

# Implementing an Online Research Group about Classism in Counselor Education

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## Abstract

In 2021, an online research group was created with counseling students from three different universities. This online research group consisted of masters counseling students and a lead research mentor and counselor educator. This research group was the first of its kind in its Program. This research team focused on intersectionality and classism. Topics of integrating the online world into counseling research, specifically, through this observed research group will be introduced in this documentation. This research team served as a catalyst to increase student morale during required remote learning. Implications driven from this student-centered, online research group will also be described. Discussion regarding ways to increasingly incorporate technology into counselor education pedagogy and research will also be included.

## Keywords

*online research; advocacy; group research; counseling research; classism*

Historically, counseling emerged as an in-person endeavor. Likewise, counselor education was historically taught in solely in-person formats. Some counseling programs still have trepidation to online counseling and counselor education (Van Horn & Myrick, 2021). Despite outsiders' views and given the COVID-19 environmental changes, many clinical services, teaching, and supervision activities have emerged using online modalities (McKenna & Manis, 2021). Of the various paradigms in the counselor education field, research is less known to be implemented in an online platform. The below documentation describes an interuniversity and student-centered online research group, which was created specifically for counseling students. Written summary and implications regarding this group facilitation may impact future hybrid and online counselor

education research engagements.

## Honoring Cyber Culture as an Element of Diversity

CACREP (2016) and ACA (2014) have already made diversity a core focus within counseling. Counselors and counselor educators pride themselves and their field in continuously facilitating cultural competence and humility. Despite current inclusiveness, the field of counseling did not innately have the cultural integration and depth that it has now (Sharma, et al., 2021). In 1962, counselor education lacked emphasis of cultural diversity in its earlier Code of Ethics. During the 1970s, both the American Psychological Association and the American Counseling Association began making efforts to more formally integrate

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aspects of diversity into their ethical codes (Sue et al., 1992). In the 1980s, the counseling profession more formally integrated varying diversity related concepts in its codes. In 2005, the ACA Code added explicit references of diversity to the Code's preamble. In 2014, the ACA intertwined, not just diversity and multicultural standards, the field's need for advocacy in its Code. Now, alongside the aforementioned concepts, much emphasis in the field is placed on cultural humility, social justice, global literacy, and phenomenological experience (Remley & Herlihy, 2014). Despite the high achievements of the profession's emphasis on culture, infusing the culture of online technology is still growing. The cyber world is arguably a culture all its own and should be considered as counselor education continues emphasis in cross-cultural work (Hidayati, et al. 2021).

### **Existing Technology Associations in Counseling and Counseling Education**

Various reasons exist to promote the integration of technology and cyber culture into counselor education. An obvious reason for continued online integration includes that counseling students are and will continue to be working in a technology saturated world (Snow & Coker, 2020). Before and certainly after the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, many students who engaged in practicum, internship, or during postgraduation were prompted to engage in some type of telehealth work in varying agencies and private practices. Telehealth has become an outlet for many mental health services. Platforms like Betterhelp, feature exclusive online counselors (Doss & Gabe Hatch, 2022). Counseling students and practicing counselors are influenced by these telehealth platforms for many reasons. One influence of the growth of counseling in the cyber world includes many common peoples' use of internet services and the consequences thereof. Méndez-Díaz et al. (2021) reported that though social media and technology usage may increase anxiety and other mood related symptoms in some people, it can be of support for many users. In other words, though technology usage may have some potential negative associations, the online world can also be a protective factor for many people. For example, frequent online users who have tried to find a cyber community, have reported support in electronic peer chat groups or through the platforms like Betterhelp. Online support groups, specifically, have included people with issues ranging from issues like ADHD to suicide (Méndez-Díaz et al., 2021). The research regarding if technology is a protective factor or a risk, ultimately, is mixed (Dewey, 2014; Kaluzeviciute, 2020). However, counselor educators can help shape technology as a protective factor for counselor education students, practicing

counselors, and their clients through appropriate modeling and usage of technology.

Though some research has been generated to promote aspects such as, teaching and supervision online to counseling students, as mentioned, less exists regarding counseling related research. Machuca and Kums (2021) discuss provisions to the Online Live Supervisions of Telemental Health Counseling (OLSTHC) Model. They described that teachings, trainings, supervision, and counseling were provided via virtual means. Their recent research has prompted ideas about extending virtual influence to online research in counselor education.

### **Online Group Purpose and Research Topic Described**

As related to others' integrations of technology in the counseling education field, this article's author created an online research group during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research group consisted of counseling masters students in three universities. This group's primary focus included studying classism. Though counselor education strives in focusing on intersectionality, less research has been done centering on a person's intersection of social class and classism (Parker, 2018). Without studying class, counselors would be missing an integral portion of a client's multidimensional identity. Classism is defined as discrimination based on identified social class standing (Collins & Yeskel, 2005; Ostrove & Cole, 2003). In fact, this article's author was and is very intrinsically invested in social class related research. Thus, the reference online research group was guided with a verbal broad prompt in classes for any interested students "to study classism." Though classism is key to the research group, future online research groups studying different topics or content, may be just as cohesive, impactful, and productive regarding group processes and morale created.

### **Student Centered Learning Through Online Research**

This research group was noted by this article's author and students in this group as "productive and enjoyable" (Starts, 2021). Students were able to still come together during this group, outside of class, even though it was technically online. This experience increased many of the research group members' morale as evidenced by student engagement. Faculty have recently found increasing student morale during this and other times of uncertainty (i.e. regarding the pandemic and other inflamed sociopolitical issues) difficult (Snow et al., 2020). However, this group seemingly catalyzed much morale and inclusion. The need to foster students in an inclusive way continues from works, such as, multicultural educator, Paulo Freire

(1972). This online group fostered elements of Freire's (1972) student-centered learning including being ultimately driven and led by students, partnering in the direction of a refined research topic, developing deeper understandings, using supportive and varying communication styles, and honoring the diversity of learners and researchers (Alschuler, 1986). For example, though this group was initially formed "to study classism," with continued student discussion, two subgroups were formed. Students in this research group were able to self-select between student elected topics of studying BIPOC students' experiences of classism and transgender clients' experiences of classism.

### **Online Group Design and Practical Implementation**

This research group met every Friday and students were able to watch a recording after the end of the live meeting. As mentioned before, incorporation of students' intrinsic interests were fostered. Utilizing additional flexibility through the meetings recordings and through usage of Google Drive minutes, helped students to engage with less disruption if they could not attend a particular group meeting. Students from three different universities were also able to connect via this research group; this led to inter-university collaboration and involvement of students from around the nation. Student feedback from varying residential locations added to the richness of research topics and discussion. This group, specifically, consisted of 20 students, including 7 students who still meet for additional research, in a current research group, at this time. Research team members shared that had this group met in-person, they would most likely have been unable to participate due to safety, location, or time related constraints. Students' comments about how online modalities have increased accessibility for their learning, coincides with other research regarding technology and counselor education (Coker, et al. 2021). Considering learning, students were also able to easily and immediately see aspects of research that they had never learned about through this article's author usage of Zoom screen sharing examples of published research articles, proposal drafts, and database showing.

### **Parallel Processing of Confidence Generated from Online Group**

This adaptive and innovative online research group seemingly helped to shift students' ideas about being required to be remote, to being excited to engage in voluntary research in a remote setting. This group's engagement also helped this author to gain personal confidence as a new counselor educator in a remote setting. Van Horn and Myrick (2001) discuss counselor educators' potential hesitancy to providing online

services. However, with experiences, such as, this research group, perhaps counselor education can be more inviting to an online integration. Parallel processing between the mentor's confidence and students' confidence peaked when one of this research group's presentation proposals was accepted to a statewide virtual conference. Various members of the research group were able to attend the conference and they reported an increase in understanding and excitement about research in counseling. This experience was beneficial for not only the attending students, but also for this article's author. Since this time, this research group has continued, evolved, and prompted later student autonomy and new student-led research projects. Ideas about the creation of empirical studies regarding counseling student self-efficacy and online learning in counselor education are also encouraged from this experience.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This opinion article provides an overview of an experience wished to be replicated in more formal settings in counselor education. This featured online group's experience generated student comradery, excitement, and eagerness during a time of much ambiguity and anxiety. It is also hoped that counselor educators may continue an openness toward integrating the cyber world into their clinical, teaching, supervision, and research work, as in this observation review.

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