham, 2014). Faculty members can obtain this information by reading articles, attending conferences on the topic, and having discussions with students about their experiences. Furthermore, consultation should be utilized whenever a faculty member is uncertain about how to advise a student (Myers et al., 2012). With proper guidance, most rehabilitation counseling professionals will be able to maintain ethical practices online (Brennan, 2013). The next sections address the overarching ethical issues of dual relationships, boundaries, privacy, professionalism, and cyberbullying.

**Dual Relationships**

Rehabilitation counselors must avoid nonprofessional relationships with clients or former clients, unless such interactions are potentially beneficial to clients or former clients (CRCC, 2016). Inviting clients to one’s personal social media profile can be perceived as inviting them into one’s personal life. A client who becomes a counselor’s digital “friend” can post to and
view messages posted to the counselor’s profile. The client can also view photo albums, read comments on photos, and interact with the counselor’s other online “friends” (Kolmes, 2009). This level of intimacy may send mixed messages to clients, especially if they are unclear about therapeutic boundaries at the outset of counseling (Kolmes, 2009). Professional relationships come with legal and ethical responsibilities that also apply to relationships on social networking sites.

According to researchers, counselors who become Facebook friends with clients can potentially lose perspective in the counseling process (Myers, Endres, Ruddy, & Zelikovsky, 2012; Pham, 2014). Friending a former client on Facebook, for example, might preclude that individual from resuming counseling in the future (Myers et al., 2012; Pham, 2014). Professionals should consider establishing their own policies regarding social media interaction and inform clients of their specific policies during induction (Pham, 2014). Maintaining Facebook contact with a client increases the chances of the counseling relationship becoming less professional (Lehmann & Crimando, 2011). Accordingly, communication via social media may put the rehabilitation counselor at increased risk of violating ethical standards.

Given the Internet’s prevalence as a preferred mode of communication in our culture, research has found that 25% of individuals seek health information online (Shallcross, 2011); thus, agencies and universities often maintain a professional presence on social networks to inform individuals about wellness programs and educational opportunities and present links to books, articles, and community resources. Froeschle, Crews, and Li (2013) suggested that organizations use a professional virtual presence and discourage individual rehabilitation counselors from “friending” clients and students on social networking sites. All information on such professional social networking profiles should relate to the organization; individual
rehabilitation counselors should not respond to specific client issues via social media (Froeschle et al., 2013). A professional social media presence should be used only to dispense information, not to communicate with clients or students.

**Boundaries**

Rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, and faculty must maintain ethical, professional boundaries when interacting with their clients, subordinates, and students (CRCC, 2016). When using social media, a practitioner, supervisor, or educator should consider whether having access to information about a client, subordinate, or student violates this principle. One reason for not becoming Facebook friends is that clients, students, or subordinates might post information to online social networking sites that violates these professional boundaries or is inappropriate for the professional relationship. Researchers found that 13% of students posted photos online that they would not want faculty members to see, and 11% posted personal information online that they would not want faculty members to know (Lehavot, Barnett, & Powers, 2010). Researchers conducting another study found that over half of the medical students who completed the survey admitted to posting embarrassing photos on their Facebook sites (Garner & O’Sullivan, 2010). Instructors and students should carefully consider the risks of establishing a relationship on social media platforms (Garner & O’Sullivan, 2010). Instructors who establish a connection with students via business networking sites such as LinkedIn may serve a professional purpose; however, connections on social sites may also complicate professional boundaries (Lehavot et al., 2010). Institutions should implement specific policies regarding social media to provide guidance to both faculty and students (Myers et al., 2012). In particular, in today’s digital age, directors of training programs should consider the establishment and dissemination of social networking policies (Myers et al., 2012; Wester, Danforth & Olle, 2013).
The prevalence of social networking sites can create particular issues for colleges, as some universities may not have clearly defined policy guidelines for professors to apply. According to Lipka (2007), when professors use social media, they create their own set of ethical dilemmas. Professors who friend a student on social media blur the professional boundaries of an already vague relationship (Lipka, 2007). Students may not feel comfortable accepting a professor as an online friend, but may feel obligated to do so for the sake of their grade (Lipka, 2007). Lipka (2007) further noted that a student may also ask a professor to be a friend online, and the professor may risk hurting the student’s feelings by rejecting the request. Alternately, professors may accept the friend request and risk creating an unfair power dynamic in the class that is seen to privilege some students over others. Supervisors and administrators should recognize the power differential when considering friending subordinates, and certainly should not establish a digital relationship with anyone who might perceive the request as coercive.

DiLillo and Gale (2011) wanted to gauge students’ attitudes regarding the acceptability of using search engines and social media to search for personal information about their clients. They surveyed 854 students enrolled in clinical, counseling, and school psychology doctoral programs in the United States and found that at least 97.8% of these psychology students had used search engines to seek information or evaluate risk concerns regarding at least one client; 94.4% had used social networking sites to do the same. In contrast, 67% of the surveyed students felt it was either never acceptable or usually not acceptable to search for information about clients using search engines (DiLillo & Gale, 2011). The authors concluded that because the students in question were accustomed to searching online for information about their personal acquaintances, they felt comfortable doing the same for professional ones.
Potential problems with blurred boundaries in regard to social media connections include clients searching for personal information about their counselors, forming dual relationships if counselors and other clients are also friends, and developing hurt feelings if counselors decline social network friendships. Other problems could arise when clients establish digital relationships with rehabilitation counselors’ partners, friends, or colleagues without the counselor’s knowledge. When accepting a friend request, issues of possible disclosure of identity must be discussed (Zur, Williams, Lehot, & Knapp, 2009).

Privacy

The issue of online privacy has received considerable attention during the last five years. In May 2010, a reported malfunction on Facebook permitted users to see supposedly hidden personal information of other users (Wortham, 2010). Although technological malfunction is a prime culprit in privacy issues, insufficient understanding of how to best manage privacy settings can also put users at risk of exposing their private information. Many students may be under the impression that their social media page is private, but unless privacy settings are correctly applied, their information may not be as protected as they believe (Taylor et al., 2010). Without these settings in place, the general public—including faculty, staff, and alumni—can access the student’s pages. Kolmes (2009) reported that “friend” status is not even necessary for different parties to extract immense amounts of data about each other. A counselor may choose to have a public Facebook profile and not utilize any profile privacy settings; this means that clients on Facebook could see all the information on the counselor’s profile, including remarks made by the counselor’s contacts (Kolmes, 2009). With no privacy settings selected, any user can see when an individual uses the site, appears in photos and videos, posts status updates, adds games or
applications, or engages in any other activity that becomes visible on the individual’s profile or wall (Kolmes, 2009).

MacDonald, Sohn, and Ellis (2010) indicated that users frequently do not properly set privacy settings, leaving themselves exposed in a number of areas. For instance, university employees are increasingly browsing social networking websites to obtain information about student misconduct (Read & Young, 2006). Furthermore, employers also browse social media sites to investigate job candidates (Read & Young, 2006). Thus, students may face privacy challenges with repercussions that follow them into their future, particularly where ethical matters are concerned.

These privacy and ethical issues have begun to manifest in a variety of professional settings. For instance, Thompson et al. (2008) investigated the impact of online social networking on medical professionals and found that of 813 medical students profiles, 362 (44.5%) were active on Facebook and that two thirds (62.7%) maintained public profiles. The researchers identified instances in which users posted information that would not usually be communicated in a doctor–patient relationship. The study recommended that medical educators examine how they teach professionalism in the context of social networking (Thompson et al., 2008). In another study, MacDonald et al. (2010) analyzed the Facebook profiles of young medical graduates, focusing on three different pages of each Facebook profile: the info page, the wall page, and the photo page. They found that 65% percent of medical school graduates had Facebook accounts and 37% did not activate their privacy options, rendering public such information as sexual orientation (37%), individual religious views (16%), relationship status (43%), and photographs of the users drinking alcohol (46%) or images of users while intoxicated.
(10%). Such information may cause distress to patients, blur professional boundaries, or otherwise harm the therapeutic alliance.

Thompson et al. (2011) found that privacy violations by medical students and residents with Facebook accounts have increased from one of 372 in 2007 to ten of 651 in 2009. Compared to residents, medical students committed more violations, all of which were related to pictures of patients posted online. This study discovered that protected health information had been put online by medical students and residents. Thompson et al. (2011) noted that pictures can be very important for doctors and patients; however, major ethical concerns arise when they are placed on the Internet. More specifically, the researchers suggested that neither the need to protect patient information nor the public nature of online activities were sufficiently explained to students. Such a lack of education may also apply to rehabilitation counselors and students.

Govani and Pashley (2005) conducted a pilot study surveying 50 undergraduate Facebook users of different majors and ages. Although 84% of these college students reported that they knew they could change their Facebook privacy settings, fewer than 48% actually did so. The survey indicated that 80% of participants had not read the privacy policy on Facebook, and only 40% noted that they were aware of Facebook’s policy on sharing data (Govani & Pashley, 2005). The researchers decided that Facebook users are primarily unaware of or unconcerned with limiting access to private information on their profiles. However, this study was conducted at only one institution, thus limiting the ability to generalize its results to other institutions or situations.

Garner and O’Sullivan (2010) surveyed 56 medical students from University of Lancaster, about their use of Facebook privacy settings, course-related groups, and professional behaviors; the authors found that 31% had seen photos of their colleagues on Facebook that they
considered to be embarrassing. Half of the participants stated that they had viewed unprofessional material posted by their colleagues on Facebook. More than 88% agreed that what happens outside of their clinical environment could affect their practice (Garner & O’Sullivan, 2010).

The San Diego State University (SDSU) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Joint Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology has implemented a policy concerning student web pages and blogs (SDSU/UCSD, 2015). If the web pages do not mention that students are enrolled in these programs, then no specific policies apply. However, the policy does apply if users mention that they are students of these programs. The policy states that (a) web postings can reflect poorly on trainees, their program, and their institution; (b) individuals are not in control of where information may end up; and (c) any materials may be viewed by future employers, internships sites, or patients. It also states that such web pages and blogs must meet all legal and ethical guidelines issued by the Board of Psychology and the American Psychological Association. Materials posted on these pages must be professional; if posted material is unethical or illegal, students are asked to modify or remove the offending material.

These policies foster professionalism among students and faculty by requiring them to proactively consider the consequences of their digital posts. Faculty should establish privacy settings that limit the viewing of their personal information by students and consider that privacy settings are not foolproof. One reasonable strategy that some have utilized has been to create separate personal and professional pages with differing levels of visibility.

Professionalism

Rehabilitation counseling students should consider how to present themselves in an appropriate manner within a diverse array of potential professional contexts. Judd and Johnston
(2012) commented that social work students must be aware of potential ethical issues linked to personal privacy within social networking sites as they advance to professional careers within the field. Ross, Lai, Walton, Kirwan, and White (2013) completed a study regarding professionalism and social networking and found that 88% of surveyed medical students agreed that physicians had a responsibility to present themselves professionally on publically accessible web sites, yet they did not believe that their online behavior should be supervised. The students further indicated they believed that disclosing patient information was a professional violation; however, making comments about a class or instructor was acceptable (Ross et al., 2013). In another recent study, 60% of deans at American medical colleges reported having issues such as students posting profanity, posting client confidentiality information, and lewd sexual material. (Chretien et al., 2009). Of the reported incidents, 13% were related to confidential client information, 52% to students’ use of profanity, and 39% to photographically documented instances of intoxication (Chretien et al., 2009).

Jain et al. (2014) conducted an online survey to find out what medical students, doctors, and the public perceived to be unprofessional for medical students to post on Facebook. The authors took screenshots of mock profiles that resembled medical students’ Facebook profiles. For each screenshot, the participants used a 5-point Likert scale to rate appropriateness and indicate what content the participants would be comfortable with their future doctors posting online. The screenshot categories included same-sex pairs (posing together or kissing), opposite-sex pairs (posing together or kissing), comments on parties or substance use (students using marijuana, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes), and comments on medical school (e.g., “just bombed the anatomy final”). The researchers concluded that the public, faculty members, and medical students had different opinions on what was acceptable to post on Facebook. Public
comfort ratings were significantly lower than those of medical students in eight categories: (a) marijuana images, (b) same-sex pair images, (c) alcohol images, (d) partial nudity, (e) parties dancing, (f) opposite-sex pair images, (g) comments on patients, and (h) comments on school (Jain et al., 2014).

Although researchers have not yet conducted studies as to the online and social networking behavior of rehabilitation counseling students the work of Chretien et al. (2009) and Tufekci (2008) have shown that many college students have uploaded controversial subject matter and acted unprofessionally. Given the high prevalence in allied health and medical school programs it is reasonable to assume that rehabilitation counseling students are also likely to be using social media unprofessionally.

**Cyberbullying**

For individuals working in the education field, cyberbullying represents a concerning extension of physical bullying. As the use of technology increases, bullies may harass their victims with text messages, instant messaging, and social media applications (Haykowsky, Ross, & Lundrigan, 2013). Victims of cyberbullying have difficulty escaping this type of abuse given the ubiquity of the Internet. Recently, several young individuals have committed suicide as a result of cyberbullying. Educators in all positions and at all educational levels must inform students about all forms of bullying (Haykowsky et al., 2013). Rehabilitation counseling educators in college and university settings can assist in prevention and intervention efforts through teaching, workshops, and informational events as well as by providing literature on cyberbullying. Community rehabilitation counseling educators are also in a position to perform this type of outreach.
Need for Policies and Training

Several researchers have argued that updated policies and training are essential to regulating the use of social networking sites by students in the health fields (Cain et al. 2009; Chretien et al., 2010; Wester et al., 2013). Training programs for rehabilitation professionals should update and improve students’ understanding of the ethical standards that apply when engaging in activities on digital networks because creating more knowledgeable professionals will benefit clients. These training programs will help professionals understand if using social media helps the client with their unique needs (Kaplan et al., 2011).

Surveying both applicants and students in psychology programs, Wester et al. (2013) assessed general problems posed to those training programs and then presented a policy that might form a basis for programs looking to minimize issues regarding potential use of online information on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace. The structure of the policy was an introduction to how information posted on social networking sites may be considered and evaluated with respect to how it affects students’ professionalism. The first portion of Wester et al.’s (2013) policy stated:

The faculty of the [training program] are committed to protecting future clients from harm by ensuring that all students are fit to practice interpersonal psychotherapy. Therefore, public information obtained via the Internet may be used by faculty to evaluate applicants and current students on behavior that might be indicative of competence problems, poor professionalism, or poor interpersonal judgment. This evaluation may result in adverse actions. This practice is consistent with the role played by training programs as gatekeepers to the profession. Examples of troubling behavior include acts of discrimination such as racism or sexism, illegal behavior, or behavior that
suggests a lack of professional judgment relevant to the professional practice of counseling. (p.150)

The next section of the policy discussed the use of privacy settings, including suggestions as to how students might maintain their responsivity online. In their policy, Wester et al. (2013) stated:

Consistent with this, faculty was respectful of individuals’ reasonable rights to privacy, even on a medium as inherently public as the Internet. However, it is the responsibility of applicants and current students to decide what information about themselves they want shared with the general public. Program faculty will therefore not circumvent established privacy settings in an attempt to “dig” for information that individuals are making a reasonable attempt to keep private. (p.150)

The third section of the policy included evaluation criteria. In the Wester et al. (2013) policy suggestion, the authors asked:

What are the actual behaviors that are of concern, and how are those behaviors related to the goals of [the training program]? How and in what settings have these behaviors been manifested? How serious is this behavior on the continuum of ethical and professional behavior? What is the explanation for the behavior? (p.150)

The fourth section covered the evaluation processes. According to Wester et al. (2013):

Applicants as well as current students will be contacted so as to provide an explanation for the obtained information. The training director shall promptly offer to discuss the information with the individual. The purpose of this discussion is to permit the student to contextualize and explain the information uncovered. From this determination, options will be developed. These options include but are not limited to denial of an interview or
of entry to the program, remedial training, or other interventions to address professionalism. (p. 151)

Cain et al. (2009) researched opinions regarding accountability and e-professionalism among a group of pharmacy students. The researchers conducted a survey and made a presentation on potential conflicts with Facebook. After the presentation, the researchers asked additional questions about changes in online posting behavior. The researchers concluded that incoming pharmacy students require e-professionalism training. Williams et al. (2011) conducted a similar investigation with pharmacy students. After a social media policy was introduced, results showed that students increased their security settings. The study found that students’ Facebook sites were publicly viewable 70% of the time before the policy was introduced, but only 50% of the time after the policy. The authors concluded that making students aware of social media policy had a positive effect on their use of security and privacy settings.

Chretien et al. (2010) conducted focus groups with medical students and found that medical students had some concerns about their online identities. The students did not want to be controlled by institutional guidelines or policies, but wanted guidance and recommendations from their universities regarding online behavior. The medical students expressed that they were responsible for their own behavior.

Faculty and students alike should be aware of potential issues when using social media, including searching for client information, breaching confidentiality, engaging in harmful relationships, posting harmful or negative content, responding to friend requests, maintaining appropriate privacy, making unethical self-disclosures, and maintaining a professional digital presence.
The Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors

The CRCC (2016) Code has regulated and governed the effective and ethical practice of rehabilitation counseling since 1987 (Tarvydas & Cottone, 2000). The neglect or abuse of ethical standards threatens the overall success of rehabilitation counseling services. The Code (2016) has six principles that are paramount to ethical behavior: autonomy, beneficence, fidelity, justice, nonmaleficence, and veracity. These ethical principles apply not only to practicing rehabilitation counselors but also to rehabilitation counseling educators and their students. Faculty members must therefore review these six principles to determine how to use social media ethically.

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the notion that clients should be able to make choices for themselves (CRCC, 2016). Participation in counseling should be voluntary, and clients should have the right to withdraw from a rehabilitation counseling program at any time without penalty. The necessary conditions of autonomy comprise three major elements: voluntariness, comprehension, and authorization (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). When providing information, rehabilitation counselors and educators should inform clients and students about the nature of the rehabilitation program and the procedures involved in sufficient detail for them to fully understand their role and responsibilities. The information should highlight the objectives of the program and clearly describe any alternative options. A consent form should be provided that clearly states that the program is voluntary, that clients may withdraw at any time, and that specifically describes how clients’ confidentiality will be protected (CRCC, 2016).

The use of social media may threaten client autonomy. It is the right of individuals to decide how to live their own lives and to have their information kept in confidence. Individuals
want to have control over their lives as well as what information is posted about them. If personal information about clients is exposed through social media without their express approval, their autonomy is threatened. With this in mind, Lehavot (2009) argued that programs should require applicants to sign letters of consent whenever institutions use the Internet to search for applicant information when making decisions regarding admission to their program. If programs fail to inform applicants in this way, they violate their applicants’ autonomy and privacy (Lehavot, 2009).

**Beneficence**

Beneficence is another fundamental principle that counselors, rehabilitation educators, and students in rehabilitation counseling education programs should follow. In context of the Code, this term means that professionals must focus on the needs and welfare of their clients above all else (CRCC, 2016). In practical terms, such a focus means that counseling should produce measurable benefits for clients, as well as that clients’ best interests always come first.

Social media may affect clients’ views of counselors and therefore may affect the beneficence of the counseling relationship. Clients may find counselors political views about certain subjects that could be upsetting for a client. Clients can find information about rehabilitation counseling professionals on social networking sites; however, rehabilitation counseling professionals may be unaware of what information is available to clients. There is also a possibility that someone may post improper information about other people publicly, including counselors or clients. If people “friend” someone on their Facebook page, in principle those people are agreeing that anything they post on an individual’s page can be made public by that friend. Therefore, other people have no legal responsibility to keep private information that an individual has posted (Bemis-Dougherty, 2010).
Rehabilitation counseling professionals should be cautious about posted information and ensure that all information is respectful and supports their clients’ well-being (Zur et al., 2009). Lehavot (2009) reported that students being trained as rehabilitation counselors should be required to use foresight when posting personal information online because it could be revealed at a later time and erode the public’s confidence in the profession.

**Fidelity**

The principle of fidelity refers to the loyalty of rehabilitation counseling professionals to their clients (CRCC, 2016). Fidelity helps rehabilitation counseling professionals gain their clients’ confidence. Clients cannot be confident about participating in a rehabilitation program if they believe rehabilitation counseling professionals are disloyal or might betray their best interests. Furthermore, rehabilitation counseling professionals must protect all client-identifying information. Maintaining confidentiality is crucial to maintaining clients’ trust.

Birky and Collins (2011) specified that in situations where rehabilitation counselors procure information about clients from Facebook, rehabilitation counselors should fully disclose this to clients; they went on to report that when counselors do not disclose information of this type, they jeopardize trust and openness. Additionally, should rehabilitation counselors accept clients’ Facebook friend requests, they must be conscious of the quality of posted information, lest it negatively affect the therapeutic relationship (Birky & Collins, 2011). In an educational context, Lehavot (2009) noted that if a faculty member searches for a student’s information online, the student may feel betrayed, deceived, and mistreated, and may consider the actions of the faculty member to be a breach of trust (Lehavot, 2009). Lehavot et. al (2010) found that 27% of psychology practicum students had searched online for client information. Researchers revealed that students were curious about clients and wanted to “establish the truth” (Lehavot et
In such cases, the ethical principle of fidelity may be violated, along with the ethical principles of autonomy and nonmaleficence.

**Justice**

The principle of justice describes how fairly rehabilitation counseling professionals regard their clients. Justice means more than avoiding unfair attitudes; it also means that clients should receive equal time, quality of service, and resources from their rehabilitation counseling professionals. Rehabilitation counseling professionals who are Facebook friends with clients with similar interests may be viewed as biased or prejudiced; therefore, rehabilitation counselors must be aware of the effects that Facebook interactions may have on clients. In order to treat clients fairly, it is important to have uniform social media policies, being careful not to “friend” some clients but not others.

When health care providers create profiles on social media websites, they are likely to receive friend requests from clients or students. Guseh et al. (2009) emphasized that professionals are not required to accept any Facebook friend requests, just as they are not required to self-disclose information involuntarily. Therefore, the authors recommended that professionals should not immediately accept friend requests; instead, they should discuss the issue with clients and inform them about the potential harm such relationships could create. Guseh et al. (2009) also stated, “In more cases, the risks of interacting with patients in online social forums appear to outweigh any current potential benefits” (p. 585).

**Nonmaleficence**

Nonmaleficence is a principle that requires rehabilitation counseling professionals to do no harm to an individual (CRCC, 2016). Nonmaleficence protects clients from the risk of harmful attitudes or behaviors on the part of counselors, even if such offenses occur...
unintentionally. Moreover, the principle of nonmaleficence allows counselors to choose the safest method of counseling and discourages them from making risky decisions that may have negative long-term effects. The principle of nonmaleficence contributes to the overall minimization of risks and threats to clients, including online.

For example, if a counselor has decided to interact with clients on Facebook, that counselor must make sure that no harm will be done to clients. Rehabilitation counselors must understand that clients may withhold information on purpose because they may not yet be ready to disclose such information. As Kaplan et al. (2011) stated, “Clients want to be in control of the information they disclose, and uninvited visits to their social media pages may be a violation of trust” (p. 6). Regarding social media, if counselors consider using Facebook, they must prove that this use will not negatively affect their clients. Kaplan et al. (2011) described how “friending” could lead to improper self-disclosure; in contrast, clients could feel rejected should a counselor “unfriend” them after a discontinuation of the counseling relationship.

Sometimes harmful consequences can be unintentional. Miller (2010) reported an incident in which an associate professor was suspended due to a student complaint about comments displayed on the professor’s Facebook page. The professor posted some personal comments meant for friends about wanting to kill her students. When the complaint was made, the professor insisted that the posts were harmless jokes and that she thought that only family and friends could see the comments. The university administration ruled that the professor’s use of social media jeopardized the welfare of her students, regardless of her real intentions, pointing out that students might not have understood the background of the posts.
**Veracity**

The principle of veracity refers to rehabilitation counselors’ willingness to be truthful with clients (CRCC, 2016). There is a great deal of false information on the Internet, and honesty is a necessary condition for forming positive relationships with clients and increasing their confidence in the therapeutic relationship. A violation of the principle of veracity could undermine rehabilitation counselors’ effectiveness even if it was inadvertent (e.g., the rehabilitation counselor shared information that he or she thought was accurate, but which turned out to be false). As stated in the Code rehabilitation professionals must not be dishonest or deceitful in any of their professional activities. This applies to the earlier discussion of discovering client information online: if rehabilitation counselors find information about clients on social networking sites, the counselors need to disclose this to clients.

**Section J of the Code: Technology, Social Media, and Distance Counseling**

The six principles of the Code outlined above are essential to ensuring rehabilitation counselors’ effective professional performance, maximizing their counseling quality, and minimizing the risk of abusing their clients. In addition to the ethical principles discussed above, the Code provides specific guidance regarding the use of technology and distance counseling. The objectives in Section J of the Code include promoting public welfare and establishing principles that define ethical behavior; these objectives also serve as the basis for processing alleged code violations (CRCC, 2016). Rehabilitation counselors must use technology effectively and professionally. Faculty and educators must take responsibility for training rehabilitation students on Section J of the Code, which addresses technology, social media, and distance counseling, in order to teach them to exercise professional judgment concerning technology, social media, and counseling.
Behavior and identification (J.1A–J.1B). The Code states that, regardless of whether counseling occurs face-to-face or via technology-assisted services, rehabilitation counselors should be held to the same standards (CRCC, 2016). When engaging in any form of counseling, a conversation must take place between counselors and clients concerning how counselors use technology in their practices, including noting misunderstandings that might arise from the use of technology; the conversation should be accompanied by an informed consent form (CRCC, 2016). The consent form should state the rehabilitation counselor’s policy on accepting friend requests on social media and a disclaimer reminding clients that electronic communications are not secure and that there could be risks to their confidentiality.

Accessibility (J.2A–J.2B). This section of the Code ensures that clients are capable of using technology-assisted services. Clients may need some type of training on how to use the technology selected. Rehabilitation counselors and clients may also have to determine clients’ technology needs (CRCC, 2016). Facebook has such an accessibility guide, yet what is accessible is often individualized based on the type and level of impairment as well as the personal preferences and resources of the individual.

Confidentiality, informed consent, and security (J.3A–J.3D). This section of the Code addresses confidentiality and consent issues associated with using technology-assisted services. Agency policies regarding confidentiality and security should be presented during the client intake process. Clients should be instructed on procedures to use in the case of a technological failure and provided with alternatives for contacting counselors in case of emergency (CRCC, 2016). To protect client confidentiality, rehabilitation counselors and educators should never post personal information about clients, students, or faculty on social networking sites. If an agency or university program has a professional page on a social networking site, there should be
a readily accessible post that includes information regarding the limitations of confidentiality. Counselors and rehabilitation educators should also inform clients and students about the privacy disclosures and limitations of digital social networks.

This security-related section of the Code addresses the need to guard against imposters when clients and counselors are telecommunicating (CRCC, 2016). Clients and counselors must have some type of code word, number, or graphic to verify each other when not speaking face to face. Rehabilitation counselors must verify that the clients who gave informed consent are the same individuals with whom they are communicating when using technology.

Individuals set up their online profiles so that people have limited access to these profiles. Nonetheless, activities in which individuals participate on other users’ profiles will still be visible to the broader public. For instance, clients’ information will be visible to any friend the counselor and the client may share. If clients do not secure their page using the same privacy settings as counselors, then anyone looking at their profile may view information—including the counselor or mutual online friends. Privacy policies should make clear that any data kept online cannot be guaranteed to be secure. For instance, Facebook provides the following disclaimer to its users:

Although we allow you to set privacy options that limit access to your information, please be aware that no security measures are perfect or impenetrable. We cannot control the actions of other users with whom you share your information. We cannot guarantee that only authorized persons will view your information. We cannot ensure that information you share on Facebook will not become publicly available. We are not responsible for third-party circumvention of any privacy settings or security measures on Facebook. (Facebook Privacy Policy, 2015)
Social media (J.4A–J.4E). The Code (2016) recommends that rehabilitation counseling professionals use separate accounts for personal and professional identities and that they monitor what appears on social media about them. They can do so by searching their name at regular intervals. For example, professionals might set a Google alert to appear whenever a new online posting mentions them (Zur et al., 2009). Clients should know about any policies concerning social media within the context of the counseling relationship. Rehabilitation counseling professionals should not post anything about clients on social media without written consent. Highly sensitive information should never be shared on social media. If professionals search for information about clients on social media, the clients should have previously signed a consent agreement permitting the search, and the search must be relevant for the counseling process. Kaslow, Patterson, and Gottlieb (2011) asserted that by investigating clients’ social media information without their knowledge, rehabilitation counselors violate the principles of trust and fidelity because clients would not normally presume that rehabilitation counseling professionals would search for information about them online (Welfel, 2016).

Rehabilitation counseling education programs must discuss with students the responsible use of social networks and address related ethical dilemmas. Providing guidance to rehabilitation educators will contribute to improving the rehabilitation counseling field as a whole; faculty members need to have updated knowledge and standards in order to guide their students effectively (Farnan et al., 2009). Although all of these ethical guidelines provide direction on how to handle unexpected ethical dilemmas, rehabilitation counseling professionals are often not aware of the ethical ramifications involved in posting certain content online and are unsure of how to proceed when faced with ethical dilemmas involving online social media (Lehmann & Crimando, 2011).
Summary

The use of social networking in academia and in the health fields is becoming a common practice, and the number of faculty utilizing social networking for professional purposes is increasing. With this trend, the boundaries between professional and personal relationships have become blurred. Without clear guidelines or policies, faculty members may have difficulty responding to the expectations of social networking culture while also upholding the ethical obligations of their professional role. In addition to enhancing education programs, researchers have indicated that the creation of specific policies relating to social networking sites can help minimize ethical dilemmas. Against this backdrop of current research and guidelines, the present study will examine the potential ethical dilemmas that may arise when students, faculty, and administrative staff in rehabilitation counseling education programs use social media.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

This study’s purpose was to explore the ethics of social media use in rehabilitation counselor education programs. The literature review revealed that the use of social media has become common practice and that the number of professionals using social media applications for professional purposes is increasing. As this trend continues to grow, the boundaries between professional and personal relationships may become blurred. The primary objective of this study was to examine potential ethical dilemmas arising from student, faculty, and administrative staff use of social media that had not been studied previously in rehabilitation counseling education. A secondary objective was to evaluate the efforts that rehabilitation counselor education programs have made to educate students on the appropriate use of social media. The study also evaluated the perceived effectiveness of these efforts. With a focus on the perspectives of program coordinators of rehabilitation programs, the following research questions were explored:

1. What are the ethical beliefs about social media use among program coordinators for CORE programs?
2. What ethical dilemmas have program coordinators encountered with respect to social media use by graduate students, faculty members, and administrative staff?
3. What policies, guidelines, or approaches are reported by program coordinators with respect to promoting the ethical use of social media in rehabilitation counseling education programs, and are the programs with policies more likely to report ethical dilemmas? Stated differently, is there a relationship between the approaches to addressing the ethical use of social media and incidents of misuse of social media?
**Participants**

The sample population for this study comprised the list of program coordinators for all 81 CORE-approved training programs in the United States. Program coordinators were selected because they were presumed to be the most knowledgeable individuals regarding any problems experienced with social networking sites in their programs. The program coordinators provided all of the responses and, thus, results for this study.

**Research Design**

This study used a quantitative, nonexperimental descriptive design. Descriptive research designs are used to obtain information concerning the current status of a specific phenomenon—in this case, the use of social media in rehabilitation counseling programs. Descriptive designs describe what exists with respect to certain variables or conditions in a situation or at a specific point in time (Salkind, 2012). A quantitative approach was used in the present study to measure the perspectives of CORE program coordinators related to the ethical use of social media (Salkind, 2012).

Surveys represent one of the best ways to conduct ongoing research, according to Draugalis, Coons, and Plaza (2008). The survey research approach gathers information by asking questions about respondents’ behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, preferences, and opinions. A survey approach was chosen for this study because Tuten (2010) noted certain advantages relevant to this study, such as (a) quick and efficient data collection, (b) convenient access to a large and diverse sample, (c) the ability to streamline questions using automated skip logic, and (d) access to an e-mail list for the target population. A primary advantage of employing a survey was that it was one of the least expensive ways to reach a large number of people. A second advantage was the impersonal nature of the data collection method, which
allowed participants to retain their anonymity, resulting in the researcher gaining information that might not be obtained under other circumstances (Salkind, 2012).

**Research Instrument**

In this survey, a modified survey instrument was used with permission from Williams (2013). The survey was designed to identify potential problems that students, faculty, and administrative staff might experience related to the misuse of social media. Because the original survey was intended for marriage and family counseling programs, any language associated with marriage and family counseling was replaced with rehabilitation counseling language. The survey was pilot tested on a group of University of Arizona professors in the Department of Disability and Psychoeducational Studies to assess the comprehensibility of the content and the logic of the questions. During the testing of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to give suggestions about the survey’s overall design and ease of use, misspelled words or incorrect grammar, the clarity of the questions, the organization and flow of questions, and any questions that should be added or removed. Based on the pilot testing, changes were made to the language of the original questions and additional questions were incorporated.

The modified survey consisted of 60 questions to be administered online. The survey was brief (estimated to take less than 20 minutes to complete) because it was anticipated that program coordinators would be less likely to respond to an extensive survey. The first page of the survey contained the elements of disclosure, and participants had to consent to participate in the study before providing any data. The informed consent question followed the standard no-signature consent form template used by the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board (IRB); see Appendix D for the approval and consent form. The principle investigator’s contact information was included as part of the elements of informed consent, and the program
coordinators who did not consent were disqualified from participation in the survey and redirected to a debriefing page. The consent process was designed to protect the participants’ rights and minimize the risk of harm by ensuring that participants’ identities and personal information remained anonymous.

Confidentiality was treated seriously in this study, and participants’ identities were kept anonymous to ensure that respondents could share their views genuinely and candidly. Salkind (2012) noted a series of ethical concerns important to consider during the research process. Ethical requirements are key elements to address in research because social research examines behaviors and patterns. Thus, when surveying participants, researchers follow the important concept of not doing harm. Individuals are more likely to share the required information in an environment that demonstrates trust, integrity, and respect for the participants. Every effort was made to provide such an environment in the context of this study.

**Program and Participant Demographics**

The next section of the survey contained various demographic questions about participants’ gender, age, and ethnicity. The online survey contained one question about each of the following areas: (a) the number of students in the coordinator’s program, (b) the number of faculty members in the program, (c) whether the program maintained a presence on one or more social networking sites, (d) the length of time the program coordinator had held his or her position, (e) the number of social networking sites to which the program coordinator personally belonged, (f) whether the program coordinator used privacy settings on Facebook, and (g) whether the program coordinator used a “limited profile” on Facebook.
Beliefs about Social Media

The next section asked the program coordinators to use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) to determine their levels of agreement with a variety of statements regarding the appropriate use of social networking sites. Examples of statements include: “It is acceptable for a faculty member to ‘befriend’ a student if the student requests it,” “Faculty should address personal problems that students reveal through material posted on their social networking sites,” and “The Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors should have guidelines regarding the appropriate use of social networking sites.”

Ethical Dilemmas with Social Media

The next section of the survey addressed potential ethical dilemmas arising from misuse of social networking sites during the previous academic year. The program coordinators were presented with a list of potential ethical dilemmas that might arise and were asked to select all the ethical dilemmas they had encountered in the past year. This portion was broken into sections for each group under consideration: graduate students, faculty, and administrative staff. Categories of ethical dilemmas such as professionalism, privacy, confidentiality, boundaries, and cyberbullying were organized around the related themes listed below:

- Professionalism: “Posted unprofessional content about himself or herself on a social network site or sites.”
- Privacy: “Searched personal content about a client on a social networking site or sites.”
- Confidentiality: “Breached a client’s confidentiality through a social networking site or sites.”
- Boundaries: “Befriended a client on a social networking site or sites.”
- Cyberbullying: “Posted unprofessional content directed at a group of people (e.g., of a certain race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality).”

**Efforts to Present Ethical Use of Social Networking**

The final section of the survey included questions regarding approaches to addressing the ethical use of social media across the coordinator’s program, school department, college, or university, asking the following questions: “Does the program, school department, college, or university have policies or recommended guidelines on social media, address this topic during student orientation or in one or more classes, or have workshops to explain the appropriate use of social networking sites?” and “How effective are the rehabilitation counselor education program’s efforts to address the ethical use of social networking sites?” The survey concluded with an opportunity for the program coordinators to add information regarding the impact that networking sites have had on the programs during the past academic year.

**Data Collection**

Dillman (2000) recommended making five contacts with participants to increase response rates for online surveys, because increasing the number of contacts can have a significant effect on return rates, thus increasing the validity of an online survey. The first contact in this research project occurred a few days prior to distributing the questionnaire and informed the participants that they would soon receive a questionnaire (see Appendix A); participants received the questionnaire two to three days later. After three to seven days, participants receive a thank-you e-mail (see Appendix C). That note thanked participants for completing and returning the survey, and it asked those who had not already completed the survey to do so. The fourth contact occurred two to four weeks after the initial questionnaire was sent to remind those who had not yet responded to fill out the online survey. Dillman (2000) recommended making a fifth
contact about a week after the fourth contact, utilizing a delivery method different from that of the initial contacts (e.g., a phone call if previous contacts were by e-mail).

An e-mail invitation containing a link to the online survey was sent to 81 program coordinators (see Appendix B). A brief description of the study was attached, along with a statement indicating that participation was voluntary and anonymous (see Appendix A). By clicking on the link provided in the e-mail, participants were indicating their informed consent and begun the survey.

Specific measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation. Participants were informed, for example, that the survey tool was configured so that it did not collect IP address information from participants, and participants were allowed to withdraw from completing the survey at any time. Additionally, there were no questions regarding personal identity. Participants were informed that the proposed data would be collected and assured that all data would be used only for the purposes of this study.

All data obtained from participants were kept confidential and were only reported in an aggregate format (i.e., only combined results were reported). All surveys were concealed, and no persons other than this researcher and the researcher’s adviser (listed below) had access to the survey responses. The data collected were stored in a HIPAA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database, and the primary investigator deleted them after the final results were published.

**Data Analysis**

In this study, descriptive statistics captured the program coordinators’ perspectives about the ethics of social media use in rehabilitation counselor education programs. Analytical statistics were used to examine potential differences across the coordinators’ responses and the programs. For demographic information, frequency distribution tables were constructed for
nominal data such as gender, age, ethnicity, number of students, number of faculty, and whether the program had a social networking site as well as whether the program coordinators used social networking sites and, if so, which ones. The ethical problems were listed as well as the efforts made to address the issue of social media networking. A chi-square test was used to determine whether programs with social media policies were to report ethical dilemmas according to the program coordinators. Another chi-square test was used to report whether there were possible relationships between programs’ approaches to addressing the ethical use of social media and incidents of graduate student misuse of social media. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

**Limitations**

The online survey was kept short to reduce the participants’ time spent answering the survey. The survey instrument provided a limited number of responses, which created problems for those participants who wanted to respond to a question with an answer or answers that were not provided. One of the notable limitations of this study is the extent to which the survey’s results were generalizable (i.e., whether the findings are applicable to other research).

**Summary**

This chapter described the study’s research methodology, including its setting and the criteria for the selection of the sample. The rationale for using a survey instrument was described, as well as the development of the survey as a research instrument. Examples of the survey and some of the questions from the survey were presented. The next chapter reports the results of the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the ethics of social media use in rehabilitation counselor education programs. Program coordinators from 81 U.S. education programs approved by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) were solicited to complete an online survey regarding ethical dilemmas or problems they had encountered with respect to social media use by graduate students, faculty, and administrative staff. The program coordinators responded as to whether their universities, departments, and rehabilitation counselor education programs had any specific social media policies, whether they had experienced any ethical dilemmas related to social media use, and indicated how these issues were addressed. Underlying this research was the premise that students of rehabilitation counseling must understand how to use social media competently without violating ethical guidelines.

Additionally, rehabilitation counseling education must proactively prepare students for professional life by explicitly addressing issues associated with social media. This study used a modified survey instrument with permission from Williams (2013). Williams designed the survey to identify potential problems that students, faculty, and clients in a counseling field might experience in relation to the misuse of social media. The original survey was intended for marriage and family counseling programs and was modified for this study by substituting rehabilitation counseling education language. This chapter presents the program coordinators’ perspectives on the ethics of social media use in rehabilitation counselor education programs.

Coordinator and Program Demographics

Participants
Before sending the survey, approval for this study was obtained from the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board. In April 2016, an introductory e-mail about the survey was sent to program coordinators of the 81 CORE-approved education programs in the United States extant at the time of the study. The e-mail and the link to the survey were followed by a thank-you note and reminder for those who had not yet participated. These e-mails were sent 20 times over a 3-month period from April to June 2016 to increase survey response, as recommended by Dillman (2000).

Of the 81 program coordinators solicited, 31 (38.27%) completed the demographic portion of the survey, but only 28 (34.56%) program coordinators completed the entire survey (see Table 1). A response rate of 35% is fairly high relative to the 20–30% response rate average obtained by Dillman (2000). Of the 31 participants who completed the demographic questions, the average age was 54.55 (SD = 9.18). In other words, a quarter of the participants were aged 51–58, or within three standard deviations of 54. Of the 31 participants who completed the demographics section, 19 (61%) were female, and 12 (39%) were male. Twenty-three (74.19%) identified themselves as White/Caucasian, 5 (16.13%) as Black/African American, 1 (3.23%) as Latino/Hispanic American, 1 (3.23%) as Native American/American Indian, and 1 (3.23%) as Arabic/Middle Eastern. The average length of time that the 31 participants had been employed as program coordinators was 7 years (M = 7.37, SD = 5.51).

The 31 program coordinators listed the social media sites they used and could choose more than one. The participants reported using the following sites: Facebook (n = 21; 67.74%), Twitter (n = 7; 22.58%), LinkedIn (n = 20; 64.52%), Myspace (n = 1; 3.23%), and other (n = 2; 6.45%). When asked about privacy settings, 17 program coordinators (80.95%) reported that they used privacy settings, 1 (4.76%) did not use privacy settings, and 3 (14.28%) did not know
whether they used privacy settings. In addition, 10 program coordinators (47.61%) reported that they used a limited profile when using Facebook, 3 (14.28%) reported that they did not use a limited profile, and 8 (38.09%) reported that they did not know whether they used a limited profile. Limited profile settings allow users to restrict certain friends from viewing certain content on their Facebook profile, whereas privacy settings or “custom” privacy settings allow users to share content with specific people while hiding it from others (Facebook, 2015).

Thirty (97.00%) program coordinators, or nearly all participants, said that they should act professionally when using social networking sites, even when they are not performing professional duties. The one individual who did not agree said the following, “I do not think it is ANY of our business what is going on in social media. To restrict ANYONE’s freedom of speech (I am not talking about violating confidentiality or other ethical principles) is not OK. Our ethics committee and ethical code OVERREACHES” (emphasis in the original).

**Rehabilitation Education Programs**

The average program size among respondents was 51 students \( (M = 51.45, SD = 34.98) \). Some programs had as few as five students, whereas one program had 150 students (see Table 2). Furthermore, nearly a quarter of the programs had 39–64 students, which is within 12.31 standard deviations of 51. The average number of faculty members for the programs was four \((M = 4.27, SD = 3.78)\), with a range of 1 to 23 faculty. Viewed another way, close to three-quarters of the programs had 3–6 faculty members, which is within 1.33 standard deviations of 4.

Nineteen program coordinators (61.29%) reported that their programs did not have a presence on a social networking site (see Table 2). The remaining 12 (38.71%) had a Facebook page. Of the 12 programs that had Facebook pages, four also had Twitter accounts, and one had
accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The 31 program coordinators reported that none of the programs used Myspace or other social networking sites.

**Social Media Policies**

In the second part of the survey, program coordinators were asked to report the approaches used to promote the ethical use of social media across the following levels: (1) rehabilitation counseling program, (2) department, school, or college, and (3) university. At each level, responding program coordinators reported about the following approaches to social media education: (a) formal policy, (b) recommended guidelines, (c) student orientation, (d) in one or more classes, (e) special meeting or workshop, (f) other, and (g) do not know (see Table 3).

**Program Approaches**

A total of 23 of the 28 program coordinators who completed the full survey (82.14%) reported that their programs addressed the ethics of social media in one or more ways (see Table 3). The most common approach, reported by 11 program coordinators (39.29%), was talking about the issue in one or more classes. Of the 11 program coordinators who reported addressing social media use through graduate coursework, nine (81.81%) also reported that their program had a standalone ethics course. Five (17.86%) programs presented guidelines during student orientation, five (17.86%) programs had recommended guidelines, and two (8.70%) had a formal policy. No program coordinators reported holding special meetings or workshops, but four programs (4.29%) used “other” approaches that were not specified. Finally, five program coordinators (17.86%) did not know if their program addressed the topic. Of the programs that addressed the topic, 19 used one approach (83.00%), three (13.00%) used two approaches (13.00%), and one used three approaches (4.00%).
Of the 23 program coordinators who reported at least one approach to addressing social media use, 12 program coordinators reported that the approach was effective. Specifically, seven said the approach was somewhat effective (58.33%), three said the approach was very effective (25.00%), and two said it was extremely effective (16.67%). The remaining 11 program coordinators (48%) reported that they did not know whether the approaches used by their program were effective. A chi-square test indicated no significant relationship between social media policies and ethical dilemmas ($\chi^2 [1, N = 28] = 3.19, p = .07$). In other words, it did not matter whether social media policies were in place; ethical dilemmas still occurred.

Furthermore, another chi-square test examined the different types of approaches used and a report of an ethical dilemma. The test found no significant relationship between the type of approach used at the program level and the report of an ethical dilemma ($\chi^2 [12, N = 28] = 73.42, p = .83$).

**Department, School, or College Approaches**

The program coordinators also reported that department, school, or college policies addressed the topic of social media. According to the program coordinators, seven programs (25.00%) addressed the topic during student orientation, four (14.29%) had recommended guidelines, two programs (7.14%) had a formal policy, one (3.57%) addressed it in special meetings or workshops, and three (10.71%) addressed it in another unspecified way. Finally, eight program coordinators (28.57%) reported that their department, school, or college did not address the topic, and seven (25%) did not know if their program addressed the issue. Table 4 summarizes the approaches used by the respondents’ department, school, or college.
University Approaches

At the university level, five program coordinators (17.86%) reported having a formal policy, four (14.29%) reported recommended guidelines, four (14.29%) said their university addressed the issue during student orientation, two (7.14%) said their school or department held special meetings or workshops, one (3.57%) reported another approach (not specified), ten (35.71%) said their university did not address this topic, and nine (32.14%) did not know.

Ethical Dilemmas

Program coordinators also reported whether there had been ethical dilemmas during the previous academic year related to the use of social media by graduate students, faculty, and administrative staff in their program. For each group, program coordinators reported if there were ethical dilemmas related to the categories of professionalism, privacy, confidentiality, boundaries, or cyberbullying.

Graduate Students’ Ethical Dilemmas

A total of 13 (46.43%) program coordinators had encountered at least one ethical dilemma with respect to graduate students’ use of social media (see Table 4). The most frequently cited ethical dilemma was students’ “befriending” of faculty members on social networking sites, reported by six (21.43%) program coordinators. After that, the next most common dilemma related to graduate students’ use of social media was posting unprofessional content on social networking sites, as reported by five (17.86%) program coordinators. Finally, a total of nine other ethical dilemmas were encountered, reported by less than 10% of respondents, or only 1 or 2 participants in each case. In these cases, the graduate students:

- expressed controversial views on a social networking site or sites;
revealed serious problems (e.g., substance abuse, domestic violence, suicidal inclinations, and affairs) on a social networking site or sites that raised questions about his or her ability to engage in rehabilitation counseling;

- befriended administrative staff on a social networking site or sites;

- posted unprofessional content about another graduate student on a social networking site or sites;

- posted unprofessional content that was directed at a group of people (e.g., people of a certain race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality) on a social networking site or sites;

- searched for personal content about another graduate student online;

- searched for personal content about a faculty member online;

- searched for personal content about a client on social media;

- other, which was accompanied by this comment: “I really appreciate these questions period I want to point out colon there is NO confidentiality required comma professionally comma unless there is a client slash counselor relationship comma or faculty requirements under FERPA period Why can’t I use punctuation in my answers question mark and exclamation point.”

The survey also asked program coordinators: “Has any graduate student from your program been disciplined due to unprofessional use of a social networking site?” Results indicated that five of the 13 program coordinators who had experienced a social media-related issue (38.46%) reported that a student had been disciplined. In addition, two (15.38%) of the 13 program coordinators who reported an ethical issue responded that a student had been dismissed due to unprofessional use of a social networking site.
Faculty Members’ Ethical Dilemmas

Only three program coordinators (10.71%) reported a dilemma related to social media use by faculty members (see Table 5). Program coordinators were able to choose more than one ethical dilemma when answering the survey. Of these, three (100.00%) incidents involved befriending another faculty member online, two (66.66%) involved befriending a graduate student, and one (33.33%) involved befriending an administrator or staff member. One (33.33%) reported an ethical dilemma involving the posting of unprofessional content, and another program coordinator (33.33%) reported a dilemma involving the expression of a controversial view. In each of the five incidents, faculty members were neither disciplined nor dismissed.

Administrative Staff’s Ethical Dilemmas

Only two program coordinators (7.14%) reported ethical dilemmas related to social media use by administrative staff (see Table 6). Of these, one (50.00%) involved befriending a graduate student, faculty member, or another administrative staff member on a social networking site or sites. Additionally, one (50.00%) involved posting of inappropriate content and expressing controversial views. In each case, administrative staff were not disciplined or dismissed.

Program Coordinators’ Beliefs About Social Media

The survey also asked program coordinators about their beliefs about social media. Specifically, the program coordinators were asked if was appropriate for a rehabilitation counselor to post “had a horrible day in clinic, why can’t patients follow directions?” (see Table 7). Using a 5-point Likert scale (5 = very inappropriate, 1 = very appropriate), the program coordinators reported that such a post was very inappropriate ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.90$).
Specifically, 16 (57.14%) reported it being very inappropriate, 9 (32.14%) inappropriate, 2 (7.14%) neutral, 1 (3.57%) appropriate, 1 (3.57%) very appropriate.

The next question asked if the program coordinators felt comfortable having the student who posted the above comment become a counselor (see Table 8), using a 5-point Likert scale (5 = absolutely not comfortable, 1 = very comfortable). For the most part, program coordinators reported not feeling comfortable with this student becoming a counselor in the future ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.78$). The specific responses were the following: 4 (14.29%) would absolutely not feel comfortable; 15 (53.57%) would not feel comfortable; 7 (25.00%) would feel neutral; 2 (7.14%) would feel comfortable; and 0 (0.00%) would feel very comfortable.

In addition to the example of a potentially inappropriate post, program coordinators were asked to report their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding their beliefs about the use of social media in rehabilitation counseling training programs (see Table 9). In this part of the survey, the program coordinators were asked to report the strength of their beliefs on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree).

**Befriending**

The majority of program coordinators disagreed ($M = 2.14$, $SD = 0.73$) with the following statement: “It is acceptable for a faculty member to ‘befriend’ a student if the student requests it.” Specifically, 16 (55.17%) of the program coordinators disagreed, and another 5 (17.24%) strongly disagreed. In contrast, seven (24.14%) were neutral, and one (3.45%) reported that he or she agreed (i.e., it was acceptable for faculty members to befriend graduate students online).
Monitoring

The next few survey statements focused on monitoring potential and current students on social networking sites. Overall, the program coordinators disagreed ($M = 2.07, SD = 1.08$) with the following statement: “Faculty should be monitoring students’ use of social networking sites.” Specifically, 12 (41.38%) disagreed and 10 (34.84%) strongly disagreed. However, three (10.34%) were neutral, three (10.34%) agreed, and one (3.45%) strongly agreed. Program coordinators felt more neutral ($M = 2.86, SD = 1.20$) about the statement: “It is acceptable for faculty to use material from a social networking site to assess an applicant’s suitability for admission.” Specifically, two (6.9%) strongly agreed, nine (31.03%) agreed, and five (17.24%) were neutral. In contrast, nine (31.03%) disagreed, and four (13.79%) strongly disagreed with the notion that it was acceptable to use information from social media in assessing suitability for admission to a graduate degree program in rehabilitation counseling.

Regarding students in the program, the program coordinators were again close to neutral ($M = 2.86, SD = 1.11$) regarding the following statement: “It is acceptable for faculty to use material from a social networking site to evaluate a student’s suitability to practice rehabilitation counseling.” In total, 1 (3.45%) strongly agreed, 10 (34.84%) agreed, and 5 (17.24%) were neutral, whereas 10 (34.84%) disagreed and 3 (10.34%) strongly disagreed. Finally, program coordinators were also neutral ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.13$) regarding the following statement: “Faculty should address personal problems that students reveal through material posted on their social networking sites.” Namely, two (6.9%) strongly agreed, nine (31.03%) agreed, and seven (24.14%) were neutral, whereas eight (27.59%) disagreed and three (10.34%) strongly disagreed.
Freedom of Speech

The program coordinators were neutral ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .73$) regarding the following statement about freedom of speech: “In general, postings on social networking sites should be protected under freedom of speech even if they may offend others.” The breakdown of responses was as follows: 1 (3.45%) strongly agreed, 13 (44.83%) agreed, 7 (24.14%) neutral, 5 (17.24%) disagreed, and 3 (10.34%) strongly disagreed.

Posting Content

With respect to posting content, the program coordinators were generally in agreement ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .96$) about the following statement: “A student who posts inappropriate content on a social networking site about another student should be subject to some form of discipline.” Most of the program coordinators agreed with the statement or were neutral: 3 (10.34%) strongly agreed, 17 (58.62%) agreed, and 6 (20.69%) were neutral, whereas only 1 (3.45%) disagreed and 2 (6.90%) strongly disagreed.

Responding to a related question, program coordinators tended to agree ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .93$) with the following statement: “A student who posts inappropriate content on a social networking site about a faculty member should be subject to some form of discipline.” In fact, 17 (58.62%), agreed, 2 (6.9%) strongly agreed, and 7 (24.14%) were neutral, whereas only 1 (3.45%) disagreed and 2 (6.9%) strongly disagreed.

As for faculty members posting content online, the program coordinators strongly agreed ($M = 4.48$, $SD = .56$) that “a faculty member who posts inappropriate content on a social networking site about a student should be subject to some form of discipline.” A total of 15 (51.72%) strongly agreed, 13 (44.83%) agreed, and 1 (3.45%) was neutral. None of the program coordinators disagreed with the statement. When asked to respond to the related statement, “A
faculty member who posts inappropriate content on a social networking site about another faculty member should be subject to some form of discipline,” program coordinators largely agreed with the statement \((M = 4.28, SD = .78)\). The leading responses were as follows: 13 (44.83%) strongly agreed and 12 (41.38%) agreed, whereas 3 (10.34%) were neutral, 1 (3.45%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed.

**Client–Counselor Relationship**

The program coordinators strongly agreed with following statement \((M = 4.93, SD = .25)\): “A rehabilitation counselor who breaches a client’s confidentiality on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline.” Importantly, 27 (93.10%) strongly agreed and 2 (6.9%) agreed; none were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

The program coordinators also strongly agreed \((M = 4.79, SD = .41)\) with the following statement: “A rehabilitation counselor who posts inappropriate content regarding a client on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline.” Significantly, 23 (79.31%) strongly agreed and 6 (20.69%) agreed; none of the participants were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

The program coordinators were mostly neutral \((M = 3.14, SD = 1.14)\) regarding the following statement: “It is acceptable for a rehabilitation counselor to use material from a social networking site to inform his or her work with a client.” More specifically, 2 (6.9%) strongly agreed, 11 (37.93%) agreed, and 9 (31.03%) were neutral. However, 3 (10.34%) disagreed and 4 (13.79%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

The program coordinators were in disagreement \((M = 1.86, SD = .97)\) about the following statement: “It is acceptable for a rehabilitation counselor to ‘befriend’ a client if the client
requests it.” Specifically, 12 (41.38%) strongly disagreed, 12 (41.38%) disagreed, and 3 (10.34%) were neutral, whereas 1 (3.45%) agreed, and 1 (3.45%) strongly agreed.

**Ethical Standards**

There was agreement among the program coordinators ($M = 4.34, SD = .84$) regarding the following statement: “*The Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors* should have guidelines regarding the appropriate use of social networking sites.” A predominant group of 14 (48.28%) strongly agreed and 13 (44.83%) agreed, whereas 1 (3.45%) was neutral. While no one disagreed with the statement, 1 (3.45%) participant strongly disagreed.

**Qualitative Responses**

At the end of the survey, the program coordinators were asked the following question: “Is there any other information that you would like to share with us regarding social networking sites and the impact they have had on your program?” Twelve program coordinators answered the question, and a few themes emerged (see Table 10). Specifically, program coordinators were thankful that the survey raised the issue of the use of social networking sites and noted that such issues will be a challenge for the future, although some were quite satisfied with the approaches used in their programs. Some program coordinators thought that it was not their role to monitor social networking sites and that this went beyond the scope of the profession’s ethical considerations while also violating the privacy of students and infringing on their right to free speech.

**Summary**

Overall, there was agreement among the program coordinators that the CRCC *Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors* should have guidelines for the appropriate use of social networking sites. Of the coordinators surveyed, 13 had encountered at least one ethical
dilemma with respect to graduate students’ social media use. The most frequently cited ethical dilemma was students’ befriending faculty members on a social networking site or sites. In addition, the most agreed-upon ethical belief among program coordinators was that a rehabilitation counselor who breaches a client’s confidentiality on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline. Program coordinators were appreciative that the issue of the social networking site use was raised in the study, and they believed that this issue will be a challenge in the future.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This chapter will include a summary of the study’s findings, a discussion of the results, recommendations for guidelines regarding social media use in rehabilitation counseling education training programs, and a discussion of future research avenues. The literature review indicated that although Facebook has only been in existence since 2004, it has changed the way people communicate in our society. While Facebook and Twitter were the leading social media applications as of 2016, in recent years they have been joined by other applications, including Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest, all of which have become increasingly popular. Today, social media is the preferred mode of communication in our increasingly digital society, especially for youth and young adults who have grown up using computer technology.

The use of social networking in academia is becoming common practice, and the number of faculty using social networking for professional purposes is increasing (Lupton, 2014). With this trend, the boundaries between professional and personal relationships are increasingly becoming blurred. Without clear guidelines or policies, faculty members may have difficulty responding to the expectations of social media use as the dominant form of communication while also upholding the ethical obligations of their professional roles. Faculty members also have a responsibility to teach students how to use social media competently without violating ethical guidelines and without jeopardizing the therapeutic relationship between rehabilitation counselor and clients. Rehabilitation counseling education must prepare students for professional life by explicitly addressing the issues associated with social media. Focusing on the perspectives of program coordinators of CORE-accredited rehabilitation counseling programs, the present study examined the following research questions:
• What are program coordinators’ beliefs about the ethics of social media in rehabilitation counseling education programs?

• What ethical dilemmas are reported by program coordinators with respect to social media use by graduate students, faculty, and administrative staff of rehabilitation counseling education programs?

• What policies, guidelines, or approaches are reported by program coordinators with respect to promoting the ethical use of social media in rehabilitation counseling education programs, and are the programs with policies more likely to report ethical dilemmas? Stated differently, is there a relationship between the approaches to addressing the ethical use of social media and incidents of misuse of social media?

**Demographics**

With an overall response rate of 38.27%, the average age of the 31 program coordinators who participated in the full study was 54.44. This is consistent with a report by the Commission of Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC, 2008) that found almost half (48%) of Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCs) were aged 50 or older. The age of the participants is important because a difference in social media use and perspectives may exist between those who are digital natives and those who are digital immigrants. Digital natives, otherwise known as the Net Generation, are individuals who grew up using the Internet as a form of communication (Prensky, 2001). The Net Generation is the cohort born after 1980 that grew up in an environment in which they were constantly exposed to computer-based technology (Prensky, 2001); “it has been suggested that their methods of learning are different from those of previous generations” (Sanders & Morrison, 2007, p. 1). In contrast, digital immigrants were born around or before 1980 and grew up in a precomputer environment or an environment that
was not inherently steeped in technology. Such individuals may or may not be comfortable with the culture of the Internet (Prensky, 2001). In the present study, most of the program coordinators were digital immigrants who did not grow up using social media sites, whereas graduate students who are now attending graduate programs are most likely digital natives. The results of the present study should be considered with this in mind, and it is possible that younger program coordinators who grew up with the Internet may have different perspectives on ethical dilemmas in social media use.

**Rehabilitation Counseling Education Programs**

Program coordinators reported a wide range in the number of students enrolled in their graduate programs (see Table 1). One program had five students, whereas one program had 150 students. The next largest program had 130 students. Four programs had 100 or more students. There was also a wide range in the number of faculty members, from 1 to 23. The next highest number was seven, followed by three programs that had six faculty members each. The informed consent form stated that “I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to determine whether schools accredited through CORE are applying appropriate professional judgment regarding graduate students’ use of social networking sites (private life vs. professional life).” This statement was designed to evoke responses regarding CORE-accredited programs. However, the questions regarding program size appeared on the survey as “How many students are in your program?” and “How many faculty are in your program?” These questions did not specifically ask about graduate students or if the faculty members taught in rehabilitation counseling programs or more general counseling programs. It is possible that the program coordinators reported data on both graduate and undergraduate students or other counseling specializations, rather than just graduate students and faculty in CORE-accredited programs.
Efforts to Promote the Ethics of Social Media

The program coordinators reported that the approaches for addressing the ethics of social media occurred primarily at the program level, rather than at the departmental, school, college, or university levels. One interpretation of these results is that program coordinators may be more aware of approaches at the program level. Alternatively, it is possible that program-level approaches are easier to monitor and implement when addressing the unique concerns related to the training of rehabilitation counselors; thus, they comprise the most commonly used approaches. The following sections discuss the prevalence and patterns of the different approaches to addressing the ethical use of social media for graduate students, faculty, and administrators in rehabilitation counseling education programs.

Program Approaches

Eighty-two percent of the program coordinators in the present study reported that their programs addressed the ethics of social media at the program level, indicating that this is the most common approach. Rather than multiple approaches, three-quarters of the program coordinators reported having a single approach at the program level. The most common approach to social media ethics, identified by almost 40% of the program coordinators, was to incorporate social media use guidelines through one or more classes. Of these, 80% reported having a stand-alone ethics course, which would be the most logical place to address the ethics of social media use. Almost 20% of the program coordinators reported that information on this topic was presented during a student orientation and/or in formal written guidelines; however, only 10% had a formal policy addressing the ethics of social media use in their programs. The results of the present study indicate that although the use of social media is being discussed in graduate programs, especially within coursework and orientation, relatively fewer programs have
developed formalized policies to address the use of social media in rehabilitation counselor education. When asked how effective their programs were in addressing social media use, 12 program coordinators (42%) reported that their program’s efforts were either extremely effective or very effective (see Table 11), while 11 reported they did not know if the approaches were effective. A chi-square test indicated no significant relationship between social media policies and ethical dilemmas. In other words, it did not matter whether social media policies were in place; ethical dilemmas still occurred. Furthermore, another chi-square test examined the different types of approaches used in the report of a specific ethical dilemma. The test found no significant relationship between the type of approach used at the program level and the outcome of the ethical dilemma. For this study, it did not matter whether programs had social media policies because they seemed not to influence whether ethical dilemmas did or did not occur. This could be because this survey did not differentiate between personal and professional social media sites.

An explanation for why program coordinators stated that their efforts were either extremely or very effective is beyond the scope of the present study. However, this belief is worth studying in future research. Such research may also help CRCC to determine which social media policy efforts to implement in its guidelines, not just for students but for the rehabilitation counseling profession in general.

**Department, School, and College Approaches**

Based on the results of the present study, the promotion of the ethical use of social media at the department, school, or college levels was less common than at the program level. In fact, only half of the program coordinators reported employing approaches at the department, school, or college levels, whereas a quarter reported they did not know whether such approaches were
implemented at those levels and a quarter, reported that their institution had no such approaches. Of the program coordinators who reported an approach at these levels, the most common approach, indicated by 25%, was addressing the topic during a student orientation, followed by explanations of guidelines and formal policies. Pomerantz, Hank, and Sugimoto (2015) found that larger universities more frequently have social media policies at the department, school, or college levels. Pomerantz et al. (2015) asserted that this is because universities are divided into units such as schools and colleges that may have different expectations.

The results of the present study fit with the work of Pomerantz et al. (2015) in finding that social media policies for students are more frequently present at the department, school, and college levels. For instance, Pomerantz et al. (2015) found that medical and health-related departments are most likely to have social media policies due to the necessity of protecting patient information under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). Given the particular concerns of the health care field, it makes sense to ensure that orientations make students aware of and familiar with the department’s rules, policies, and regulations. It is not surprising, then, that medical and health-related departments used this approach the most at the department, school, or college levels.

**University Approaches**

Most program coordinators, 67%, did not have or did not know about university-wide policies on the use of social media. At the university level, program coordinators (18%) reported that social media use was covered in the recommended guidelines of their university. The findings of this study are consistent with those of the more comprehensive study of university policies on social media by Pomerantz et al. (2015), which reported that less than one quarter of all institutions had a university-wide social media policy.
According to Pomerantz et al. (2015), very little prior research analyzed the development of social media policies in higher education; instead, most of the research has focused on corporations’ policies on social media. Williams, Johnson, and Patterson (2013) conducted a survey with marriage and family counseling education directors, and three-quarters of these directors reported that their universities did not have policies or guidelines concerning the appropriate use of social media. In the past, there have been some incidents of professors posting inappropriate content on social media (Pomerantz et al., 2015).

**Ethical Dilemmas**

As part of the survey, program coordinators reported any ethical dilemmas they had encountered arising from misuse of social media during the previous academic year. Program coordinators could report on more than one ethical dilemma. During the previous academic year close to half (45%) of the respondents reported at least one ethical dilemma regarding graduate students, compared to only 10% who experienced a dilemma involving faculty and administrative staff. Importantly an ethical dilemma does not mean a violation had occurred. In fact, at the time of this study social media use was not addressed in the revised *CRCC Code*. However, a reported ethical dilemma indicated that a program coordinator was concerned about the conduct or behavior of a graduate student, faculty members or administrative staff.

**Graduate Students’ Ethical Dilemmas**

**Befriending faculty members.** The most frequently cited ethical dilemma was a student befriending a faculty member on a social networking site, which was an issue reported by six program coordinators (21%). In a general study on ethical dilemmas in rehabilitation counseling, Hartley and Cartwright (2016) found that boundary violations continue to be the most common ethical dilemma encountered by rehabilitation counselors. The fundamental
ethical concerns related to boundary violations in real life are also present with respect to social media friend requests, which may blur the line between personal and professional roles. If a faculty member accepts a student’s friend request, the student may believe that the relationship is personal, which may or may not be what the faculty member intended. If the faculty member declines the connection, the student may feel rejected or offended.

**Befriending another graduate student.** Another ethical dilemma cited by five program coordinators (18%) involved one graduate student befriending another graduate student on a social networking site. It is possible that a student may not feel safe accepting another student’s request, or that a student may feel pressured to do so; these feelings may be tied up with issues of cyberbullying. Individuals aged 18–29 seem to be the major demographic group to experience harassment online (Duggan, 2014). The different kinds of harassment include name-calling, efforts to embarrass someone, physical threats, sexual harassment, and stalking (Duggan, 2014).

**Posting unprofessional content.** Another ethical dilemma cited by five program coordinators (18%) concerned the posting of unprofessional content by graduate students on social networking sites. Further investigation is needed to understand why an individual would post unprofessional content about him- or herself on social media. Posting unprofessional content could be the result of peer pressure, wanting to seem important, or simply wanting to have fun with one’s peers. Students are used to sharing both personal and professional information on social media, but they still have concerns regarding who will view it. Students should consider who will see the information they post (White, Kirwan, Lai, Walton, & Ross, 2013). Other researchers have commented that students feel the need to share information, but they also have to manage how they present themselves (Newman, Lauterbach, & Munson, 2011).
According to White et al. (2013), students often conveyed remorse over posting unprofessional material.

In a recent study, medical students reported that they know their online behavior is unprofessional four times more often than do faculty (Kitsis et al., 2016). In light of this, one might think medical students would monitor their online presence more strictly. On the contrary, the medical students surveyed stated that they hardly ever monitor their online presences. One student expressed that monitoring his online image “won’t be important until I have an [online] professional presence to monitor” (Kitsis et al., 2016 p. 6). Students may know they have to keep track of their “digital footprints,” but they do not think they have to do so while they are still in medical school (Kitsis et al., 2016). Faculty need to assist students in managing their online image by discussing how their digital presence on social media could affect their professional lives in the future.

Other ethical dilemmas. Program coordinators encountered nine other ethical dilemmas, each reported by fewer than 10% of the program coordinators. The two themes present in these ethical dilemmas were professionalism and personal privacy.

Professionalism. Five ethical dilemmas were grouped under the broader theme of professionalism. These issues related to graduate students posting serious problems on social media that raised questions about their ability to be rehabilitation counselors, befriending administrative staff on social media sites, expressing controversial views, and posting unprofessional content about another graduate student or a specific group of people. One could interpret this issue as indicating that graduate students need to be aware of what they post on social media sites and how it might reflect on them professionally. In other studies, researchers found that some respondents reported that reflecting on past social media posts led them to
believe that what they had expressed was unprofessional (White et al., 2013). Examples of unprofessional content may include posting pictures of drinking or illicit drug use; swearing; criticizing teachers and programs; or posting criminal activity, obscene gestures, or racist comments.

**Personal privacy.** Three ethical dilemmas could be described as personal privacy issues, including dilemmas related to graduate students searching for personal content about another graduate student, a faculty member, or a client. While searching for some information online may be permissible, three program coordinators reported that the searches were inappropriate and violated someone’s personal privacy. Ethical dilemmas may have arisen when someone completed an in-depth social media search on his or her colleagues or clients, as individuals may use the personal content they find on their colleagues and clients to hurt them, whether intentionally or inadvertently.

**Faculty Members’ Ethical Dilemmas**

The survey revealed that program coordinators did not consider faculty misuse of social media to be a major concern. In fact, only three program coordinators (10%) reported an ethical dilemma related to faculty use of social media, and no coordinators reported a faculty member being disciplined or dismissed as a result of social media use. All three of the ethical dilemmas reported related to a faculty member being befriended by another faculty member or a graduate student on social media. The results of this study suggest that program coordinators were either unaware of instances of faculty befriending students online or did not view it as problematic. The former interpretation is more likely based on a study completed by Sturgeon and Walker (2009), which found that almost 75% of faculty members interviewed were concerned about being professional with students and “befriending” expectations with students.
and students may find it difficult to maintain their academic roles if they begin friendships on social media. As stated previously, boundaries between the personal and professional may become blurred online, a clear ethical issue.

**Administrative Staff’s Ethical Dilemmas**

As for administrative staff, the most frequent ethical dilemmas reported related to befriending other administrative staff members, graduate students, and faculty members on social media. One program coordinator reported that an administrative staff member had posted inappropriate content about him- or herself, and one program coordinator reported an administrative staff member posting controversial views on a social networking site. No coordinators reported an administrative staff member being disciplined or dismissed. These ethical dilemmas could be grouped under the themes of acting unprofessionally and blurring relationship lines. If employees become Facebook friends with other employees, personal information is exchanged in the form of pictures, comments, videos, and pages “liked” (Wu, 2015); this can lead to blurred boundaries. Furthermore, fellow employees may learn personal information about one another, such as medical conditions, marital status, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs (Wu, 2015). Accessing this information could cause havoc in the form of harassment and discrimination in the work environment (Wu, 2015). Another issue could arise if coworkers discuss confidential/protected information with other coworkers on social media (Wu, 2015). An example would be employees of a pharmaceutical company discussing online if the new “wonder drug” their employer is developing will receive FDA approval. Another example is paralegals who post on Facebook about the $400,000 settlement payment a client just made to keep a lawsuit from going to trial (Wu, 2015).
Program Coordinators’ Beliefs about Social Media

The program coordinators reported their levels of agreement with a variety of statements regarding the appropriate use of social media. They were in strong agreement when the statements were about the client–counselor relationship. Program coordinators were also strongly in agreement concerning faculty members and students being disciplined for posting inappropriate content about each other. The survey did not clarify whether the statements analyzed were from a personal or professional social media site.

Client–Counselor Relationship

Program coordinators were in complete agreement with each other that a rehabilitation counselor who breaches a client’s confidentiality on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline. Additionally, 82% of program coordinators reported that it was unacceptable for a rehabilitation counselor to befriend a client on social media, even if the client made the initial request. Furthermore, 55% of program coordinators agreed or were neutral and 44% disagreed on whether it was acceptable for rehabilitation counselors to use material from a social networking site to inform their work with clients.

Faculty members should discuss with graduate students whether social media relationships between counselors and clients can be detrimental to the therapeutic alliance. Online interaction could result in a dual relationship in which clients are confused about whether they are friends with their counselors. Rehabilitation counselors must avoid nonprofessional relationships with clients and former clients unless such interactions are potentially beneficial to the clients or former clients (CRCC, 2016). Inviting clients’ access to one’s personal profile online can be perceived as inviting them into one’s personal life. A client who becomes a counselor’s digital contact (or “friend”) can post to the counselor’s page and view messages
posted on the counselor’s profile. The client can also view photo albums, read comments on these photos, and interact with the counselor’s other contacts (Kolmes, 2009). This level of intimacy could send mixed messages to clients, especially if they are unclear about therapeutic boundaries at the beginning of counseling (Kolmes, 2009).

**Students Posting Inappropriate Content**

Most program coordinators, 70%, reported that a student who posts inappropriate content about another student should be subject to some form of discipline. In addition, 66% of program coordinators reported that a student who posts inappropriate content about a faculty member on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline. If students post hateful words about one another, this could lead to negative effects on the targeted individual, such as depression or suicide. If graduate students post other inappropriate content, such as content involving profanity, drugs, theft, sex, alcohol, or tobacco, these posts could jeopardize their future professional careers. A graduate student posting inappropriate content about a faculty member may demonstrate hostility toward that faculty member. Students must remember that faculty members have a right to privacy and respect. Rehabilitation counseling students must consider that faculty members can assist students with internships and future employment, and posting inappropriate content may jeopardize their chances of receiving such support.

**Faculty Posting Inappropriate Content**

Program coordinators were in almost total agreement regarding faculty posts on social media. Ninety percent reported that faculty members who post inappropriate content on a social networking site about a student should be subject to some form of discipline. Another point of strong agreement among program coordinators (86%) was that a faculty member who posts inappropriate content on a social networking site about another faculty member should be subject
to some form of discipline. Program coordinators have higher expectations for faculty members than for students with regard to discipline and professionalism, as nearly all (90%) agreed that faculty members should face disciplinary action for inappropriate posts. Faculty members are expected to have more knowledge about rules and boundaries, whereas students are considered to still be learning about rules and boundaries.

Faculty members could use social media to harm or control students when posting inappropriate content. Teachers may abuse the power inherit in their relationships with students by employing any of the following forms of power: (a) “reward power” in distributing grades, (b) “coercive power” in disliking students’ actions, (c) “referent power” in being role models, (d) “information and expert power” in being knowledgeable in their fields, and (e) “legitimate power” in possessing legal authority over their students (Biaggio, Paget, & Chenoweth, 1997). Faculty may use their power when communicating with students on social media, whether intentionally or inadvertently. For instance, a faculty member could post inappropriate content about a student’s personal behavior or post something positive about a student. These comments are publicly available, and the student’s reaction to such a post is not predictable (Aragon et al., 2014). The student could forge a more positive or negative relationship with the faculty member due to such comments (Aragon et al., 2014), altering the balance of the relationship and the class environment.

A faculty member who posts inappropriate content on social media about another faculty member could cause an imbalance of power between faculty members. One faculty member may want to control, embarrass, or harm other faculty members. In such a situation, hostility could erupt and create a toxic working environment. An alternative interpretation would be that
one faculty member could post content that might interfere with the promotion of another faculty member, or which might compromise his or her career.

**Freedom of Speech**

Program coordinators were neutral on the subject of freedom of speech. One interpretation of this finding could be that program coordinators are not knowledgeable enough about the law to discuss it. Another interpretation is that program coordinators may feel that monitoring the Internet and social media could be too big a task to do effectively. A U.S. Supreme Court decision on the subject stated: “Schools may limit or discipline student expressions if school officials reasonably conclude that it will materially and substantially disrupt the work and discipline of the school” (*Frederick v. Morse*, 2007; *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 1969). No court decisions have provided guidance about students making comments on social media about off-campus issues. One researcher remarked that if an individual posts content on an institutional web site or social media site that disrupts the work and discipline of the school, then such an act is punishable (*Meloy*, 2011).

**Ethical Guidelines**

Most program coordinators thought that the *Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors* should have guidelines regarding the appropriate use of social networking. At the time of distribution of the survey, the revised *Code 2016* (which addressed areas of social media) had not been released. Given the prevalence of online communication in today’s society, rehabilitation counseling education programs should be more proactive with regard to the use of social media. These ethical guidelines should be based on the *Code* and should address responding to friend requests, searching for client information, breaching confidentiality, engaging in harmful relationships, posting harmful or negative content, maintaining appropriate
privacy, making unethical self-disclosures, and maintaining a professional digital presence. As part of the therapeutic alliance, when using social media the rehabilitation counselor has to preserve the relationship with the client (Castonguay, Constantino, & Holtforth, 2006). The ways in which future clients contact rehabilitation counselors and what they say or ask can provide important clinical information that predicts some of the issues that the counselor will face in his or her efforts to establish the alliance when rehabilitation counseling embarks. Thus, when using social media one has to be aware that the attachment bond is the connection between the client and rehabilitation counselor and represents a level of trust that must be established between the two participants. The Code is a crucial tool for providing effective and ethical rehabilitation counseling and should address this increasingly important part of modern life.

**Friending.** The following section offers some suggested guidelines for ethical social media use. According to the program coordinators surveyed in this study, faculty members should not befriend a student on social media, even if the student requests it, because this could interfere with appropriate boundaries (CRCC, 2016). Rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, and faculty must describe and maintain ethical professional, personal, and social boundaries with their clients, subordinates, and students (CRCC, 2016). When using social networking sites, a supervisor or educator should consider whether having access to information about a subordinate or student violates this principle. For this reason, a supervisor or educator should wait until the supervisory relationship concludes before becoming social media friends. According to the Code, “Rehabilitation counselor educators consider and clearly discuss the risks and benefits of extending boundaries with their students and take appropriate professional precautions to minimize the risk of harm to the student” (CRCC, 2016).
Students’ befriending faculty members. If a student sends a friend request a faculty member on a social networking site, the faculty member should initiate a discussion about the reasons for maintaining professional boundaries (Aragon et al., 2014). Faculty members may also include in their syllabi policies regarding correspondence with students via social networking. Social networking policies should outline what is acceptable in online relationships and interaction.

In several studies, students expressed feelings of suspicion and irritation when they received “friend” requests from either unknown educators or their “worst” professors on Facebook (Karl & Peluchette, 2011). Sturgeon and Walker (2009) reported that some students disregard friend requests from professors because the relationship could be viewed as less positive for the student. An ethical problem could arise if the student sees the “friend” relationship as a “special” connection with the faculty member (Aragon et al., 2014). A student may feel that the faculty member will then assist the student with better grades or ignore the student’s absences from class (Aragon et al., 2014). This could lead to the student becoming frustrated and angry with the faculty member because he or she thought there was a “special” connection when no such connection exists and no special treatment is dispensed (Aragon et al., 2014). Faculty and institutions may be exposed to possible dilemmas due to a lack of clear policies and guidelines, making the development of and adherence to these guidelines critical (Aragon et al., 2014).

Befriending clients. Program coordinators believed it was unacceptable for a rehabilitation counselor to befriend a client online, even when the client made the initial request. When a client requests to connect with a professional via social media, professionals should not accept the friend request; instead, they should discuss the issue with the client and inform him or
her about the potential harm of commencing a social media-based relationship. Guseh et al. (2009) stated, “In more cases, the risks of interacting with patients on online social forums appear to outweigh any current potential benefits” (p. 585). Becoming Facebook friends can harm counselor–client relationships. Boundaries between clients and counselors may become blurred, and the acceptance sends a mixed message to clients about the appropriateness of establishing other types of counselor–client relationships. Moreover, the lack of boundaries could harm clients and break the ethical code of nonmaleficence. As stated previously, Kaplan et al. (2011) described “friending” with clients leading to improper self-disclosure; by contrast, clients might feel rejected if a counselor “unfriends” them. This may damage the therapeutic alliance between rehabilitation counselor, and clients’ trust may be broken.

Rehabilitation education programs and rehabilitation counseling agencies, including faculty and counselors, should consider including a professional policy statement regarding the importance of not accepting students or clients as online friends. The statement could outline the reasons why such a relationship is not acceptable, including issues regarding privacy and confidentiality.

**Searching on social media.** Rehabilitation counseling students should not search for client information on social media. According to Kaplan et al. (2011), clients wish to be in control of the information they disclose, and uninvited visits to their social media pages are a violation of trust. In the counseling relationship, one should be honest about the information that is being shared. The therapeutic alliance establishes that the clients benefit from feeling that they are being listened to and understood, experiences that facilitate the establishment of safety and trust predictors of strong thepatuic alliance development. As counselors, we do not go to clients’ homes, open their mailboxes, and look at their mail. Looking at someone else’s mail
without permission is considered a federal offense (18 U.S. Code § 1702). One could argue, in contrast, that if the information is on the Internet, it is no longer private. However, if a rehabilitation counselor or student searches for personal information without the client’s permission, then it may constitute a violation of the client’s rights. One must consider whether searching for client information promotes autonomy and the individual’s ability to choose what to share in the counseling session. There should be a standard for searching for client information. The Code does mention “Counselors should avoid searching for client’s virtual presence unless relevant to the rehabilitation counseling process” (CRCC, 2016). Counselors should discuss with their clients the risks and benefits of online sharing and how it changes the dynamics of the counseling relationship. Above all, rehabilitation counselors have to consider whether the information obtained from a social networking site promotes the well-being and welfare of the client.

Confidentiality. Rehabilitation counselors should not breach client confidentiality (CRCC, 2016). This needs to be emphasized at the rehabilitation counseling education level. Rehabilitation counselors and students need a set of standards to ensure that their online behavior will not cause harm to clients or compromise the privacy and confidentiality of either themselves or their clients (CRCC, 2016). Program coordinators who responded to the present study agreed that posting harmful or negative content about clients, fellow students, faculty, or administrative staff on social media should never occur. If it does happen, the program coordinators stated that there should be some form of discipline. Nonmaleficence is an important principle to remember when dealing with the ethics of social media use. One may unintentionally harm the client when posting online. Again, this could damage the bond that between the rehabilitation counselor and client need in the therapeutic allcanie with each other. Discussions with graduate students on
this topic should focus on defining what content is acceptable to post. According to the Code rehabilitation counselors should avoid posting any “personally identifiable information” unless the client has provided written consent (CRCC, 2016). Moreover, everyone in the field needs to be cautious regarding what they post on social media. Counselors have to remember that information posted online is permanent, and their actions could cause a confidentiality breach.

**Privacy.** The importance of maintaining appropriate privacy online and methods of doing so should be discussed with rehabilitation counseling graduate students. Rehabilitation counselors and graduate students need to be updated on the security settings that social media sites offer. Students should be familiar with privacy settings and how to set limited profiles on social media sites, and should be trained on how to use the security features that social media sites offer. Students should also know the limitations and capabilities of the privacy settings of the social media sites they use.

Rehabilitation counselors and graduate students should consider several areas involving online privacy. When posting clients’ images or information, they must be sure that permission was sought from that individual to post (CRCC, 2016). Posting should not infringe on another’s privacy. It is important to make sure that one is not violating a network use policy or HIPAA privacy rules.

True privacy does not exist in the world of social media. Before posting, professionals should consider what could happen if the post became widely viewed and how that might reflect on everyone involved.

**Professionalism.** Avoiding unethical self-disclosure and maintaining a professional digital presence should be high priorities for rehabilitation counseling professionals. Students of rehabilitation counseling must understand how to use social media competently and without
violating ethical guidelines. As stated previously, students may face an array of repercussions from social media use, even many years later. A person who posted inappropriate content at 20 years of age could be judged for it when applying for a rehabilitation counseling graduate program. For example, an individual who once posted about white supremacy and made very negative comments about race could jeopardize his or her future job prospects. When applying for a rehabilitation counseling graduate program, this hypothetical person could be judged on past incidents of negative social media posts or on his or her present incidents of positive social media posts such as volunteering in the community. The rehabilitation counseling program could judge that the person should not be trusted to become a professional rehabilitation counselor. The university program coordinator could even consider that person a threat to the campus and the student population. Lehavot (2009) reported that students in training to work in the field of rehabilitation counseling should be required to use foresight when posting personal information online because this information could be revealed at a later time and erode the public’s confidence in the profession. A rehabilitation counselor or student who self-discloses inappropriately on the Internet may affect his or her relationships with clients. This may also affect the therapeutic alliance. In its guidelines, the Code does mention that rehabilitation counselors should have separate professional and personal presences in their social media use (CRCC, 2016).

**Social Media Policy Guidelines**

Guidelines for social media use should also include whether rehabilitation counseling education training programs should use material from social networking sites to evaluate a student’s suitability to practice rehabilitation counseling or an applicant’s suitability for admission. The possibility of obtaining misleading information from an online search is high.
When searching a social media site using a person’s name, program administrators should consider that even if they are using the right name, the information they find could be for another person with the same name. As a result, potential students should know if admissions officials are searching for them online. High school counselors also should guide high school students in how to clean up their digital presence on the Internet.

As stated previously, social media can be used as a teaching tool, but faculty first need to receive training on how to use it effectively, particularly as many faculty and staff are not digital natives. Faculty and administrators should discuss guidelines to ensure that social media use will not jeopardize the ethical integrity of the learning process or the institution. Guidelines should state that disciplinary action will be taken against students, faculty, and administrative staff who violate these standards. Faculty need to be aware of the potential ethical dilemmas that can occur with regard to the use of social media. Some of the comments from program coordinators in the current study suggest that social media usage is not a problem today, which unfortunately does not help to prevent it from becoming a problem in the future.

At the university level, there is a need for guidelines and policies to inform the entire student body about this topic. Pomerantz et al. (2015) found that social media policies for universities were grouped into three categories: the suitability of posts (suitability of posts and suitability of tone), representing the institution (branding), and ensuring that posts obey the law (legality). This may include informing students on how to use the school’s name and logo appropriately in their communications. Guidelines should delineate how an individual who is representing the university should behave when using a social network site belonging to the university, as well as on other social media sites and in other online contexts.
Social media sites are powerful communications tools that have a significant impact on organizational and professional reputations. Universities should develop policies to help clarify how best to enhance and protect personal and professional reputations when participating in social media. Pomerantz et al. (2015) reported that there is a potential for liability and a need to cultivate policies without delay that protect the rights of the students and faculty while simultaneously protecting the university.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study is an example of quantitative, nonexperimental, descriptive research design in which there was no control group and no random selection of participants. Threats to the internal and external validity of such studies were detailed by Campbell and Stanley (1963), and three possible threats to the validity of this study were identified using these guidelines. This study took its sample from the program coordinators for all of the 81 CORE-approved training programs in the United States. These participants were not randomly selected, which is a threat to external validity because the characteristics of sample group limits the generalizability of the study to other populations. Because these participants volunteered for the study, there was a possibility they had a strong interest in social media use; their responses to the survey could reflect a bias. Also, the possibility of the Hawthorne effect exists: the nature of the survey could have threatened external validity and led to response bias (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). If that were the case, generalizability of the results would be affected.

Because the survey did not clarify between professional or personal social media sites, there may have been some confusion among program coordinators completing the survey. This confusion is centrally in regards to the program coordinators’ beliefs about the ethics of social media in rehabilitation counseling education programs and ethical dilemmas reported by
program coordinators with respect to social media use by graduate students, faculty, and administrative staff of these programs. Also, given the ever-changing landscape of popular social media sites, Instagram and Snapchat were not part of the survey. This could have had some bearing on the outcomes.

**Future Research**

It is critical to the field of rehabilitation counseling to continue to investigate social media use and ethics. As the use of social media increases, researchers must examine how the profession might employ social media responsibly. It is important to consider how rehabilitation counseling professionals present their private and professional identities on social media. Further research could help determine whether these differences disappear as students’ progress in their professional development.

Researchers should explore the social media policies and procedures in place in other counseling settings (e.g., private settings, workers’ compensation programs, and state and federal vocational rehabilitation agencies). They should determine whether these policies or procedures are effective in assisting counselors and clients in preventing ethical dilemmas regarding social media use. Researchers must also identify ethical dilemmas within social media use, taking into special consideration the perspectives of other rehabilitation counseling professionals.

More insight is needed to describe what is being taught in graduate rehabilitation counseling ethic classes regarding social media use. For example, what does the curriculum entail? Should there be a more unified curriculum within graduate rehabilitation counseling training programs regarding this subject? Comparative studies are needed to determine which policies are working on different campuses regarding social media use. An in-depth look at
current policies and their impact on reducing ethical dilemmas related to social media use may reveal areas for policy improvement.

Further research also needs to examine cyberbullying in the rehabilitation counseling field. Additional information is needed to understand the subject in more depth and to determine whether practitioners within the profession are being trained in this area. Future research should also examine whether the CRCC Code should discuss cyberbullying.

The field of rehabilitation counseling should also investigate whether rehabilitation education training programs are monitoring discussion posts for online courses and taking steps to address any ethical dilemmas that might occur with the graduate students taking the online course. Personnel supervising these discussions need to understand specific problems that could arise in rehabilitation counseling education programs and what approaches are being used to intervene if ethical dilemmas occur.

If ethical dilemmas arise within the rehabilitation counseling programs, how are they being resolved? Hartley and Cartwright (2016) found that resolving ethical dilemmas was handled through discussions with supervisors, peers, and clients. Also, reviewing the CRCC Code or agency policy, referring the client to another professional or discontinuing services when necessary, and seeking an advisory opinion for the CRCC Ethics Committee. The question remains whether such ethical dilemmas would be resolved differently in education programs.

When marketing to prospective graduate students, rehabilitation education programs should be encouraged to have social media networking presences that engage future students who may be interested in these programs. They should assist interested individuals in learning more about the program and eventually becoming rehabilitation counselors. If the programs are or are not using informed consent, would the future students know that the programs are
searching on the Internet about them. Future research could examine programs that do have official social networking presences and whether these programs have experienced increased enrollment.

With the rise in digital communication, policies need to be developed to promote the ethical use of social networking in all rehabilitation counseling education programs. With the new ethics in social media guidelines in the *Code*, will rehabilitation counseling education programs be more aware of ethical dilemmas, or will things remain the same? Will there be more discussion and research about social media as younger professionals enter the field of rehabilitation counseling? It will be important to continue to investigate the perspectives of program coordinators, especially if younger professionals report different beliefs about social media. These are questions that further research should seek to answer.
Appendix A – Initial Contact

SUBJECT LINE: “Survey: Graduate Rehabilitation Education Activity on Social Networking Sites”

My name is Beverly Reghabi; I am a doctoral candidate in Rehabilitation Counselor Education at the University of Arizona. I will be sending you an online survey to explore whether schools accredited through CORE are applying appropriate professional judgment regarding masters-level students’ use of social networking sites (private life vs. professional life).

The purpose of this research is to improve our understanding of the challenges that the rehabilitation profession faces regarding the use of social networking sites and how the rehabilitation curriculum can address these challenges.

I will be sending the link to you shortly.

Thank you for your consideration.

Beverly Reghabi
Doctoral Candidate, University of Arizona
Disability and Psychoeducational Studies
Appendix B – Second Contact

SUBJECT LINE: “Survey: Graduate Rehabilitation Education Activity on Social Networking Sites”

Dear Participant,

My name is Beverly Reghabi; I am a doctoral candidate in Rehabilitation Counselor Education at the University of Arizona. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to explore whether schools accredited through CORE are applying appropriate professional judgment regarding masters-level students’ use of social networking sites (private life vs. professional life).

The purpose of this research is to improve our understanding of the challenges that the rehabilitation profession faces regarding the use of social networking sites and how the rehabilitation curriculum can address these challenges. To be eligible to participate in the study, you must be 18 years or older and be a program coordinator of a training program accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education.

Procedures

The questionnaire consists of 60 questions and will take approximately 20 minutes or less to complete. This questionnaire will be conducted via an online Qualtrics-created survey.

There are no known or expected risks from participating in this research, except for the mild frustration associated with answering the online survey questions. If you are uncomfortable answering any online survey question, please skip that question.

It is important that you respond openly and honestly to the online survey for accurate results. Your responses are completely confidential.

If you have any questions, please contact me at bjreghabi@email.arizona.edu or contact my advisor, Dr. Michael Hartley, at mthartley@email.arizona.edu.

Please click on the link below to take the survey.

Thank you for your consideration.

Beverly Reghabi
Doctoral Candidate, University of Arizona
Disability and Psychoeducational Studies
Appendix C – Third Contact

SUBJECT LINE: “Survey: Graduate Rehabilitation Education Activity on Social Networking Sites”

My name is Beverly Reghabi; I am a doctoral candidate in Rehabilitation Counselor Education at the University of Arizona. I am conducting an online survey seeking the opinions of the program coordinators at schools accredited through CORE. I have recently distributed an online survey to you. I want to extend my thanks to those you have taken the online survey.

For those who have not yet done so, I would appreciate if you would take the online survey. The information that you will provide will help us to further our understanding of the challenges that the rehabilitation profession faces regarding the use of social networking sites and how the rehabilitation curriculum can address these challenges.

Please click on the link below to take the survey.

Thank you for your consideration.

Beverly Reghabi
Doctoral Candidate, University of Arizona
Disability and Psychoeducational Studies
Appendix D – Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Introduction

Dear Participant,

My name is Beverly Reghabi; I am a doctoral candidate in Rehabilitation Counselor Education at the University of Arizona. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to determine whether schools accredited through CORE are applying appropriate professional judgment regarding masters-level students’ use of social networking sites (private life vs. professional life).

The purpose of this research is to improve our understanding of the challenges that the rehabilitation profession faces regarding the use of social networking sites and how the rehabilitation curriculum can address these challenges. To be eligible to participate in the study, you must be 18 years or older and be a program coordinator of a training program approved by the Council on Rehabilitation Education.

Procedures

The questionnaire consists of 60 questions and will take approximately 20 minutes or less to complete. This questionnaire will be conducted via an online Qualtrics-created survey.

Risks/Discomforts

There are no known or expected risks for participating in this research, except for the mild frustration associated with answering the online survey questions. If you are uncomfortable answering any online survey question, please skip that question.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for participants. However, it is hoped that through your participation, researchers will learn more about how graduate students, faculty, administrative staff, and clients use social media.

Confidentiality

All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the primary investigator and the investigator's advisor, listed below, will have access to them. The data collected will be stored
with HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

**Compensation**

There is no direct compensation.

**Participation**

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely.

**Questions about the Research**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Beverly Reghabi, principal investigator, at bjreghabi@email.arizona.edu.

**Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants**

If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Michael Hartley, advisor, at mthartley@email.arizona.edu.
Appendix E – Data

Table 1
Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Coordinators</th>
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<th></th>
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<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>61.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3.23</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White / Native American / American</td>
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<td>3.23</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Years of experience</strong></td>
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<td>5 or less</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45.16</td>
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<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 or more</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.90</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>67.74</td>
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<td>22.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.68</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Use of limited profile on Facebook</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.13</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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Table 2

*Program Demographics*

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<table>
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<tr>
<td>26–50</td>
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<td>38.71</td>
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<tr>
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<td>19.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101–150</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.90</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social networking site</th>
<th>n</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
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<td>38.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>16.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myspace</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>No social networking site</td>
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<td>61.29</td>
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Table 3

*Efforts to Present Ethical Use of Social Networking*

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<th>Rehab Counseling Program</th>
<th>Department or School</th>
<th>University</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal policy</td>
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<td>7.14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides recommended guidelines</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.86</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressed during student orientation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.86</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In one or more classes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39.29</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special meetings or workshops</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not address this topic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.86</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>I do not know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>7</td>
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Table 4  
*Program Coordinators Reporting Ethical Dilemmas with Social Media Use by Graduate Students (n = 28)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am not aware of any of these problems occurring in the last year</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>53.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended a faculty member on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about him- or herself on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended another graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed controversial views on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended administrative staff on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealed serious problems (e.g., substance abuse, domestic violence suicidal inclinations, affairs) that raised questions about his or her ability to engage in rehabilitation counseling on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about another graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about another graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about a faculty member on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about a client on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content directed at a group of people (e.g., of a certain race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality) on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: “I really appreciate these questions period I want to point out colon there is NO confidentiality required comma professionally comma unless there is a client slash counselor relationship comma or faculty requirements under FERPA period Why cant I use punctuation in my answers question mark and exclamation point”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about a client on a social networking site or sites</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about administrative staff on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about an administrator on a social networking site or sites</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used offensive language in general (but not directed specifically at a group or person)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached another graduate student’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached a faculty member’s confidentiality on a social</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached an administrative staff member confidentiality on social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached an administrator confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended an administrator on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended a client on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used offensive language in general (but not directed specifically at a group or person)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied a faculty member on a social networking site or sites (also known as cyber-bullying)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied an administrator on a social networking site or sites (also known cyber-bullying)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied a graduate student on a social networking site or sites (also known as cyber-bullying)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 5
Program Coordinators Reporting Ethical Dilemmas with Social Media Use by Faculty Members (n = 28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Description</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am not aware of any of these problems occurring in the last year</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>89.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended another faculty member on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended a graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed controversial views on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about him- or herself on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended an administrative staff member on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended an administrator on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealed serious problems (e.g., substance abuse, domestic violence suicidal inclinations, affairs) that raised questions about his or her professionalism or competence on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about a graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about a client on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about a graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about another faculty member on a social networking site or sites</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about an administrative staff member on a social networking site or sites</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about an administrator on a social networking site or sites</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached a graduate student’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached another faculty member’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached an administrative staff member’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached an administrator’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached a client’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended a client on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content directed at a group of people (e.g., of a certain race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used offensive language in general (but not directed specifically at a group or person)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied an administrator on a social networking site or sites (also known as cyberbullying)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied a faculty member on a social networking site or sites (also known as cyberbullying)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bullied a graduate student on a social networking site or sites (also known as cyberbullying)
Table 6
*Program Coordinators Reporting Ethical Dilemmas with Social Media Use by Administrative Staff (n = 28)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am not aware of any of these problems occurring in the last year</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>89.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed controversial views on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about him- or herself on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended another administrative staff member on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended a faculty member social networking site or sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Not aware</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealed serious problems (e.g., substance abuse, domestic violence suicidal inclinations, affairs) that raise questions about his or her professionalism or competence on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about a graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content about a client on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about a graduate student on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about another administrative staff member on social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about a faculty member on social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for personal content about an administrator on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached a graduate student’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached another administrative staff member’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached a faculty member’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached an administrator’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breached a client’s confidentiality on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended an administrator on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriended a client on a social networking site or sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted unprofessional content directed at a group of people (e.g., of a certain race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used offensive language in general (but not directed specifically at a group or person)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied a graduate student on a social networking site or sites (also known as cyberbullying)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied a faculty member on a social networking site or sites (also known as cyberbullying)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied an administrator on a social networking site or sites (also known as cyberbullying)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Description of Appropriatelessness Statement*

Please rate the appropriateness of what is CIRCLED IN RED in the image: “had a horrible day in clinic, why can’t patients follow directions.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very appropriate to post on a social networking site</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate to post on a social networking site</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral to post on a social networking site</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate to post on a social networking site</td>
<td>32.14%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very inappropriate to post on a social networking site</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8
*Description of Comfort Statement*

Would you feel comfortable having the student who posted this as a counselor in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would be VERY comfortable having this student a counselor in the future</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would be comfortable having this student as a counselor in the future</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would be neutral having this student as a counselor in the future</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not feel comfortable having this student as a counselor in the future</td>
<td>53.57</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely would NOT feel comfortable having this student as a counselor in the future</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is acceptable for a faculty member to befriend a student if the student requests it</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is acceptable for faculty to use material from a social networking site to assess an applicant's suitability for admission</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is acceptable for faculty to use material from a social networking site to evaluate a student's suitability to practice rehabilitation counseling</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty should address personal problems that students reveal through material posted on their social networking sites</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty should be monitoring students’ use of social networking sites</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, postings on social networking sites should be protected under freedom of speech even if they may offend others</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student who posts inappropriate content about another student on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student who posts inappropriate content about a faculty member on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A faculty member who posts inappropriate content about a student on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A faculty member who posts inappropriate content about another faculty member on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A rehabilitation counselor who breaches a client's confidentiality on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A rehabilitation counselor who posts inappropriate content regarding a client on a social networking site should be subject to some form of discipline</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is acceptable for a rehabilitation counselor to use material from a social networking site to inform his or her work with a client</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is acceptable for a rehabilitation counselor to befriend a client online if the client requests it</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors</em> should have guidelines regarding the appropriate use of social networking sites</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10
*Description of Other information Statements*

Is there any other information that you would like to share with us regarding social networking sites and the impact they have had on your program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfortunately or fortunately, Facebook messenger has been the best way to track down students who received scholarships to the Rehabilitation Services Administration long-term traineeships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we occasionally hear about students mental health issues or other issues that would impair their ability to be an effective counselor when other students see it on social media and then feel compelled to share it with a faculty member (generally out of concern for a student). Once the information is shared we (as a faculty) need to address it as it turns into a gate keeping ethical issue if we know a student is somehow impaired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This survey has increased my awareness regarding the need for the Rehabilitation Counseling program to be more proactive with regard to the use of social networking sites. Thank you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we occasionally hear about students mental health issues or other issues that would impair their ability to be an effective counselor when other students see it on social media and then feel compelled to share it with a faculty member (generally out of concern for a student). Once the information is shared we (as a faculty) need to address it as it turns into a gate keeping ethical issue if we know a student is somehow impaired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This survey has increased my awareness regarding the need for the Rehabilitation Counseling program to be more proactive with regard to the use of social networking sites. Thank you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we occasionally hear about students mental health issues or other issues that would impair their ability to be an effective counselor when other students see it on social media and then feel compelled to share it with a faculty member (generally out of concern for a student). Once the information is shared we (as a faculty) need to address it as it turns into a gate keeping ethical issue if we know a student is somehow impaired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This survey has increased my awareness regarding the need for the Rehabilitation Counseling program to be more proactive with regard to the use of social networking sites. Thank you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not be aware of many of the proposed items happening unless they were called to my attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it is way beyond the scope of a graduate education program to be monitoring social network sites. Unless there is a violation of the code of ethics that is brought to our attention, then it is not our role, it oversteps the privacy of the student. Additionally, we have better things to do - such as focus on education including ethical principles. Furthermore, judging a potential student in the example above as part of their application package seems inappropriate. It might be poor judgement, which can easily remedied by a good RCE program. Our code of professional behavior covers this issue adequately, and I see no need for a specific policy on social media. Finally, I was forced to answer some of your questions incorrectly as you did not provide an option that suited the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The state I reside in penalizes state employees (including faculty) if they make negative comments about the agency they work for on social media. I would have liked to have had the opportunity to make comments under each question. There are some extenuating circumstances and explanations I would like to have provided regarding my answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not think it is ANY of our business what is going on in social media. To restrict ANYONE's freedom of speech (I am not talking about violating confidentiality or other ethical principles) is not OK. Our ethics committee and ethical code OVERREACHES.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We take the protection of privacy and the consideration of the feelings of others very seriously. Breaches such as these would definitely result in advising meetings with the individual(s) involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with our program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11
Proportion of “Yes” Responses regarding Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Extremely/Very Effectiveness (n=5)</th>
<th>Somewhat Effectiveness (n=7)</th>
<th>Comparison between Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal policy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend guideline</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student orientation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>00.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not address</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>00.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Bemis-Dougherty, A. (2010). Professionalism and social networking: Social networking offers many benefits for physical therapists and physical therapist assistants, but it's important to avoid the pitfalls. *PT in Motion, 2*(5). Retrieved from http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA228508774&sid=summon&v=2.1&u=uarizona_main&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=eaee8c0a19adab5e7981b3312260eab6


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Kaslow, F. W., Patterson, T., & Gottlieb, M. (2011). Ethical dilemmas in psychologists accessing Internet data: Is it justified? *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 42*(2), 105.


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