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The Use of Cohort Facebook Pages in MFT Training Programs

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ABSTRACT

The current study explores how private cohort Facebook pages impact a MFT students’ training experience. Limited research has been conducted regarding social media and clinical training programs. Students from national MFT master’s and doctoral programs will be interviewed about their experience with private cohort Facebook pages. Students will participate in focus groups lead by student-researchers in order to increase participation and anonymity. Data will be analyzed using Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) grounded theory.

RESEARCH AIMS

1. To begin a discussion of the potential benefits or pitfalls associated with Facebook cohort pages in MFT training programs.
2. To explore MFT students experiences with Facebook cohort pages.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How have cohort Facebook pages impacted MFT students’ training experience?
2. What purposes do cohort Facebook pages serve?

LITERATURE

- Research on social media’s impact on the MFT field is beginning to be conducted (Blumer, Hertlein, Smith, & Allen, 2014; Cravens, Leckie, & Whiting, 2013; Hertlein, Blumer & Mihaloliakos, 2015; Hertlein, Blumer, & Smith, 2014; Williams et al., 2013; Jordan, Russell, Afousi, Chemel, McVicker, Robertson, & Winek, 2014).
- Researchers have begun to turn their attention to the use of social media in MFT training (Jordan et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2013).
- Less inquiry has been devoted to the impact cohort Facebook pages, which hold a prominent role in communication among MFT students.

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. What factors did you consider when making your decision about whether or not to join the cohort Facebook page?
2. How often would you say you check the cohort page? Or look at material posted on the cohort page?
3. What is the nature of the material posted on your cohort Facebook page?
4. What type of material have you posted on your cohort Facebook page?
5. In comparison to your peers, how often do you post?
6. What are some functions the cohort Facebook page serves? How has it been useful or helpful?
7. What is the primary purpose of the cohort Facebook page in your opinion?
8. What are some unanticipated consequences of having a cohort Facebook page? Whether you are or are not a member of the page.
9. Did you feel pressure to join the cohort Facebook page?
10. Were you concerned about being left out of events or missing information? Were you concerned about not making friends within your cohort?
11. How has the cohort Facebook page impacted cohort dynamics?
12. Have you ever been angry, hurt or annoyed by something that was posted on the cohort page? Or something that you heard about that involved the cohort page?
13. Have you ever seen anything posted on your cohort Facebook page that was offensive, inappropriate or made you feel uncomfortable? If so, what did you do?
14. Who did you talk to about this (friends, faculty, other)?

METHOD

Participants

- MFT students who are currently in Master’s or Doctoral training in MFT.

Procedure

- An email was sent to all COAMFTE-accredited MFT programs and ask the program director to share our recruitment poster with his or her students.
- A consent form and demographic questionnaire were sent to participants to complete via Qualtrics before participating in the focus group. Participants must give informed consent before they are able to access the demographic questionnaire or participate in the focus group.
- Focus groups will be conducted by video (Google Hangout) in order to obtain a national sample of students from several MFT training programs.
- To maximize participant comfort, focus groups are lead by student members of the research team.
- To ensure confidentiality, focus group audio recordings contain no identifying information. Participants are asked to select a pseudonym, or false name by which to identify themselves.
- Members of the research team will transcribe focus group audio recordings.

IMPLICATIONS

Strengths of using Facebook in education

- The majority of Graduate students use social media now more than ever.
- Social Media has changed relationship development.
- Quickens and enhances the social support aspect of the cohort.

Challenges of using Facebook in education

- Students often self-disclose information they do not intend classmates to have.
- Students unsure of the level of privacy on account.
- Over-familiarity between cohort members can create conflict when boundaries are crossed.
- Peer pressure within programs to participate in using the cohort Facebook page.

Unique Challenges of using Facebook in Clinical Training Programs

- Clients may obtain private information.
- Confidentiality may be breached on private pages due to communication between students.
- Faculty could become aware of information that a student did not intend for viewing outside the cohort.

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