A Dissertation

entitled

Counselor Education Student Perceptions of the American Counseling Association Ethical Code as It Pertains to the Use of Facebook

by

Tanner A. Babb

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Counselor Education and Supervision

Kathleen Salyers, Ph. D, Committee Chair

Martin Ritchie, Ed. D, Committee Member

Nick Piazza, Ph. D, Committee Member

Kasey A. Tucker-Gail, Ph. D, Committee Member

Patricia R. Komuniecki, Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

August 2012
An Abstract of

Counselor Education Student Perceptions of the American Counseling Association Ethical Code as It Pertains to the Use of Facebook

by

Tanner A. Babb

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Counselor Education and Supervision

The University of Toledo

August 2012

Student use of online social networks has increased exponentially in the past five years. Facebook is one of the largest and most utilized by students. Many counseling students use Facebook on a regular basis to keep in touch with friends, family, and acquaintances. (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Current American Counseling Association (ACA) ethical codes do not address online social networking and leave many gray areas for students to interpret when using online social networking, which could have a negative impact on their ability to interact with peers, supervisors, and clients in the most ethical way possible (ACA, 2005). The purpose of this study is to look at how students view online social networking on Facebook and how those actions relate to current ethical codes. As more understanding is gained of student’s perceptions of ethical codes then current codes can be adapted accommodate the use of online social networking.
Dedication

To my wife for her support, love, and encouragement and my parents for challenging me to reach my goals
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my dissertation committee. Dr. Kathleen Salyers who walked with me through the qualitative process of this dissertation and cheered me on. Kathleen has always had a listening ear for the highs and lows of the process. Her passion for qualitative work has inspired me in the process of my dissertation. Dr. Martin Ritchie has been an inspiration both personally and professionally. His love for the field of counseling has inspired me to pursue research that can benefit counselors everywhere. Dr. Nick Piazza has always modeled an enthusiasm and excitement for technology and how it relates to the counseling field and has encouraged me to explore the relationship between counseling and technology. Dr. Kasey Tucker-Gail has encouraged me with her excitement about this project and her willingness to help.

I would like to thank the participants in this study. I appreciate their willingness to give feedback about their journey with Facebook and their experiences with the ACA Code of Ethics. I hope their experiences and perspectives about Facebook and ethics can benefit other counseling students.

I wish to thank my wife Julie for both sticking by me and keeping me laughing during this process. I have appreciated her understanding in the times I needed to work away from home. Her love, support, humor, and encouragement have kept me sane through this process. I want to also thank my family and Julie’s family for their understanding and patience through this process. I finally want to extend thanks to Travis, Andrew, and Dan for being awesome friends during this process. I am blessed to have such wonderful friends and family.
Table of Contents

Abstract iii
Acknowledgements v
Table of Contents vi

I. Chapter I: Introduction 1
   A. Statement of the Problem 3
   B. Purposes of the Study 4
   C. Significance of the Study 4
   D. Research Questions 5
   E. Method 6
   F. Parameters of Study 7
   G. Definition of Terms 7
   H. Organization of the Chapters 8

II. Chapter II: Review of the Literature 9
   A. Definition of Facebook 9
      a. History of Facebook 9
      b. People on Facebook 9
      c. Activity on Facebook 10
      d. Global Reach of Facebook 10
      e. Mobile use of Facebook 10
      f. Platform Development on Facebook 10
      g. Privacy on Facebook 11
B. American Counseling Association Code of Ethics 11
   a. Preamble of Code of Ethics 11
   b. Purpose of Code of Ethics 12
   c. The Counseling Relationship 12
   d. Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy 13
   e. Professional Responsibility 13
   f. Relationships with Other Professionals 14
   g. Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation 14
   h. Supervision, Training, and Teaching 14
   i. Research and Publication 15
   j. Resolving Ethical Issues 15

III. Chapter III: Method 17
   A. Overview of Method 17
   B. Summary of Research Questions 18
   C. Role of the Researcher—Author’s Lens 19
   D. Setting 19
   E. Participants 19
   F. Data Collection 20
      a. Demographic Form 20
      b. Interviews 21
   G. Member Checks 22
   H. Personal Reflection Journal 22
   I. Data Management 23
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Demographic Information</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Interview Data</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Personal Reflection Journal</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Data Analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Validity</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Plan for the Presentation of Results</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Informed Consent</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Chapter IV: Analysis and Results</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. The Participants</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The Procedure</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Impact of an Ethics Class</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Dual Relationships</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Confidentiality</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Personal Use of Facebook</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Dual Relationships</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Confidentiality</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Now I See It</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Confidentiality and Consent</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Gathering of Information</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Facebook and the Law</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Supervision and Professional Relationships</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Consultation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Do the Ethics Really Tell Me What To Do</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a. Importance of Facebook 47
b. Harm to Clients 47
c. Potential Pitfalls and Liabilities 48
d. Posting or Commenting 50
e. Missing in the ACA Code 51

V. Chapter V: Discussion 54
   A. Conclusions 54
   B. Implications 56
   C. Future Research 58
   D. Limitations 58

References 61

Appendices 63
   A. The Demographic Information and Consent Form 63
   B. University of Toledo Institutional Review Board Exempt Status 64
   C. Institutional Review Board Exempt Status 65
Chapter One

Introduction

Online social networks establish parallel realities and extensions of the social environment that allow people to interact with each other virtually (Eberhardt, 2007). Online social networks are changing the way in which people think about friends and acquaintances (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). The online social networks, like MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn, provide students with Web pages or profiles that can be customized to varying degrees in order to display personal information of their choosing. These profiles could include information and items such as relationship status, political views, contact information, personal interests, favorite books or movies, educational background, birthday, gender, local address, schedules, a list of friends, and academic coursework (Acar, 2008; Eberhardt; Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006). Users of online social networking sites can usually upload or post photos and videos. Many online social networking sites now also allow users to chat with other users (Acar). Online social networking provides, for many, an opportunity to meet new people, or learn more about the people in one’s community (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield). The pages that individuals have on online social networking sites usually have a comment section or wall as well, where friends or visitors can leave messages that others can view (Eberhardt, 2007; Kolek & Saunders, 2008).

In addition to the profile that these sites allow individuals to create, there is also the potential for connecting with others that these sites allow. Virtually all of the online social networking sites allow individual members to become virtual friends
with each other, view each other’s profiles, and network with each other (Acar, 2008; Eberhardt, 2007; Nazir, Raza, & Chuah, 2008). Databases of profiles are created that members of that online social networking site can search in order to locate friends and acquaintances. Individuals can also create or join groups of others that have their own page that could cover a wide variety of topics and interests. Students can also create and send invitations for events that they want to host. In a sense, these online social networks have become virtual communities within communities for the users, where they can connect with people that have similar ideas and interests (Eberhardt, 2007).

Online social networking is a very popular form of communication in this day and age. Approximately, 41 percent of 12-13 year olds, 61 percent of 14-17 year olds, and 91 percent of undergraduate students utilize online social networking site (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Counselors, supervisors, and educators need to be aware of the potential ethical implications with online social networking. Counselors, counselor supervisors, and counselor educators all have either direct or indirect impact on the client that is seeking out counseling. Online social networking is very new and the current ethical code for counselors does not directly address the area of online social networking. College students who use Facebook, both undergraduate and graduate, are used to communicating in several different ways with friends and acquaintances on Facebook. They use different methods on Facebook than they would in person like wall posts, messaging online, and chatting. Many of these ways of communicating, which are part of normal online interaction, would be completely inappropriate between counselors and clients, or between counselors and their
supervisors. Counselors are usually encouraged to look at their Code of Ethics to determine the highest ethical behavior when interacting with their clients or supervisors. The best place for counselors, supervisors of counselors, and educators of counselors to learn about how ethical issues and supervision considerations should be handled is the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Code of Ethics. This current code of ethics has not been updated to include any information on Facebook or online social networking; so many of these “new” ways of communicating online are not addressed. This lack of attention to online social networking has several potential implications for counselors, the potential for breaching confidentiality, the potential for crossing boundaries, and the potential for hurting clients.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is sparse scholarly literature that addresses the online social networking site Facebook, and no current research literature that addresses counseling ethics and use of Facebook. Facebook has only been around since 2004 (Facebook, 2010), and the ACA Code of Ethics was last revised in 2005. Counseling students’ current ethical code was written at a time when online social networking was very new and little used. Currently, counseling students are free to use Facebook as they desire. No limitations, boundaries, or constraints exist for Counselors when it comes to Facebook. Currently there is no oversight on how counselors use Facebook and how they should or should not interact with clients on Facebook. No research exists on how counseling students are applying current ACA ethical code to contemporary situations with online social networking. The counseling profession does not know how inadequate the current ACA Code of Ethics is in addressing issues like online social networking. Counselors can choose to use
Facebook for personal connection with friends, and clients could still locate their profiles and ask to be their “friend.” Current ACA ethics do not address how a counselor should manage ethical situations like a client “friending” them. Current ethics also do not address situations that would relate to a counselor receiving sensitive information that was posted on a client’s Facebook wall, like a client’s sexual orientation, or suicidal ideation or intent. Should counselors address the secondhand information they receive, or wait for clients to personally share the information they receive? Many other potential ethical situations exist, some of which could cause emotional harm to the counselor or client. A study is needed to address the problem that is created by a lack of understanding about the relationship between perception of ethical code and practice with online social networking.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the ethical perceptions of counseling students who are involved in the online social networking site Facebook. The online social networking site Facebook involves messaging, chatting, posting pictures and video, and game playing. Experiences specific to ethical perceptions and ethical interpretations were explored. The author of this study sought to identify emergent themes from the participants’ disclosures. The American Counseling Association can benefit from information about how these participants, counseling students who use Facebook, perceive current ethical code and how it relates, or fails to relate, to online social networking.

**Significance of the Study**

This research adds information and understanding to the process of interpreting
and revising the American Counseling Association’s Code of Ethics. Such an understanding informs counselors, supervisors, and counselor educators of how counseling students perceive the way in which ethics relate to their use of Facebook, and by extension other online social networking sites. Counselors currently have the potential to interact with a client, supervisor, or fellow counselor on Facebook, which could lead to any number of ethical violations depending on the information that might be communicated. A new look at how counseling students view ethical codes in light of their online social networking behavior could affect the boundaries that a new counselor would set. These new boundaries may keep the counselor from “friending” a client, may keep them from “friending” a supervisor, or discussing confidential information with a fellow counselor online. As research is currently limited in this area, the results of this study may also serve as a catalyst for additional research and a possible revising of the ACA’s code of ethics.

The current study provides participants an opportunity to view current ACA ethical code, share their perception of that code and how it relates to their use of online social networking, and voice concerns about what areas of online social networking on Facebook may not be addressed by current ACA ethical code.

**Research Questions**

Research questions examined in this study included:

1. What is the participant’s perception of the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and how it relates to the online social networking site Facebook?

2. What ethical issues do participants perceive in using Facebook after completing a graduate level course in ethics?
3. What ethical issues do participants perceive in using Facebook when presented with a copy of the ACA Code of Ethics as a reference?

4. How does the perception or understanding of ethical codes have an impact on or affect the personal use of Facebook?

These four research questions are best understood within the context of participants’ education about ethics and current use of Facebook. Therefore, participants will be asked about their graduate training in ethical issues, any seminars or training they might have received in ethics, and any speakers they have heard that have addressed ethical issues. Participants will also be asked about their current use of Facebook.

Participants will be asked for their perception of ethics before and after they are presented with the ACA Code of Ethics to review. Asking about participants’ perception prior to receiving the ACA Code of Ethics and after they receive the Code of Ethics will create a context for the perception they have with just their previously taken ethics course and then the perception they have upon immediate interpretation of the ACA Code of Ethics.

**Method**

The purpose of this study is to understand the perception that counseling students have of how the ACA Code of Ethics is interpreted in relationship to online social networking. Because this study seeks to understand the perceptions of participants, qualitative methods are the most suitable for attaining rich descriptions of each participant’s interpretation of ethical code and use of online social networking. A participant’s interpretation of the ACA Code of Ethics should affect the behaviors that he or she deems as acceptable or unacceptable when using Facebook. This study is phenomenological in nature because three phenomena of interest are identified for
inquiry. First, phenomenological inquiry will be used to understand the perception that all participants derived of ethical code in relationship to online social networking based on previous training, coursework, and immediate interpretation of ethical code. Second, structured interviews will be the primary method used to gather relevant data. Third, a demographic form will be used to collect additional information and member checks will be used to clarify any discrepancies and unintelligible dialogue from the interview transcripts. An analysis of the data will also be conducted to look for emergent themes and the themes will then be coded. This will be an ongoing, recursive process that will involve all the forms of acquired data to create a list of every expression relevant to the participants’ perceptions.

**Parameters of Study**

Participants were comprised of four graduate students in a community counseling program who had all taken a legal and ethical issues course that included the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and who all had used the online social networking site Facebook for over a year. Participants were selected from volunteers who were solicited by e-mail for participation. The graduate students ranged in age from 18 to 65. Informed consent was sought from all participants.

**Definition of Terms**

**Facebook** – Facebook is an online social networking site that was founded in 2004 that allows people to keep in touch with friends, family, and others, and share social media.

**Online Social Networking** – Is an online platform, site, or service that connects people who share common interests.

**Counselor** – a professional (or a student who is a counselor-in-training) engaged in a
counseling practice or other counseling-related services. Counselors fulfill many roles and responsibilities such as counselor educators, researchers, supervisors, practitioners, and consultants

**Organization of Chapters**

Chapter one is an introduction of the problem and provides a rationale for the study. Chapter two is a review of literature relevant to ethical issues and online social networking. Chapter three is a presentation of the research method to be used in this study, as well as a rationale for its use. This chapter presents a summary of the research problem, purpose, significance, questions, methods, parameters, and nomenclature. A summary of the research will be presented, as well as the author’s subjective lens. Information about validity; participants; and data collection, management and analysis will also be discussed. Chapter four presents the analysis and results of the study. Chapter five presents the discussion, limitations, and future research.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

In order to explore and develop a greater understanding of the ethical perceptions of counseling students who use Facebook, a comprehensive examination of related literature of the history and function of Facebook and the purpose and content of the American Counseling Association’s Code of Ethics will be undertaken. In addition, this literature review will identify aspects of Facebook that might pose ethical concerns for counseling students.

Definition of Facebook

History of Facebook. Facebook was founded in February 2004 (Facebook, 2010) as a social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, families, and coworkers. The company developed technologies that facilitated sharing information through the social graph, and digitally mapping people’s real-world social connections. Initially, Facebook was just for college students, but currently Facebook is open for anyone to sign up and share their information with people they are connected (Facebook, 2010).

People on Facebook. Facebook achieved nearly 1 million users in 2004 after a year of being online, 5.5 million after two years, 12 million after three years, 50 million after four years, 100 million after five, and 350 million after six years. As of September 2010 there were over 500 million active users on Facebook, and 50 percent of active users log on to Facebook in any given day. The average user has over 130 friends. The collective population of Facebook spends over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook (Facebook, 2010).
Activity on Facebook. People on Facebook currently interact with over 900 million objects (pages, groups, events, and community pages). The average user on Facebook is connected to over 80 community pages, groups, and events. The average user creates 90 different pieces of content (pictures, texts, comments) each month. Currently, more than 30 billion pieces of content (web links, news, stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) are shared each month (Facebook, 2010).

Global Reach of Facebook. Facebook and its influence extend far beyond the borders of the United States. Currently, more than 70 different translations are available on the site. About 70 percent of Facebook users are outside of the United States. Over 300,000 users helped translate the site through the translations application (Facebook, 2010).

Mobile Use of Facebook. Facebook has also made the transition to mobile devices for many users. There are more than 150 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices. People who use Facebook on their mobile devices are twice as active on Facebook than non-mobile users. There are also more than 200 mobile operators in 60 countries working to deploy and promote Facebook mobile products (Facebook, 2010).

Platform development on Facebook. Many users also develop and use applications on the Facebook platform. Currently there are more than one million developers and entrepreneurs from more than 180 countries. Every month, more than 70 percent of Facebook users engage with Platform applications. More than 550,000 active applications currently exist on the Facebook platform. More than one million websites have integrated with Facebook Platform. More than 150 million people
engage with Facebook on external websites each month. Two-thirds of comScore’s U.S. Top 100 websites and half of comScore’s Global Top 100 websites have integrated with Facebook (Facebook, 2010).

**Privacy on Facebook.** Facebook users set privacy settings to control who is able to see their profile. Facebook is considered one of the leaders of the online social networking industry in helping people control the information they post online and with whom they choose to share it. Facebook considers user privacy to be one of their top priorities, and has worked with National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and WiredSafety to make sure their privacy settings meet the highest standards. Facebook is TrustE certified and users have the ability to share and restrict information based on specific friends or friend lists (Facebook, 2010).

**American Counseling Association Code of Ethics**

The American Counseling Association (ACA) is an educational, scientific, and professional organization whose members work in a variety of settings and serve in multiple capacities. ACA members are dedicated to the enhancement of human development throughout the lifespan. The members of the association recognize diversity and embrace a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts. ACA views professional values as an important way of living out an ethical commitment. ACA believes that values inform principles (ACA, 2005).

**Preamble of Code of Ethics**

The preamble of the ACA Code of Ethics explains the documents purpose and underlying philosophy. The preamble to the ACA Code of Ethics states that
inherently held values that guide our behaviors or exceed prescribed behaviors are deeply ingrained in the counselor and developed out of personal dedication, rather than the mandatory requirement of an external organization (ACA, 2005).

**Purpose of Code of Ethics**

The ACA Code of Ethics serves five main purposes for members and counseling students. The Code enables the association to clarify to current and future members, and to those served by members, the nature of the ethical responsibilities held in common by its members. The Code helps support the mission of the association. The Code establishes principles that define ethical behavior and best practices of association members. The Code serves as an ethical guide designed to assist members in constructing a professional course of action that best serves those utilizing counseling services and best promotes the values of the counseling profession. The Code serves as the basis for processing ethical complaints and inquiries initiated against members of the association (ACA, 2005).

**The Counseling Relationship**

The first section of the ACA Code of Ethics describes the ethical approach to the counseling relationship. Counselors encourage client growth and development in ways that foster the interest and welfare of clients and promote formation of healthy relationships. Counselors actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients they serve. Counselors also explore their own cultural identities and how these affect their values and beliefs about the counseling process. Counselors are also encouraged to contribute to society by devoting a portion of their professional activity to services for which there is little or no financial return (ACA,
Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy

The second section of the ACA Code of Ethics is on Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy. It encourages counselors to recognize that trust is a cornerstone of the counseling relationship. Counselors are to aspire to earn the trust of clients by creating an ongoing partnership, establishing and upholding appropriate boundaries, and maintaining confidentiality. Counselors are to communicate the parameters of confidentiality in a culturally competent manner (ACA, 2005).

Professional Responsibility

The third section of the ACA Code of Ethics is on Professional Responsibility. It encourages counselors to aspire to open, honest and accurate communication in dealing with the public and other professionals. It states that counselors should practice in a non-discriminatory manner within the boundaries of professional and personal competence and have a responsibility to abide by the ACA Code of Ethics. Counselors are to actively participate in local, state, and national associations that foster the development and improvements of counseling. Counselors are to also advocate and promote change at the individual, group, institutional, and societal levels that improve the quality of life for individuals and groups and remove potential barriers to the provision or access of appropriate services being offered. Counselors, the code states, also have a responsibility to the public to engage in counseling practices that are based on rigorous research methodologies. In addition, counselors should engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote
their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities (ACA, 2005).

**Relationships with Other Professionals**

The fourth section of the ACA Code of Ethics is focused on relationships with other professionals. This section encourages professional counselors to recognize that the quality of their interactions with colleagues can influence the quality of services provided to clients. Counselors should work to become knowledgeable about colleagues within and outside the field of counseling. Counselors should develop positive working relationships and systems of communication with colleagues to enhance services to clients (ACA, 2005).

**Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation**

The fifth section of the ACA Code of Ethics is focused on evaluation, assessment, and interpretation. This section encourages counselors to use assessment instruments as one component of the counseling process, taking into account the client personal and cultural context. Counselors should promote the well being of individual clients or groups of clients by developing and using appropriate educational, psychological, and career assessment instruments (ACA, 2005).

**Supervision, Training, and Teaching**

The sixth section of the ACA Code of Ethics is focused on supervision, training, and teaching. It states that counselors should aspire to foster meaningful and respectful professional relationships and to maintain appropriate boundaries with supervisees and students. Counselors should have theoretical and pedagogical foundations for their work and aim to be fair, accurate, and honest in their
assessments of counselors-in-training (ACA, 2005).

**Research and Publication**

The seventh section of the ACA Code of Ethics focuses on research and publication. This section encourages counselors who conduct research to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession and promote a clearer understanding of the conditions that lead to a healthy and more just society. Counselors should support efforts of researchers by participating fully and willingly whenever possible. Counselors should also minimize bias and respect diversity in designing and implementing research programs (ACA, 2005).

**Resolving Ethical Issues**

The eighth section of the ACA Code of Ethics focuses on resolving ethical issues. It encourages counselors to behave in a legal, ethical, and moral manner in the conduct of their professional work. They are aware that client protection and trust in the profession depend on a high level of professional conduct. They should hold other counselors to the same standards and be willing to take appropriate action to ensure that these standards are upheld. Counselors are also to strive to resolve ethical dilemmas with direct and open communication among all parties involved and seek consultation with colleagues and supervisors when necessary. Counselors should incorporate ethical practice into their daily professional work. They should engage in ongoing professional development regarding current topics in ethical and legal issues in counseling (ACA, 2005).

The ACA Code of Ethics was last revised in 2005 (ACA, 2005). The Code of Ethics is supposed to address the potential pitfalls that a counseling student, or
counselor can be exposed to in the course of doing their job, or while being employed as a counselor. Counseling students have the potential to use Facebook virtually all day long with the advent of Facebook for cell phones. Online Social Networking has developed a great deal since 2005, and the population of users has risen exponentially. Many counseling students use Facebook on a regular basis. The ACA Code of Ethics should give students some guidance on how to interact on Facebook in a way that respects clients, their privacy, and allows no harm to come to their clients. However, no scholarly research has been done on Facebook and Counseling Ethics to this point.
Chapter Three

Method

This chapter presents the method used in this study to examine the perceptions of counseling students who use the online social networking site Facebook. A description of the study and its method commences the chapter. Next, the research questions are presented followed by the author’s subjective lenses. The research setting, participant selection, data collection, data management methods, and data analysis follow. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of validity issues and how they were addressed and the plan for the presentation of results.

Overview of Method

A Grounded Theory Method has been used in this qualitative study. This had several implications for this study. First, the approach to research that this study took was an abductive approach. Basically this means that the information or research was gathered without preconceived notions about connections. There are infinite explanations for counseling students’ perception of ethics and how that perception affects their Facebook use. Abduction allows for an inference to be made that is based on the data and information gathered, where one or several explanations serves as the “best” possible explanation for how counseling students’ perspectives affect their use of Facebook. Second, a theory or hypothesis was developed, based on the themes that were derived from coding the transcript data that served as the best possible explanation of how perception of ethics affected Facebook use. Third, a very minimal review of research has been conducted and has been limited to the artifacts involved in the study, which are the Facebook site itself and the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. The
purpose for this was to prevent the researcher’s perspective from becoming skewed in the creation of the questions and the direction of the interviews. This allowed the researcher to remain unbiased in the approach to the information gathered in the qualitative research. The information was gathered and then theories were formed based on the themes involved in the information. The researcher began the study by first contacting the director of a Master’s level counseling program. The researcher requested the director contact students in the program asking for volunteers for the research study. The director was asked to make sure that the volunteers were informed that they have to be actively using Facebook for at least a year to participate in the study. Once the researcher had been given the contact information of interested students four of the students were selected to participate in the study. The researcher first called each participant to set up an interview time. The researcher then met the participants for an interview and administered the consent forms. The researcher then administered the interview questions with the participants. The researcher then completed field notes immediately following the interviews. The researcher finally reflected in a personal reflection journal in order to be aware of biases and monitor thoughts and reflections about study. The researcher insured confidentiality of the participants by keeping any identifying information as well as interviews locked in a cabinet in a locked office.

**Summary of Research Question(s)**

Research questions examined in this study included:

1. What is the participants’ perception of the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and how it relates to the online social networking site Facebook?

2. What ethical issues do participants perceive in using Facebook after completing a
graduate level course in ethics?

3. What ethical issues do participants perceive in using Facebook when presented with a copy of the ACA Code of Ethics as a reference?

4. How does the perception or understanding of ethical codes impact or effect the personal use of Facebook?

**Role of the Researcher--Author’s Lens**

The researcher has been an active Facebook user since 2004. The researcher attempted to compensate for any bias that might result from his Facebook use by keeping thoughts and actions documented in a personal reflection journal. The researcher has also taken several ethics courses during his academic career where online social networking may have been discussed. The researcher attempted to stick very closely to the questions to minimize bias that might result from the researcher referring to the ACA ethical code.

**Setting**

The research took place at a small liberal arts Christian university, in a small Midwestern city. The interviews were conducted in a small seminar classroom in one of the buildings on campus. The classroom initially had twelve chairs around four small tables that were set up in an oval pattern. The tables were moved so that there was one table with two chairs facing each other.

**Participants**

Each of the participants was between the ages of 18 and 65 and was an active counseling student in a Master’s degree counseling program that leads to licensure in counseling. The study included three male participants and one female participant, all Caucasian. These four participants were from a very small pool of students and were the
only ones to volunteer for the study. Due to the small nature of the program, any other identifying information was kept confidential to protect the identity of the participants. Each of the participants was required to have an active Facebook account for over a year and to have taken a graduate level ethics course which included the ACA Code of Ethics. Participants were selected through a list received from the director of the counseling program of potential students who would be willing to be interviewed and would also have access to Facebook. The list was developed by the director from students who responded to an e-mail he sent requesting volunteers who have taken an ethics course and have been using Facebook for over a year.

**Data Collection**

Prior to collecting any data, permission to conduct this study was received from and granted by The University of Toledo Human Subjects Research and Review Committee, the Office of Institutional Research, and the small Christian liberal arts school’s Human Subjects Research and Review Committee. Once permission was granted, the consent forms, along with the complete study description were explained to each participant. Participants were then asked a series of questions, which are displayed below in the interview section, about how they perceive ethics affects their Facebook use. Participants were then given a copy of ACA’s Code of Ethics and asked section by section how they see each standard applying to online social networking. A demographic form, interview, member checks, and the researcher’s personal-reflection journal were the primary modes of data collection for this study. These are presented below.

**Demographic form.** Basic information was collected from each participant on a demographic form in order to contact participant for verification of transcription
information in order to validate data. This form was completed with each participant at the beginning of each interview. This form included basic information, such as: name, phone number, and e-mail. This form is included as appendix A.

**Interviews.** Interview questions were developed by researcher based on research on Facebook and study of ACA Code of Ethics. The questions were developed to address a gap in the research about Facebook and Ethics. Questions were created with intent of helping interviewee consider use of Facebook and understanding of ACA Code of Ethics. Questions are structured in such as way as to encourage interviewee to consider how the ACA Code of Ethics might apply to Facebook standard by standard.

Interviews for all participants were conducted at the University in one of the unused classrooms. The rooms were selected for their ability to provide confidentiality and privacy to the participants. Questions were:

1. How often do you think about ethics when you use Facebook?
2. What ethical issues do you think there might be with using Facebook? If any, please explain.
3. What areas of the ACA code of ethics do you think might apply to Facebook? Please explain.
4. Are there any areas in Section A The Counseling Relationship that would apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.
5. Are there any areas in Section B Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.
6. Are there any areas in Section C Professional Responsibility that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.
7. Are there any areas in Section D Relationships with Other Professionals that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

8. Are there any areas in Section E Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

9. Are there any areas in Section F Supervision, Training, and Teaching that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

10. Are there any areas in Section G Research and Publication that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

11. Are there any areas in Section H Resolving Ethical Issues that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

12. Does the Glossary of Terms provide adequate definitions to address possible client issues with online social networking? If no, then please explain.

13. After looking at the ACA code of ethics, do you see any additional areas of ethics that might apply to Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

14. What areas, if any, should be added to the Ethical Code regarding online social networking?

**Member Checks**

Member checks were used to clear up any confusing or unclear transcript information. In such situations, telephone calls were made to participants, transcripts were read, and questions were asked for clarification.

**Personal Reflection Journal**

A personal reflection journal was maintained to record thoughts, ideas, and reactions that occur throughout the research process. Notes were jotted throughout the
interview process and also throughout the researcher’s use of Facebook. Notes were also
taken during times where reflective thoughts about the study occurred. The purpose of
this journal was to keep my observations and reactions or reflections separate. This
journal also served as a means of protecting the study from any biases I might have had
from my own use of Facebook or my own perception of ACA’s ethical code.

Data Management

Demographic information. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder
and then transcribed. The transcriptions were coded for themes. Demographic
information was obtained from each of the participants in the first interview. The
demographic information was kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s locked
office. After study was completed then identifying information was shredded.

Interview data. The researcher transcribed interviews verbatim. The consent form
(see Appendix A) will include permission for transcription. Tapes and any typed data
were labeled with pseudonyms or codes and kept in a locked cabinet in researcher’s
office. Any data recorded on researcher’s computer was password protected. Back-up
copies of these files were stored in a locked cabinet in researcher’s office. Identifying
information was kept in a separate locked file cabinet from recordings and transcriptions.
At the completion of research, tapes and identifying information will be destroyed.

Personal reflection journal. Any entries made in the personal reflection journal
were entered as soon as possible following each interview. Pseudonyms or codes were
used in the journal to refer to the interviewees. The notes were organized in a binder and
kept in a locked cabinet in researcher’s office.
Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Constant Comparison Method. The Constant Comparison Method consists of four stages of data analysis. The first is comparing the incidents applicable to each category. The second is integrating categories and their properties. The third is delimiting the theory. The fourth stage is writing the theory (Dye, Schaetz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000).

The Constant Comparison Method was chosen because it combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). It is necessary to categorize the data in order to compare it, and according to Bruner, Goodnow, and Austin (1972), “To categorize is to render discriminably different things equivalent, to group the objects and events and people around us into classes, and to respond to them in terms of their class membership rather than their uniqueness” (p. 16). The categories must be meaningful both internally, in relation to the data understood in context, and externally, in relation to the data understood through comparison (Dey, 1993). When a particular category is adopted, a comparison is already implied. To compare observations bits of data must be identified which can be related for the purposes of comparison.

In principle, data are organized by grouping like with like: data bits with data bits. After the bits are separated into piles, each bit is compared within each pile. Data requiring further differentiation, will be divided up into separate “sub-piles.” Each observation could then be compared within each pile or sub-pile, looking for similarities or differences within the data. Patterns or variations in the data could also be searched for by making comparisons between the different piles or sub-piles. However, things are
not simply “alike or related” they are alike or related in some respect or another.

Distinctions are always conceptual as well as empirical – they reflect some criterion or criteria in terms of which observations are distinguished and compared” (Dey, p. 96).

The meaning of the category then evolves during the analysis, as more and more decisions are made about which bits of data can or cannot be assigned to the category (Dey, 1993). The fit between data and categories—the process of developing categories—is one of continuous refinement. “Flexibility is required to accommodate fresh observations and new directions in the analysis” (Dey, p. 111).

The data were analyzed by first looking for preliminary groupings. Codes were generated based on the preliminary groupings. The transcriptions were then coded according to repetitive and emergent themes. The data were further analyzed to look for subcategories. The themes and patterns that were found were questioned and compared and contrasted to other conceptualizations in an effort to treat the data analytically while reducing it to meaningful interpretation (Coffey & Atkinson, 2004).

Validity

In qualitative research, validity refers to “trustworthiness” (Glesne, 2006). Maxwell (1992) has identified five types of qualitative research validity: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability, and evaluative validity. All five forms do not apply to every single research study (Maxwell). The types of validity discussed in this study depended on the data collected and the process taken that were necessary to collect the data.

Plan for the Presentation of Results

The participants’ demographic information is described in Chapter four, as well as
their basic information about Facebook use. Chapter four presents the results of the data analysis. Chapter five presents a summary and discussion of the findings from the study as well as certain limitations, and some implications for future research.

Informed Consent

Copies of the Compliance with Human Subjects form, and all informed consent forms are attached.
Chapter Four

Analysis and Results

This Chapter presents the analysis and results of the study. The participants are briefly described. The procedure for analyzing the data is described. The data were first analyzed to look for preliminary groupings. Codes were generated based on the preliminary groupings. The transcriptions were coded according to repetitive and emergent themes. I then further analyzed the data to look for subcategories. The themes and patterns that were found were questioned and compared and contrasted to other conceptualizations to treat it analytically and reduce it to a meaningful interpretation. Four specific categories developed from the comparison of themes and patterns.

The Participants

This study included four participants, three men and one woman, all between the ages of 18 and 65. The participants were all Caucasian. All the participants were students in a Master’s Level Counseling Program at a small Christian Liberal Arts school. The program is a licensure program that leads to a license as a Mental Health Counselor. All the participants have completed a year of study in their Master’s program. The participants all have a taken a Master’s level ethics course in the course of their studies. The participants have all also been using Facebook for over a year and must have currently active Facebook accounts.

The Procedure

I began the study by contacting the director of the Master’s level counseling program. I requested the director contact students in the program and ask for volunteers for my research study. The director verified that the students knew they had to be
actively using Facebook to participate in the study. I was given a list of four students that were interested in volunteering for the study. I contacted them via e-mail to set up an interview time. I administered the consent form and acquired enough demographic information to contact each interviewee if I needed to follow-up about any interview information. I then administered the interview questions with each participant and recorded their responses. I completed field notes during and immediately following the interviews. I also reflected in a personal journal in order to be aware of biases and monitor thoughts and reflections about the study.

I transcribed the interviews and separated the data in each interview into pieces or data bits. I separated like data with like data. As I found similar themed items I would group them together. I then divided the themed piles into sub-piles as some groups required more differentiation. I was then able to look for similarities and differences within each grouping of data. Patterns and variations in the data began to emerge as I made comparisons between the different piles and sub-piles.

The meaning of the categories then began to evolve during analysis as I realized which data could be assigned to the various categories. I generated codes for the data in each grouping and was then able to compare information across categories. Four distinct themes emerged from the contrast and comparison of coded data as well as over a dozen categories that focused in on ethics and Facebook. The themes and categories are explored below.

**Impact of an Ethics Class**

The first theme that was drawn from the data was about the impact of a Master’s level ethics course. The participants had been asked what ethical issues they perceived in
using Facebook after having taken a graduate level course in ethics.

**Dual relationships.** The first category that was really highlighted in this area was dual relationships. One participant, when asked about issues that they might perceive with using Facebook just responded, “Dual Relationships.” Another participant responded, “I think I did just a little bit with the dual relationships, you know you need to separate your clinician side from your personal life.” Another participant responded, “If the person limited or chose who they wanted to befriend and who they didn’t.”

I was not surprised that dual relationships were one of the major categories in this theme. Part of the reason why I structured my research questions the way I did was to get an estimation of what is on students’ minds in their normal course of using Facebook. Facebook allows the potential to “friend” many acquaintances and even random people (Christofides et al., 2009), and the potential for more dual relationship issues was on my mind in the construction of these questions and in my personal journal information.

The ACA Code of Ethics discusses dual relationships in Section A, F, and G. Section A of the ACA Code of Ethics discusses the dual relationships that counselors can have with clients, section F of the Code of Ethics discusses the relationship a counselor can have with a supervisor, and section G discusses the role the counselor can have with research participants (ACA, 2005). However, none of the sections describe any medium that is similar in nature to online social networking.

**Confidentiality.** The second category that seemed to develop in the first theme was about Confidentiality. One participant gave the following quote that highlighted his thoughts about confidentiality,

Okay, confidentiality with clients, even with a lot of counselors, I can cite this
specifically. There is a counselor that is on my Facebook and he does a great job, and he posts on there, helpful hints and tips, he puts things from his sessions on there. He’s very careful about it. And, I think he does a wonderful job with it. But you could cause a problem with that. Because, no matter how vague or general you are with that, some people are going to connect the dots between that counselor and the individual themselves, and they are going to know the situation then.

Another participant gave the following quote about confidentiality,

I think confidentiality is a big one that jumps out to me, counselors in general have to be aware of and smart with what they post about their work, I don’t think they should obviously post anything personally about their clients. And then with running a group I think they need to take that into account. You talk about confidentiality and what is being shared in the group. I think you need to kind of reinforce the fact that now there are so many different avenues that younger generations have to communicate that you should include the social networking realm as well.

Confidentiality seemed to be a re-emergent category in this area as another participant gave the following quote,

Two part answer, getting into the counseling profession, being a counseling trainee, I see the new importance to confidentiality after seeing clients and having sessions that go well, or go poorly. I mean I’m not the type of person that would post how that goes on Facebook, but I can see the temptation to do so. So, I think it has increased, ethics-wise and Facebook, and I think even in general with now employers seeing and asking to see your Facebook page. I think just that whole
aspect should have caution with what you are posting on Facebook. So, I think my whole awareness of ethics and Facebook has increased as I have started this graduate program.

Facebook has allowed methods of communication through posting and commenting that were not available fifteen years ago (Christofides et al., 2009). It stands to reason that students would have additional concerns about sharing information. Section B of the ACA Code of Ethics discusses confidentiality, privileged communication, and privacy (ACA, 2005), and it mentions many areas like respecting a client’s rights, information that is shared with others, and consultation, but it does not address the changing nature of communication that is online social networking (ACA, 2005).

Dual Relationships and confidentiality seemed to be on the minds of almost all the participants right away. Another area that was a common category in this theme was disclosure and boundaries. One participant said,

I think there are a few ethical issues that could arise. It’s hard to get consent from your fellow Facebook friends. Any picture that is taken of you, you have to be tagged in it, but it could be posted without your consent, without your knowledge maybe, and anything you write or post on their wall could be reposted later on, I guess kind of without you knowing.

Another participant said,

I think there is certainly an issue of disclosure engaging in any kind of relationship with a client online via Facebook and would certainly pose a boundary issue and certainly keeping personal and professional life separate is important to maintaining a therapeutic stance.
Boundaries seemed to be a common area of concern. Facebook allows individuals that are your friends to post pictures of you without your consent, and make comments on your Facebook profile page that will show up to all of your Facebook friends (Eberhardt, 2007). This ability to disseminate information without permission could create many difficult situations for counselors. The ACA Code of Ethics seeks to address how a counselor is supposed to relate to clients in Section C. The area that seems to be of most concern when considering boundaries and disclosure is Standard C.3.c. This area discusses how “counselors should make reasonable efforts to ensure that statements made by others about them or the profession of counseling are accurate” (ACA, 2005). It could be difficult or even impossible to control what people are posting about a counselor on Facebook, especially when there is no authority that governs what is “acceptable” for people to post on there.

The other section of the ACA Code of Ethics that seems to relate to disclosure and boundaries is Standard C.7.a, which is entitled personal public statements. This standard states that when counselors are making personal statements in a public context, they should clarify that they are speaking from their personal perspective and that they are not speaking on behalf of all counselors or the profession (ACA, 2005). This area of the ACA Code of Ethics should be of concern to any counseling professional that uses Facebook because it could be considered a public context, since it is on the Internet.

In addition to disclosure and boundaries a common category that seemed to emerge in this theme was the area of friending. One person talked about limiting friends in saying, “If the person limited or chose who they wanted to befriend and who they didn’t,” and another person said,
when it talks about, you know harm for your clients, you know you don’t want to do anything that is going to jeopardize the safety and well-being of your client so if you are going to end up befriending them, breaking the dual relationships code you may have some conversation that could jeopardize your treatment with them so. Another participant said, “I guess it did come up in class the one time, whether we would befriend clients if they were to request us as friend, and personally I wouldn’t do that at all.” Another participant, when talking about friending, said, “who would they befriend and who wouldn’t they befriend…the section in the ACA code could be expanded to be more specific and include some clear guidelines for professional practice.”

It seems like the participants that responded in this area had concern that the current edition of the ACA Code of Ethics does not adequately address the practice known as “friending” on Facebook. Friending is the ability to add someone to your own social network and create a connection through which pictures and other information could be shared (Christofiedes, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). Although section A of the ACA Code of Ethics does address roles and relationships with clients (ACA, 2005), it seems that there might be some confusion about how that applies to online social networking.

**Personal Use of Facebook**

The second theme that really seemed to emerge from analyzing the coded data was one of how a perception or understanding of ethical codes has affected the personal use of Facebook for the participant. One participant, when talking about how his understanding of ethics has affected his use of Facebook and who he friends said, 

*Personal values, who do you let on Facebook as a Counselor? Do you have a Facebook site, should we have a Facebook site? Should we let our clients in there?*
Is it good networking? Is it good marketing? All good questions.

Another participant, when discussing the area of friending in this theme said,

Right, if later on down the road you would be in a social setting where you would have a chance to befriend them in a different setting when they are not being seen as a client, where would the boundary lie?

This area of concern for the participants seems to line up with a concern about Facebook and the potential for clients to find a counselor and add them as a friend years down the road (Acar, 2008). The ACA Code of Ethics seems to be clear in the area of relationships with former clients, which is in Standard A.5.c by saying that nonprofessional relationships with former clients should be avoided, except when the interaction is potentially beneficial to the client (ACA, 2005). The same section of the ACA Code of Ethics also clarifies what must occur if said interaction does occur in Standard A.5.d. This section discusses how if a nonprofessional interaction does occur then the counselor needs to document in the case notes the rationale, the potential benefit, and the anticipated consequences for the client (ACA, 2005). This would seem to mean that if a counselor wanted to have a former client as a Facebook friend then the counselor would need to document the rationale, the potential benefit, and the anticipated consequences of said Facebook friendship in the case notes.

**Dual relationships.** Another category that emerged in this theme was about dual relationships. One participant had this view of Facebook and how it affected his own relationships, “yes, because Facebook is a little more relational, interactive, whereas a webpage you are just looking at information and obtaining information. You are not actually interacting at a relational level by just looking at a webpage.” Another
participant when thinking about how what they know about ethics might affect their Facebook use said, “You don’t want to pursue a relationship, friendship, or otherwise necessarily with the client and I think Facebook would be a way to pursue that relationship, and it should be avoided.” Another participant, when thinking about roles and relationships with clients said, “just kind of the same thing, former clients being wary of forming that dual relationship during session and then post termination, it’s just being wise.” One participant summed up an area of confusion that related to personal use of Facebook when he said, “yes, but then where do you draw the line with that, because you are engaging in a dual relationship, if you befriend them on your counseling page.” Another participant expressed some confusion as well about how you might use Facebook with clients in mind by saying,

I could see how that could cross a boundary. I don’t think with Facebook..I don’t think you can just do a page. I guess you could put information just out there, but not befriend anybody, I think. I have never done it, I’m not sure.

The area of dual relationships seems to be a common area of concern with all the participants. The frustrating thing about Facebook is that you may not always know when you are part of a group with a client or former client because of how large the groups are, or because of how the group may be presented to you in a format that does not immediately list all of the members (Facebook, 2010). The ACA Code of Ethics seems to be very specific about not having non-professional relationships with former client in Standard A.5.c (ACA, 2005), but there still seemed to be a little bit of confusion among the participants about whether or not you could use a Facebook page as a business page for your counseling center and befriend your clients through it then. It seems as if
the confusion for the participant might have more to do with whether Facebook can be used professionally or not.

Confidentiality. Confidentiality seemed to be another emergent category in this theme. One participant expressed a little frustration at all the modes of communication when considering confidentiality and said, “What’s the difference between text, e-mail, and Facebook…e-mail and Facebook are becoming synonymous on your iPhone.” The same participant later said the following in the same conversation, “There are bits and pieces of communication that goes through Facebook, I think it is naturally going to happen.” Another participant, when reflecting about confidentiality said,

Confidentiality, I think would be a big one too, cause if you are seeing them as a client, they may, depending on what they are being seen for, may feel compelled to write things about sessions to you and wanting to chat and stuff and to have that boundary there saying that what we talk about in session is confidential.

Another participant, when reflecting about the possible dangers of having a client as a friend said, “other people that might work in your office may be friends and could read what a client might be writing to you if they didn’t send it as a message kind of thing.”

Confidentiality seemed to be a major concern in this area. The nature of Facebook is such that you have many opportunities and ways of sharing information through messaging, posting, and sending pictures (Facebook, 2010). Standard B.1 of the ACA Code of Ethics discusses how counselors should maintain awareness and sensitivity regarding cultural meanings of confidentiality and privacy. This standard also discusses how counselors should respect differing views toward disclosure of information and how counselors should solicit private information from the clients only when it is beneficial to
the counseling process (ACA, 2005). This description in the ACA Code of Ethics would seem to be clear about keeping information confidential, except for whether or not Facebook is considered private information to the client. The cultural meanings of privacy and how it relates to Facebook should be taken into account when it comes to the client’s information.

**Now I see it**

At question four during the interview phase the participants were each presented with a copy of the ACA Code of Ethics to which they could refer while answering the rest of the questions. This allowed each of the participants to go point by point through the ACA Code to see if any of the code seemed to apply to Facebook when it was fresh in their minds.

**Confidentiality and consent.** One of the first categories that came out of the data for this theme was the category of confidentiality and consent. One participant referred to the area of confidentiality and consent when he said

> Just the whole privacy thing, you don’t want to, cause you definitely wouldn’t want to write anything that was written in the records on Facebook. Yeah, I guess one thing I just thought of with the informed consent, you know something that may be able to be written in here to say that on the consent form that you will not have a relationship with the client. What that term would look like I don’t know.

Another participant, when referring to the ACA code of ethics made the following remark that fit into this category. “Section A2, concerning informed consent, certainly would apply if an online relationship were established. You can’t give full consent for the ramifications of that because it’s public. It’s not private communication.” One of the
participants when referring to the area of confidentiality in the ACA Code of Ethics
brought up the following example that helped to illustrate how they thought of
confidentiality,

Sure, someone might post, ‘Hey, I’ve got a client, and they don’t mention names
or anything like that, but I’ve got a client that is dealing with this, does anyone have
any ideas to help me help them?’ And some people will respond back, on their
pages, and in other status you know very well where they work, what population
they are working with, so that comes a little bit too close.

Another participant mentioned the following statement when they were looking over the
area of confidentiality in the Code, “I have observed other counselors consulting each
other over Facebook, a practice I do not participate in.” Another statement from a
participant that seemed to resonate within this theme of confidentiality was the following,

Two come to mind: Respecting clients respect for privacy, that the counselor
wouldn’t have access or see for some reason the client’s Facebook. Umm consider
that to be the client’s own personal life, umm if it’s not brought up in session, just
have a care not to bring up things they might have seen on the Facebook page. And
the other one would be transmitting confidential information. If you were to contact
or be in contact with the client over Facebook umm just inform them of the risk of
using computer software in general of uh access others might have to that just the
dangers, I guess that are surrounding electronic communication in general.

One of the key concerns by the participants seemed to be sharing confidential
information through the medium of Facebook. Facebook, as it is constructed, allows for
small networks or groups of people to be constructed that are limited to acquaintances or
friends (Facebook, 2010). This small network of people might give some counselors the impression that they are talking in a setting where clients will not be aware of information that is being transmitted. The ACA Code of Ethics seems pretty specific about information that is being shared with others by saying that counselors should make every effort to ensure that privacy and confidentiality of clients are maintained by everyone involved with the case (ACA, 2005). I wonder if part of the question for some of the participants is how privacy and confidentiality are defined in relationship to something like Facebook.

**Gathering of information.** Another category that evolved in this theme was the gathering of information through the use of Facebook. One participant said the following regarding the use of Facebook to gather information, “Research, it’s a great way to do research. You can get so many people involved in research.” Another participant seemed to look at Facebook as a potential way to gather information by saying,

I am going to have a way for, and there are ways that counselors have that their clients are able to take tests and assessments online, through their website. They can fill out that long lengthy boring paperwork instead of sitting in the office for a half hour during their first intake, on their website, so records. That applies to Facebook as well, on my Facebook, and on counselor’s Facebook, now it exists, the half sheets you can fill out and provide information through Facebook. So, then you, right there, it’s important, because it becomes a real issue too.

Another participant seemed to echo this idea of gathering information in relationship to Facebook by saying, “I can see like if you are doing a lot of research, kind of like what you are doing and you are posting snippets of it on you know Facebook or something.”
Another participant spoke from personal experience with gathering information through Facebook when they said,

That’s interesting, I have used Facebook for a research project asking my Facebook friends to be participants in an online qualitative research survey, where they were directed to a third party site to take it so confidentiality was still intact. I’m not sure where exactly that would fall under in G, maybe rights of research participants. That’s it.

One participant highlighted an area that fit into this category when he said, “I don’t think there is anything that specifically applies, other than doing research like this, which follows these guidelines outside of the Facebook world.”

Facebook allows for instant access to hundreds or even thousands of “friends” (Facebook, 2010). Facebook can be, and seems to have been, a means for some to gather data on certain subjects. The ACA Code of Ethics discusses how a counselor needs to maintain security if human subjects are being used in a study (ACA, 2005). The statements that participants gave, as well as the nature of the Internet, make me wonder if Facebook is secure enough to be used as a means of gathering data. One concern that I came across in my research is that Facebook has a backup of all data on its servers, which it keeps until a user deletes his or her account (Facebook, 2010). Is that secure enough for research, knowing that a third party could have access to that data?

**Facebook and the law.** Another category that seemed to come out this area of discussion was Facebook and the Law. One participant when looking at the legal section of the ACA Code of Ethics said,

I mean we are not going to want to call Facebook and spend five weeks when we
are going to court and three weeks to provide documentation. Or we need to e-mail someone on something, it would maybe become a logistical issue for us.

Another client mentioned the following statement that had to do with Facebook and the Law,

I’ll take that more generally to the law, so we are going to have to be very aware of limiting variables when it comes to having clients on there or what we say on there because it can be used in a court of law now. How does that affect us? Something you say is misconstrued and causes someone to become upset and act on it in someway and you are blamed. And, in a court of law you can lose your license. I mean there has to be protection for us, as well as guidance for us.

Another participant explored this area of Facebook and the law even more by saying,

So, we’ll have to if we are called in for a client in a court of law and they were on Facebook and put x amount of quotes on there and then commented for three months and then we are asked to either go on their behalf or testify against them in some way and we have all this information on them on our Facebook page, I mean, we are going to need to know what to do with it, and what we are required to do with it, and how confidentiality applies. It seems a little nebulous now.

Another comment that seemed to fit into the category of Facebook and the Law was the following,

You could charge for it and use it as counseling. I’ll tell you that’s done, there’s online counseling. You have to look at bartering fees and how it matches up with the codes. There probably needs to be specified codes. Or if there’s not then we can do it. I think if it is reasonable and ethical and there is phone counseling.
There’s online counseling. There’s any type of counseling for any type of disorder out there. So, why wouldn’t an individual find out how to become more effective with the technology if it was appropriate, ethical, and help people. So, there needs to be some real smart ethical law writers to get their arms around that.

Another participant, when looking at how Facebook might relate to the law said,

Court order disclosure, but I think we already talked about that. Needs to be specified if it’s not clear now, the laws on the books. How are we going to follow suit without ethical codes in regard to the law itself.

Another participant expressed some concern in this area with their comment,

Standards in the law, we need to have our arms around that, what are we liable to legally with technology? Can our Facebook account be subpoenaed and taken to a court of law? What do we have to do, and then that changes what we let on it or not for me real quick. I may shut that thing down fast in some way, some shape or form. I mean it’s a very intrusive thing, standards and the law and conflicts between ethics and laws.

Many of the participants voiced a concern about how Facebook relates to the law. The ACA Code of Ethics has several places where the law is discussed that might relate to Facebook. The first is in A.12.e where counselors must ensure that the use of technology does not violate the laws of any local, state, national, or international entity, and all relevant statutes must be observed (ACA, 2005). Counselors are also expected to discuss the difficulty of maintaining confidentiality with electronically transmitted communications in A.12.g during the informed consent process if any electronic communications are going to be used (ACA, 2005). Counselors should also make sure to
let clients know that a judge could subpoena any communication on Facebook between the counselor and client, even though it might be considered “private” by a client (ACA, 2005). I think it is telling that concerns about Facebook and the law were not voiced until participants were presented with a copy of the ACA Code of Ethics. This could mean that issues of legality do not occur in the participants mind until they are reminded of possible legal pitfalls.

**Supervision and professional relationships.** The next category in this theme was Supervision and Professional Relationships. One client referred to this area when he said, “Termination and referral, I won’t terminate a client on Facebook. I have had that happen in a dating situation, and that’s no fun. The laws and statutes, I think that it needs to be specified.” Another participant mentioned, “And also, just when we are outside of a supervisory situation for me as a new counselor then to have those support networks.” Another participant referred to the area of code on Supervision and Professional Relationships and said,

Well, the consultation and ethical obligations. I mean if you are questioning potentially I guess, the advertising and soliciting of clients. Would it be ethical for a counselor to advertise their counseling practices over Facebook, you know if you are doing private practice, could you advertise?

One participant offered a comment that came from his or her own experience in saying, I know there, I have heard of counseling agencies that say no Facebook at all, and then some have said that you have to kind of limit it, you know to who you are going to interact with. Some places that you work don’t like you to have those relationships internally cause they want it to be professional.
Another supervision comment that seemed to fall into this category was,

I think when it comes to a supervisor’s relationship you know you have got to have that boundary between the supervision relationship and the friendship side of things. I know of an instance where professors on campus, we make comments here and there about different things, but it hasn’t been anything counseling related, necessarily. If it was it was just humor, things that weren’t necessarily toward clients or anything but you know that there definitely needs to be that boundary there. In terms of the professionalism that goes into that, you definitely don’t want to be posting anything that’s going to bring harm to any of your clients because of the consents that they have signed.

Another perspective in this category of Supervision and Professional Relationships, is the following comment made by a participant,

Use of Facebook would fall under F.3.A relationship boundaries with supervisees. I’m not torn to say that supervisors and the people they are supervising shouldn’t have a Facebook relationship. I think, as I already stated, that the relationship should be discussed about the extent to which they will have social interaction. And that could be taken on an individual case-by-case basis. I think there could be some potential dangers, obviously if the student or whoever is being supervised were to come out and say stuff against a supervisor or about that they talked about, breaking confidence, then it could be an issue, so just caution against that.

This category seemed to really relate to the concern that participants had about whether or not they should be Facebook friends with their supervisors. Facebook provides many opportunities to connect with people you know, and will often suggest people in your
town or workplace as possible friends to you (Facebook, 2010). The introduction of Standard F in the ACA Code of Ethics discusses how counselors are supposed to foster meaningful and respectful professional relationships and to maintain appropriate boundaries with supervisees and students (ACA, 2005). A specific area of the ACA Code of Ethics in Standard F.3.a discusses how counseling supervisors should avoid nonprofessional relationships with current supervisees, and later discusses how counseling supervisors should not engage in any form of nonprofessional interaction that may compromise the supervisory relationship (ACA, 2005). The question that the participants seem to be considering is about what constitutes a nonprofessional relationship. Is Facebook always nonprofessional? Is there any way that Facebook can be part of long-distance supervision? Before the participants were presented with the ACA Code of Ethics the main focus for them was on dual relationships and confidentiality, but after being presented with the ACA Code of Ethics many areas of concern, like how they should relate with a supervisor began to be part of their thinking. It is interesting that the participant will focus mostly on the clients when they do not have a copy of the ACA Code of Ethics in front of them, but that focus changes to other areas of professional competence when presented with the Code.

Consultation. The final category in this theme is Consultation. One participant characterized Facebook in the following way, “It’s a great way to communicate to other counselors, and to get to know them, and have a mutual referral network.” Another participant commented the following; “I expect maybe a good way to get referrals from community organizations, judicial individuals, on and on and on, third parties.” Another participant said the following about how the profession related to other professions,
I think there’s got to be at least a disclaimer for the profession itself to hold it’s integrity to put in there what in regards to treatment is and diagnosis and conversation in general is put in the code of ethics. Just to have in there, just to set the standard, now what happens with it, happens with it, but I mean it needs to be spelled out for Facebook.

Another participant highlighted this category when they said,

Well, the consultation and ethical obligations. I mean, if you are questioning potentially I guess. The advertising and soliciting of clients, would it be ethical for a counselor to advertise their counseling practices over Facebook, you know you are doing private practice, could you advertise?

Facebook provides a means to stay in touch with people vast distances away, and through many different avenues of communication (Facebook, 2010). The introduction to Standard D of the ACA Code of Ethics discusses how counselors should work to become knowledgeable about colleagues within and outside the field of counseling. In addition, counselors should develop positive working relationships and systems of communications to enhance services to clients (ACA, 2005). In light of this description, it would seem that counselors could benefit from the vehicle of communication that Facebook provides as long as they are refraining from discussing clients in any of their communications.

**Do the Ethics really tell me what to do?**

The next theme that seemed to emerge from the analysis of the data was a question about whether or not the ACA Code of Ethics really addresses something like Facebook.
**Importance of Facebook.** The first category that seemed to be apparent in this theme was of the importance of Facebook. One participant when asked how often they think about ethics when using Facebook, they replied, “every time.” Another participant in discussing how the Code of Ethics and Facebook are connected said, “I think that in my intake evaluation I am going to have something regarding technology and e-mail and Facebook and twitter in my intake evaluation in regard to it, now what that’s going to be, I’m not sure yet.” Another participant said, that, “I think it’s an important area of research, one that hasn’t been addressed as fully as it should have been. Another participant, when talking about how they think about Facebook and Ethics replied, “If we think it can be used as a positive tool, but it has a lot of dangers, which it does, we are going to put safeguards in there.”

Facebook seems to be pretty pervasive in the life of the participants. Research would tell us that most children in this generation grow up using Facebook (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). It stands to reason that as the participants reflect on what Facebook means to them that it would seem pretty important, and would relate to many aspects of their work. The participants all seemed to think that Facebook is important, and that it is not heavily researched or addressed by the ACA Code of ethics in the depth that it should be.

**Harm to clients.** Another theme that was apparent in this category was of harm to clients. One participant said, “It could definitely affect treatment. And, it could be exploiting of other people, it could lead to that I think.” Another participant said, Ethical issues, social issues, issues with the opposite sex, fidelity, infidelity issues, joking and candor, people tend to reach out and a lot of times its gets misconstrued
and people get hurt and it causes other normal social issues and headaches. In regards to fidelity it causes, it causes and can cause marital issues.

Standard A.4.a in the ACA Code of Ethics discusses how counselors are to act to avoid harming their clients and to minimize or to remedy unavoidable or unanticipated harm (ACA, 2005). The participants seem to believe that many possible areas of harm can come out of the use of Facebook by clients. It should make counselors pause and wonder that if they are ignoring Facebook, are they ignoring potential causes of behavior, or areas of distress for the client. I also wonder if counselors are avoiding learning about Facebook if that will make them ill prepared to recognize possible areas of a clients life or treatment that may cause harm to the client.

**Potential pitfalls and liabilities.** Another category in this area was Potential Pitfalls and Liability. One participant discussed his or her own anxiety with the issue of liability by saying,

Yes, which is going to be anything and everything, but I mean to limit myself from liability, that’s it, that’s what it is for. And I think on Facebook you are going to need to limit yourself to liability. If it is going to be used in a court of law or if it can be taken and misconstrued in any way, and it can be used in any way.

Another participant said,

Exactly. Cause you don’t, like G1 to D, it’s the precautions to avoid injury. You don’t want to, and the multicultural stuff, I mean and if you want to go that deep with it, you know you need to be sensitive to those things too.

One participant discussed how friending people can lead to difficulties and problems in saying,
Yes, I could see maybe potentially how befriending a certain person who may want to keep a lower profile. I mean, it wouldn’t be in their best interest to engage in the relationship anyway, but if somebody they befriended saw that their name was there and they didn’t want to know, you know it was just some of that protection kind of thing. I could see how that might become a problem.

Another participant gave a reason for how Facebook and Ethics connect with just saying, “If you are disclosing names of clients or things that are going on in session”.

One last participant summed up this category well by saying,

I know that social networking is popular in general. I am unaware though of how prevalent or how much use it has, kind of on an individual basis between counselor and client, or counselor and counselor. I think one thing that definitely should be added is making, I don’t know, the ACA members aware of potential pitfalls and dangers when using social networking sites, communication, and that can fall under the confidentiality and all those areas previously mentioned. But as this type of communication, type of networking continues to increase, I think it will become more and more ingrained or I don’t know, we’ll just intrude into other areas professionally, so I think something should be added about that.

Facebook is pervasive in the lives of young people (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). It is obvious that many of the participants are concerned about potential pitfalls and areas of liability and view these concerns as something necessary to address. It is obvious that the ACA Code of ethics attempts to steer counselors away from areas of potential danger in Standard A as it discusses avoiding harm and imposing values (ACA, 2005), but it seems as though there might need to be
some more specific areas that address online social networking.

**Posting or commenting.** The next category that seemed to be apparent in this area was that of Posting or Commenting. The first participant was discussing posting with people on their Facebook list and said, “that kind of goes with the same thing on thirteen, I think we have talked about that a little bit, you know in terms of confidentiality and the boundaries between supervisors.”

The next participant, when talking about how they think about ethics when using Facebook said,

I would say about half of the time and certainly every time I choose to post something whether that be status update or make a comment on somebody else. I think about how that would reflect on me or my practice if a client or supervisor were to come across it.

Another participant was discussing how they manage the content of their Facebook with ethics in mind and said,

I limit it to content and then my discretion to take anybody off of the Facebook site that exceed that boundary of reasonable contact, words or photos. When people are posting, so you reserve the right to take them off of there. Just because you are a counselor, and not an individual I can see someone lashing back because they are deleted from your Facebook site.

Another participant discussed posting and commenting by saying,

Well, like I just mentioned, you know you could post a link to some of the latest research or it could become a networking…but then you need to be careful what you are posting is ethically accurate to your research that you are positing is going
to be valid too.

Facebook allows users to post pictures and information and comment on any of their friend’s pages (Facebook, 2010). It is encouraging to see that the participants are mindful of what others might think about their posts and comments when they make them. It is especially encouraging to see that the participants are mindful of their role as a counselor as they interact with their normal Facebook friends. I think that in light of how much counselors think about ethics when they use Facebook it might be good to make sure that the ethics they are thinking about address their areas of concern.

**Missing in the ACA code.** The last area that seemed to be apparent in this theme related to when participants talked about what was missing in the code in regard to technology references. The first participant said,

This may be a big statement, a section D, a section E, a section…is a technology section. There is not a technology section in here, in this whole code of ethics. I think this is crazy. So, I think a technology section needs to be in there especially when now we are going to have legal liability.

Another participant was discussing how dated the code currently is when they said,

I think it’s a good start, but, it is my guess that Facebook in particular, but the internet in general was not taken into account when this code was developed originally, and additions to it have been late in coming and have not really addressed technical working as quickly as it has happened in the real world.

Another participant referred to the terminology section when they said,

I would say it does not provide adequate definitions. The glossary in general is kind of lacking in terminology in dealing with I think just technology in general,
computer based or otherwise. And as far as definitions go to add towards it, I’m trying to think of which ones would be most pertinent to add. I guess it would have to depend on what they say would be to try to regulate it with the use of those type of social networking sites.

Another participant said,

Things that you would see specifically being helpful to counseling students. I think it would be helpful to have an entire section devoted to Internet communication and more than just including Facebook, but certainly video chatting, e-mailing, what information is okay to use those mediums for and what is not. And, is actual counseling services appropriate to be delivered that way?

When thinking about what was lacking from the ACA Ethical Code another participant said,

I don’t know where I am going to fall on that, but it’s going to be error on the side of caution, going to probably get into some relationships with clients where I want them to have limited information about me personally, of course not all counselors are naturally wired to think on guard, so maybe in the ethics and codes they need help, setting those up. It may be helpful to counselors, especially the ones that are paranoid minded, security minded from the get go, or younger ones who just haven’t been through the world, so they haven’t seen what’s out there to have those safeguards. It’s not real complicated, I mean they could put suggestions, ethical suggestions.

Another participant summed up the need for technology section well by saying,

No, like I said, here needs to be…I think that what they did with this whole section
was…with the whole code of ethics was..is they take the general, the general dozen, records, confidentiality, informed consent, group stuff, advocacy, diversity, discrimination, and they adjust that, professional responsibility to clients with other professionals in assessment. It’s the same dozen or two, or variations of the same types of topics put in search sections and they just customized to the professionals, to the clients, to the specific relationship, to assessment only, and it’s the same dozen things that even the word and the verbiage in there is similar. It just needs to have section I: Technology.

The participants all seemed to agree that a technology section was needed to address the many concerns that they had. I think, especially in light of the way in which participants had the ACA Code of Ethics to go through, and yet still found it lacking in description of technology, that there needs to be a consideration of what might need to be added to the Code of Ethics that would adequately address counselors need for clarification.
Chapter V

Discussion

This chapter presents the conclusions that have come out of analyzing the data and exploring the categories and themes. This chapter will also present the implications of the data and how it applies to the relationship between Facebook and the ACA Code of Ethics. Future possibilities for research will also be presented. Finally, limitations of the study, both the type of research and the nature of the subject area will be presented.

Conclusions

Facebook is a means of communication that is not going away any time soon. It is pervasive in the lives of many counseling students and has had an impact on the way they think about ethics. The participants that were interviewed were presented with a list of questions that was based on four different research questions. The first question had to do with the ethical issues that participants perceive in using Facebook after completing a graduate level course in ethics. This question in a sense created the category that related to the impact of a Master’s level ethics class. The participants described thinking about dual relationships, confidentiality, disclosure, and friending. The participants did not go into depth or breadth with any of the categorical areas in this theme, but seemed to have an understanding that there are some areas of conflict between Facebook and the ACA Code of Ethics.

This first research question that was asked really provided me with the sense of what counseling students think about when they do not have a code of ethics in front of them, which is going to probably mirror the real life situation that most counselors will be in as independent counselors. I found it helpful to learn that the participants had a
general sense that there are some areas of conflict between the ACA Code of Ethics and Facebook, but were not able to be specific about those areas of conflict without more information.

The second research question dealt with the ethical issues that participants perceive in using Facebook when presented with a copy of the ACA Code of Ethics as a reference. The purpose of the questions related to this research question were to get the participants to reflect more closely about the different parts of the ACA Code of Ethics and how it might relate to Facebook. The participants seemed to go much deeper into topic areas that highlighted seven different themes. The different categories that arose from this deeper reflection were: Potential to harm, comments, dual relationships, confidentiality, gathering information, Facebook and the law, and supervision and professional relationships.

The second research question really created a contrast of information between when the participant has a copy of the ACA Code of Ethics and when they do not have a copy of it. This helped me to understand issues that a counselor is consciously aware of, and issues that might be on the periphery of a counselor’s mind, but that they need a reference to be able to clarify. This question also helped to focus the counselor in on the ACA Code of Ethics and begin to analyze how well it addressed Facebook. This research question seemed to shed some light on the shared perception by the participants that the ACA Code of Ethics does not address Facebook very well.

The third research question that was explored was about the participant’s perception of the ACA Code of Ethics and how it relates to Facebook. The participants, when asked to step back away from the Code of Ethics and look at how the two artifacts related came
to some of the following conclusions. First, five different categories came out of coding information related to this area, and they are: Importance of Facebook, Exploitation of Clients, Potential Pitfalls and Liability, Posting and Commenting, and Areas that Need Technology References. Second, the participants all seemed to realize that they think about Facebook a great deal, and view it as very important, which is a sentiment that does not seem to be reflected by the ACA Code of Ethics.

The fourth research question had to do with how the perception or understanding of ethical codes have an impact on or affect their personal use of Facebook. Three categories emerged in this area: Friending, Dual Relationships, and Confidentiality. These three areas seemed to be the ones most impacted in the participant’s lives by how they thought of the ACA Code of Ethics. The participants ranged from thinking about Facebook a little and relating it to a few subjects in their life to thinking about it all the time and allowing it to affect many areas of their life.

The general sense that was derived from analyzing this question was that the participants are thinking about ethics on a daily basis when they use Facebook and have some definite areas of concern about whether or not they are using Facebook in an ethical manner. The areas that seemed to be most pertinent that related to this question were areas of relationships and confidentiality. The participants were most concerned about the friends they had on Facebook, and the information they share, and what the ACA Code said about those two areas of their life.

**Implications**

The implications of this study are disturbing. I have interviewed four participants about their perceptions of how Facebook relates to the ACA Code of Ethics and I
received four very different perspectives. There were some similarities between the perspectives about Standards in the ACA Code that related to the professional work of a counselor, but there were also some stark differences on how each of those sections translated into the personal use of Facebook. I think it is obvious from all the participants’ feedback about how the ACA Code of Ethics is lacking in information that is technology related, and specifically lacking when it comes to online social networking, that an update of the ACA Code of Ethics is due in order to prevent confusion and limit harm to clients.

An issue that is worth considering from this study is that there is some danger inherent in the use of online social networking, especially when the Code of Ethics is not readily available. This study raises the issue of how much information is being taught to students in counseling programs in regard to online social networking and how they should or should not use it. This study also raises the idea that there may be disconnect between the generations of people that have written the Code and teach it, and the students who have grown up on Facebook and are newly learning the Code.

Students are thinking about the nature of the relationship between Facebook and Ethics. The question remains though if what the students are thinking lines up with what the writers of the ACA Code of Ethics originally intended the sections of the code to be used for. Are students applying the code in ways it was never meant to be applied, or are students attempting to find standards that apply to behaviors that they have already been doing online, but now find themselves questioning?

The last implication of this study may just be a lesson to those in counseling who do not use Facebook. For those counselors who do use Facebook on a daily basis and have
grown up on it, it is a fact of life. It is there, and it is something that has to be negotiated when it comes to working with clients. The counselors that use Facebook and see clients have different issues than those who do not, and think about different things in regards to dual relationships, confidentiality, and liability. The committee that governs the ACA Code of Ethics is going to have to take this into consideration and re-write the Code of Ethics to meet these needs in it’s young counselors.

**Future Research**

The next logical step after this study would be to do a quantitative study to see how a larger group of counseling students uses Facebook in regards to frequency, intensity, and duration. I would also like to incorporate some components into that study that would explore areas like dual relationships and confidentiality specifically. I would like to present the participants with some examples of “dual relationships” in regards to Facebook and see how offensive the participants find those dual relationships in order to begin to gauge how a participant understands the nature of dual relationships.

I would also like to create a series of Facebook posts or comments that the participant would have to react to in regards to level of confidentiality. I would like to use a measure like this to determine how confidential counseling students as a whole would view information if it was presented on Facebook. I would also like to conduct a study that would specifically look at the “gaps” in the ACA Code of Ethics to work at determining what needs to be added to the Code to help it address the needs of a more technologically focused generation.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study is that the participants were self-selected and not
selected at random, so the individuals might be somewhat different from the population at large or the population of segment of interest. The number of participants in this study was also limited to the four volunteers, so it is too small to be representative of the population, and I was unable to get consensus and saturation due to the limited number of volunteers. This study also did not collect numeric data from a representative sample of the target audience, so this type of research cannot be subject to statistical analysis to estimate to what extent opinions expressed by participants reflect the opinions of the population studied. There is also the chance that some of the participants have expressed views that are consistent with social standards and are trying to not present themselves negatively. This could have led to a social desirability bias, which might have led the respondents to self-censor their actual views (Audience Research Basics, 2011).

There are also some limitations inherent in studying a subject like online social networking. One limitation is the terminology. Without the participant’s Facebook page in front of them it may be difficult to come to a complete understanding of terms like Commenting, Posting, or even Friends. Information could have been lost in translation with the participant as certain areas were discussed, but similar meanings were not held of those certain areas. Facebook is also a very private thing to many individuals and the participants may have been cautious in releasing too much information about their own practices for fear of it affecting their own position in the counseling program.

My own knowledge of Facebook and online social networking could also have served as a limitation that might have influenced the question construction for the interview as I selected what I viewed as important based on my knowledge of Facebook and the research available at the time. My own knowledge and experience with ethics
could also have served as a limitation as I put my own expectations into the questions of what I thought students should know after a Master’s level ethics course. The quality of the data collection and the results are highly dependent on the skills of the moderator or interviewer and on dependent and interpersonal exchanges with respondents (Audience Research Basics, 2011). Therefore, due to the interpersonal nature of my interactions with the respondents, any number of variables, including my dress, demeanor, and language could have influenced the quality of information given by the respondents.
References


Appendix A

The Demographic Information and Consent Form

Demographic Form

Confidentiality will be maintained in this study, but demographic information will have to be collected in order to contact interviewee for follow-up interview or for clarification about content of an interview. After the completion of the study the demographic information of participants will be destroyed.

Name: __________________________
Phone Number: __________________
E-mail: _________________________
Appendix B
University of Toledo Institutional Review Board Exempt Status

To: Kathleen Salyers, Ph.D. and Tanner Babb
   Department of Counselor Education and School Psychology

From: Mary Ellen Edwards, Ph.D., Chair
       Kamala London, Ph.D., Vice Chair
       Walter Edinger, Ph.D., Chair Designee

Signed: [Signature]
Date: 05/06/11

Subject: IRB #107405
Title: Counselor Education Student Perceptions of American Counseling Association Ethical Code as it Pertains to Use of Facebook

On 05/06/11, the above research was reviewed and approved as Exempt (category 2b) by the Chair and Chair Designee of the University of Toledo (UT) Social Behavioral & Educational Institutional Review Board (IRB). The requirement to obtain a signed consent/authorization for use and disclosure of protected health information form has been waived as this research is determined to be minimal risk and a signed consent/authorization document would be the only record linking the subject to the data. It was determined that this waiver for signed consent/authorization will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the participants. This action will be reported to the committee at its next scheduled meeting.

Please Note: A consent form is not required for this study. However, an Information Sheet regarding the study should be distributed to potential participants. This Information Sheet should include the name and telephone number of a contact person in case the subjects need additional information. It is also strongly encouraged that the study be explained verbally to potential subjects.

Items Reviewed:
- IRB Application Requesting Exempt Review
- Questionnaire(s)

Designated as EXEMPT RESEARCH: 05/06/11

Please read the following attachment detailing Principal Investigator responsibilities.
Appendix C

IRB Exempt Status

Internal Review Board

EXEMPT status Application

Date: __3-15-11____

I. General Information

Name of researcher - Tanner Babb

Supervising professor – Dr. Kathleen Salyers (University of Toledo)

Title of research – Counselor Education Student Perceptions of American Counseling Association Ethical Code As It Pertains to Use of Facebook

II. Project Information (use additional pages if needed)

Purpose of research: The purpose of the research is to explore counseling students’ perception of American Counseling Association Ethical Code and how it applies to the use of Facebook.

Subjects:
1. who are your subjects? The subjects will be four students from the graduate counseling program at [redacted], who have completed an ethics course and are also users of Facebook.
2. how are they selected? The director of the program will be asked to send out an e-mail with an explanation of the research being done and volunteers will be asked for. The preference will be for two male volunteers and two female volunteers. If more volunteers than are needed apply then the men and women will be chosen randomly from the pool to fill the spots.

Methods/procedures:
1. attach a copy of all instruments (survey, dependent measures) given to subjects

Questions will include

1. Have you ever been faced with any ethical situations while using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.
2. How often do you think about ethics when you use Facebook?
3. What ethical issues do you think there might be with using Facebook? If any, please explain.
4. Has a client ever asked you to befriend them on Facebook?
5. Have you ever been part of a mutual group with a client on Facebook?
6. What areas of the ACA code of ethics do you think might apply to Facebook? Please explain.
7. Are there any areas in Section A The Counseling Relationship that would apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.
8. Are there any areas in Section B Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy that apply to
Appendix C

IRB Exempt Status

using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

9. Are there any areas in Section C Professional Responsibility that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

10. Are there any areas in Section D Relationships with Other Professionals that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

11. Are there any areas in Section E Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

12. Are there any areas in Section F Supervision, Training, and Teaching that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

13. Are there any areas in Section G Research and Publication that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

14. Are there any areas in Section H Resolving Ethical Issues that apply to using Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

15. Does the Glossary of Terms provide adequate definitions to address possible client issues with online social networking? If no, then please explain.

16. After looking at the ACA code of ethics, do you see any additional areas of ethics that might apply to Facebook? If yes, then please explain.

17. What areas, if any, should be added to the Ethical Code regarding online social networking?

2. Describe the procedures used to collect data from subjects -

Once permission is granted, the consent forms, along with the complete study description will be explained to each participant. Participants will first be given a demographic sheet to fill out, and then will be asked a series of questions about their Facebook use. Participants will then be asked a series of questions about how they perceive ethics affecting their Facebook use. Participants will then be given a copy of ACA’s Code of Ethics and asked section by section how they see each standard applying to online social networking. A demographic form, interview, member checks, and the researcher’s personal-reflection journal will be the primary modes of data collection for this study. Interview questions were developed by researcher based on
Appendix C

IRB Exempt Form

research on Facebook and study of ACA Code of Ethics. Questions were created with intent of helping interviewee consider use of Facebook and understanding of ACA Code of Ethics. Questions are structured in such as way as to encourage interviewee to consider how the ACA Code of Ethics might apply to Facebook standard by standard. Interviews for all participants will be conducted in the graduate school in one of the unused classrooms. The rooms will be selected for their ability to provide a quiet atmosphere and minimized interruptions. Member checks will be used to clear up any confused or unclear transcript information. In such situations, telephone calls will be made to participants, transcripts will be read, and questions will be asked for clarification. The interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder and then transcribed. The transcriptions will be coded for themes. Each participant will be given an opportunity to choose a pseudonym to protect his or her real identity. Demographic information will be obtained from each of the participants in the first interview. The demographic information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s locked office. After study is completed then identifying information will be shredded.

III. Exempt Status: (see CFR 45.46.101(b)

Rationale for Exempt status (check one)

1.  ___x___ using surveys or interviews on adults only

2.  ______ using educational tests in educational settings on adults only

3.  _____ observing public behavior on adults & no specific identifiers are associated with the observations

4.  ______ other (see CFR 45.46.101(b) (be sure to specify)

Do NOT write below this line, for official use only

The research meets the criteria for EXEMPT status.

The research does NOT meet the criteria for EXEMPT status

Rationale:
Appendix C

IRB Exempt Form

[Signatures and dates]