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# A SURVEY REGARDING INTERNET COUNSELING

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MATTHEW PRICE McCRICKARD

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Matthew Price McCrickard entitled "A Survey Regarding Mental Health Counseling." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Guidance and Counseling.

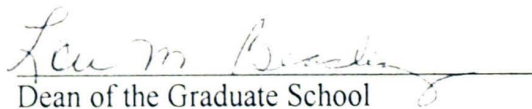
  
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A Survey Regarding  
Internet Counseling

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Science  
Degree  
Austin Peay State University

Matthew Price McCrickard

December, 2002

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to  
Bonnie Mixon McCrickard  
my co-conspirator in life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude to Drs. Stuart Bonnington, Maureen McCarthy, and LuAnnette Butler for their invaluable guidance and assistance throughout the preparation of this thesis. These scholars have been remarkable resources, each providing unique and different perspectives from which to examine the helping professions. I also want to thank my wife, Bonnie Mixon McCrickard, for her infinite gifts of love, support, and encouragement.

## ABSTRACT

Internet counseling has received increasing attention from mental health practitioners and research scholars in recent years. Members of Internet discussion groups targeting mental health professionals were surveyed to obtain their perceptions regarding the use of the Internet in providing direct client services. Results varied among practitioners from several mental health disciplines including counseling, psychology, social work, and pastoral counseling. Overall, respondents indicated that the Internet could be a useful tool to mental health practitioners, however they were unclear as to whether the medium was an ethical form of providing direct client services.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Advances in computer technology have dramatically influenced the manner in which people communicate, conduct business, and relate with one another. Interactions such as commerce and banking, information gathering, and healthcare once required individuals to take time away from their daily routines in order to visit bankers, merchants, librarians, or healthcare providers (Harris-Bowlsbey, 2000). Modern computer applications, including the Internet, afford many individuals the opportunity to transact business, conduct research, and even obtain medical services from their homes or offices through a few simple computer keystrokes.

Scholars disagree regarding an accurate historical account of the Internet's development, evolution, and widespread growth and acceptance. One scholarly camp suggests that the modern Internet evolved from computer networks that were originally developed by the United States Department of Defense to link large computers in various parts of the country thereby providing the technology to store, access, and analyze vast amounts of useful information (Rosenzweig, 1998). Other scholars purport that the computer languages and technology used to power the Internet have been used within the defense industry. The globalization of the computer network, however, was accomplished by research institutions, universities, and financial entities (Edwards, 1998). Although academic quarrels abound regarding the historical evolution of the Internet, there is widespread agreement among scholars with respect to discussions of the tremendous impact the Internet has had on all facets of modern society.

Since the Internet has gained in usefulness and popularity, the medium has been increasingly utilized within the healthcare profession for various purposes including research and consultation, and more recently even for diagnosis and treatment of patients (LeBourdais, 1997). Also in recent years, mental health practitioners have utilized the Internet as a routine part of their professional services (Wallace, 1999). As a result, many of the professional organizations that govern the ethical standards for mental health care have created codicils to their codes of ethics or have documented organizational positions regarding their members utilizing the Internet as a part of service delivery (Freeny, 2001). These organizations include the American Counseling Association (ACA), the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), the American Psychological Association (APA), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), among several others (ACA, 2002; NBCC, 2002; AAMFT, 2002; APA, 2002a; NASW, 2002).

Following the Internet's expansion and increasing acceptance by mental health professionals, many scholars have examined the impact of the computer medium as well as how the Internet has influenced both clients and practitioners who maintain therapeutic relationships via cyberspace (Laszlo, Easterman, & Zabko, 1999). The following section provides a review of scholarly research literature regarding mental health services and the Internet.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Professional counseling has not been insulated from the technological influences and societal expectations that have resulted from the widespread acceptance and use of the Internet. Researchers are continually examining how computers and the Internet impact the counseling profession as well as the ways in which counselors choose to utilize the Internet to serve their clients. During recent years, scholars have studied the relationships between computer networks and such issues as counselor education and training, billing and record keeping, supervision and consultation, as well as various ethical considerations.

Scholars are increasingly focusing their research attention on the ethical considerations surrounding the use of computer technology by mental health professionals to conduct or augment counseling services. Numerous studies examine the use of computer programs and applications (Marin & Splete, 1991), interventions and processes (Barnes & Herr, 1998; Gati, Shenhav, & Givon, 1993). Other studies evaluate the timing of counselor contact with computers in therapeutic settings (Niles, 1993), while still others look at whether or not the use of computers is cost-effective (Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998). Recently, much of the literature relating to counseling and computers focuses on practitioners' use of the Internet as a part of professional services provided. The following will provide a review of the literature regarding the ethics of therapeutic use of the Internet by mental health professionals.

## Ethical Considerations

Barak (1999) suggests that psychology, and its associated professions, is on the verge of change resulting from the vast influences of the Internet. The author argues that the Internet has and will pervasively affect many aspects of psychology including research methodologies, direct counseling services, information exchange, self-help applications, psychological testing and assessment, and the promotion of practitioners, agencies, and educational institutions. Barak discusses the ethical concerns related to the use of the Internet by professionals and indicates that issues related to confidentiality, credentialing, and appropriate training should be paramount in discussions of ethics and the Internet. The author concedes that the Internet has dramatically influenced the discipline of psychology, but cautions professionals to recognize that many of the ethical dilemmas regarding Internet practice remain unanswered and it is likely that the profession as a whole will grapple with the same dilemmas for some time.

Many scholars discuss the types of professional services provided by counselors via the Internet as well as the various electronic media utilized to provide services. Guterman and Kirk (1999) describe the manners in which counselors provide information to or interact with clients as well as colleagues via the Internet. The authors report that such methods as electronic mail, chat, websites, search engines, web rings, and online communities provide opportunities for counselors to gather information, communicate with others, and participate in professional activities. Guterman and Kirk state that computer technology has a dramatic influence on both client and counselor in the development and implementation of therapy. The authors indicate that an increasing number of counselors are opting to provide some forms of their services through one or

more of the aforementioned Internet methods, and as such, the counseling profession is embarking on new issues related to standards of practice and professional ethics.

Clark, Horan, Tompkins-Bjorkman, Kovalski, and Hackett (2000) describe the many benefits of the Internet including its cost-effectiveness, immediacy, ease of access, and readily available sources of information, yet the authors also discuss the potential for ethical dilemmas to arise as a result of counseling over the web. Specifically, the authors state that practitioners within the field of psychology must use discretion when using the Internet because ethical risks prevail. The authors outline several uses for Internet counseling that they deem appropriate including interfacing directly with clients, providing educational resources, and enhancing academic motivation.

Ethical guidelines and codes established by professional organizations provide counselors with various parameters in which to provide services while maintaining at least a minimum standard of care. Attridge (2000) provides information regarding the ethical codes of the NBCC and the ACA and provides six areas of consideration for counselors who work with clients via the Internet. The six issues Attridge suggests are the therapeutic relationship, client confidentiality, informed consent, practice across state lines, electronic medical records, and suicide/homicide. Although Attridge devotes attention to each of these six areas in his discourse, he provides a lengthy discussion regarding client confidentiality in comparison to the other five areas. He proposes that counselors work diligently to utilize modern and effective computer hardware and software applications to better ensure the confidentiality of clients, but due to the overall vastness and nature of the Internet, complete client confidentiality is virtually impossible. Attridge also speaks of the perplexity of regulating cybercounseling. He purports that due

to each state's differing licensure requirements, professional counselors may not be providing services lawfully across state lines. Attridge further indicates that providing professional services to individuals residing outside of a counselor's state of licensure may prove detrimental for the professional's licensure status or liability insurance eligibility as well as potentially hinder the professional's ability to provide quality care in the event of an emergency.

According to Bloom (1998), credentialing boards other than the NBCC and ACA have also ratified specific ethical codes related to the practice of cybercounseling. Specifically, Bloom mentions the National Career Development Association, however he indicates that other professional organizations are following the lead of those associations already seeking to implement new ethical codes. Moreover, Bloom explains the similarities between the manner in which medical associations have governed the practice of telemedicine and the new technologies influencing the mental health professions. Bloom admonishes that there are fraudulent individuals attempting to provide counseling services via the web; however, he argues that if professionals take certain precautions and adhere to ethical guidelines clients may receive beneficial services. In addition to the discussion of basic ethical considerations, Bloom introduces more than a score of issues that the NBCC Ethics Committee has taken under consideration. Essentially, the issues Bloom describes remind Internet practitioners to adhere to published ethical codes and provide clients with the same quality of services that they would receive in more traditional counseling relationships.

Global credentialing is a concept suggesting that traditional counselor preparation and practice within the United States may change as a result of cybercounseling since it is

wholly feasible that a practitioner in a foreign country could be providing services to a client within the United States (Clawson, 2000). Professional societies establish ethical codes to provide members with basic guidelines to maintain professional standards and promote continuity among services. Moreover, Clawson indicates that new organizations are being formed to address globalization and the many changes it is causing within professions, including the various mental health disciplines. Overall, Clawson provides a checklist that practitioners may follow in seeking to better understand how global credentialing may become a part of professional nomenclature regarding Internet counseling.

Lee (2000) describes how ethical counselors are committed to ensuring that clients of all backgrounds and socio-economic status (SES) are able to access counseling services. He indicates that cybercounseling may be an effective therapeutic modality, though individuals from low SES may not be as readily able to receive services via the computer due to limited access to technology in the home or lack of computer skills. Lee suggests that counselors who use Internet technology should be cognizant of the fact that many potential clients may not have access to the Internet and therefore perceive themselves as less powerful in a therapeutic relationship. Lee also illustrates how the medium may be a useful and innovative way in which to serve clients who may have previously gone without services due to limitations such as geography, lack of access to practitioners, or various disabilities. According to Lee, many community centers, schools, and libraries are providing computer access for their patrons, and therefore an individual who may not have Internet access at home could log on and potentially contact counselors who provide electronic counseling services.

Other research explaining the use of web based mental health services indicates that individual practitioners, as well as those working in counseling centers, utilize the Internet in their delivery of services. Sampson (1999) submits that clients may benefit from career counseling via the web regardless of whether clients are able to visit individual practitioners, career centers, or if their only counseling contact is through the Internet. He argues that the web is best utilized when practitioners augment traditional delivery methods, and the Internet has an abundance of practical uses within effective counseling services provided through career centers. Sampson suggests that prior to the implementation of career websites, counselors should examine client needs, available financial and staff resources, and ethical considerations, and match these criteria with effective website development.

Murphy and Mitchell (1998) introduce the term “therap-e-mail” to describe cybercounseling conducted through the use of electronic mail (p. 21). These authors indicate that therap-e-mail is an effective method through which counselors may provide services and suggest that there are both strengths and limitations to its use. They suggest that therap-e-mail may lack visual and auditory nonverbal cues, but Murphy and Mitchell allude to the idea that individuals can provide written descriptions of their nonverbal cues to expand communication and improve understanding. The authors suggest that written expression through email provides information that can be retained for later review and is a useful therapeutic tool whereby clients use “typing as an externalizing mechanism” (p. 27).

The forms of communication employed in web counseling also relate to ethical standards, and Suler (2000) explains five properties related to the manner in which

counselors and clients interface via the Internet. Suler's five properties are synchronous/asynchronous, text/sensory, actual/imaginary, automated/interpersonal, and invisible/present, and he discusses the pros and cons of each.

Synchronous versus asynchronous simply means that clients and counselors may communicate online at the same time period, as in an online chat, or at different time intervals through email messages. Suler (2000) describes the current lack of information relating to the senses available via the Internet, but he suggests that the future of the medium may afford both practitioners and clients additional sensory information that could augment the Internet's usefulness. Another concept Suler presents is the contrast between imagination and actuality, describing that clients may feel more freedom to express themselves or use imagination in therapeutic relationships than they might in other forms of therapy. The researcher also discusses the relationships that exist between automation and interpersonal relations as well as between invisible and present. Although computers aid users to automate routine and difficult tasks, Suler points out that some aspects of therapeutic relationships may be assigned to the computer, however not without a myriad of pitfalls. Moreover, Suler suggests that web counseling may not afford the same degree of perceived benefit to clients who believe that they are only talking to a machine, compared to other clients who conclude that the computer is a conduit to the person on the other end of the communication process.

Authors including Baltimore (2000) and Jenicus and Sager (2001) discuss ethical ramifications regarding the practice of marriage and family therapy through the use of the Internet. Baltimore states that practitioners should become knowledgeable about changing technology that impacts the helping professions as well as become proficient in

the many uses of computers in helping relationships. The author describes the changes to the ethical codes of both the NBCC and ACA as each organization has incorporated electronic counseling into the profession. Baltimore cautions professionals to look to their various ethical codes when deciding whether to enter into a cybercounseling practice or use the Internet in other ways to supplement more traditional counseling methods.

Jencius and Sager (2001) also discuss the changes to the various codes of ethics established by many of the mental health professional associations. Moreover, the authors describe many of the counseling uses of the Internet that have previously been mentioned in this review, however they also include the idea that audio and video conferencing may be utilized by practitioners in their work with clients. The authors provide the results of their review of many counseling websites and indicate that issues of ethical importance are beginning to emanate from these sites. According to Jencius and Sager, professional counselors who utilize the Internet should seek to protect prospective clients by providing links to licensure boards, clear explanations of their credentials and expertise, and avenues for emergency services so that clients may make informed decisions and have access to additional resources.

Other authors also describe the professional societies' roles in establishing ethical parameters surrounding counseling services over the web. Robson and Robson (2000) explain how the British Association for Counselling (BAC) and the Register for Psychotherapists (UKCP) are seeking to monitor and regulate the practice of cybercounseling in the United Kingdom. Professional associations around the globe are faced with numerous difficulties in establishing ethical guidelines that keep pace with the ever-changing Internet, however Robson and Robson suggest that there are several core

principles that professional organizations and practitioners should follow when conducting web counseling. Autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and fidelity are each principles that Robson and Robson describe as essential in ensuring that clients are able to freely make their own therapeutic choices as well as receive quality counseling services from a safe and competent practitioner.

The manner in which states and governmental agencies enact professional licensure requirements, maintain regulatory jurisdiction, and influence the establishment of ethical codes is also cogent to discussions of the roles professional organizations take in promoting ethical cybercounseling (Hughes, 2000). According to Hughes, jurisdictional counseling boards have not been consistent with their interpretations of cybercounseling or with the regulation of practitioners. Additionally, Hughes states that regulatory boards need to clearly define cybercounseling and address its legality. She explains that a board-licensed practitioner may be providing services to individuals outside of the board's jurisdiction, or a practitioner who resides and is licensed outside of the particular board's state may be providing services to a client within the board's jurisdiction.

### Training and Supervision

Several studies examine the various influences that the Internet has had on the education, training, and supervision of counselors. Stevens and Lundberg (1998) suggest that the expansion of the web has greatly enhanced the educational opportunities for counseling professionals, and has provided professionals the ability to reach increasing numbers of clients who would not have otherwise been able to receive career counseling services due to financial or geographic limitations. Although the authors praise the

usefulness of the Internet, they also discuss how clients navigating the web can become overwhelmed or frustrated with the medium until they are savvy users accustomed to the various workings of search engines, computer nomenclature, and email. Overall, Stevens and Lundberg (1998) report on the implementation of Internet usage as a part of a master's level career counseling class. The authors indicate that graduate students were able to effectively utilize the many resources available to them on the Internet, delineate useful Internet resources from those that provide little benefit, and equip clients with useful career information as a part of traditional career counseling services.

Gilbride, Breithaupt, and Hoehle (1996) discuss how graduate students use the Internet to share information, communicate common concerns, and augment classroom interactions. The authors scrutinized approximately 860 messages posted to the listserv associated with a master's program in rehabilitation counseling and found that graduate students utilized the medium to discuss class content, issues related to the profession, and service delivery. Moreover, Gilbride, et al. investigate graduate student viewpoints regarding the web and report that overall student perception of the Internet shifted from skepticism to that of widespread acceptance of the Internet as a useful part of their educational process.

Other studies also examine the augmentation of career counselor education and training through the use of the Internet. According to Gilbride and Stensrud (1999), the Internet provides a useful and practical medium through which counseling educators and current or prospective students may communicate. Email correspondence, listservs, databases, and homepages allow individuals to circumvent many educational barriers like geography, employment restrictions, disabilities, or limited institutional resources, in

order to achieve higher standards of quality in professional education (Gilbride & Stensrude, 1999). The authors also emphasize the importance of using the Internet to improve the quality of counselor education and rehabilitation or career counseling services by meeting student learning needs, placing emphasis on diversity, and alleviating the concerns of skeptics who do not believe the web to be a useful tool.

Gilbride (2000a) suggests that traditional counseling courses can be greatly enhanced through supervised interaction with an on-line client. Gilbride provides a detailed account of how one of his vocational and career counseling classes interfaced with and provided career counseling to an individual through only electronic media. Students were able to establish rapport with their client, investigate career options, make recommendations, and assess alternatives without any face-to-face contact with the individual, although the client was well known to the course instructor. At the conclusion of the academic term, both the client and the group of students reported that their counseling and educational experiences had been fruitful (Gilbride, 2000). Gilbride indicates that this type of pedagogical experience has several administrative difficulties such as time constraints, lack of a direct personal relationship with the client, and a potentially inappropriate modality for some clients. Conversely, he also advises that the advantages of class participation and discussions, archival benefits, and elimination of scheduling specific counseling sessions provide both counselors and clients great flexibility in career counseling.

Research is limited regarding the overall effectiveness of electronic counseling. However, counselors who are educated in the technology and risks of the Internet and who are closely supervised by well-informed colleagues are able to provide adequate

services via the web (Oravec, 2000). Oravec provides similar descriptions of the various modes cybercounseling may take, but also expounds on issues relating specifically to education and supervision. The author suggests that trainees become informally familiar with Internet services and capabilities before attempting any formal interactions with clients via the web. Oravec discusses the usefulness of the Internet as a teaching tool and describes several strengths and weaknesses of the medium in educational venues. The strengths that Oravec recommends include the Internet's cost efficiency, opportunity for new counseling experiences, and the therapeutic strengths of narrative approaches. In contrast, Oravec describes several weaknesses related to Internet counseling which are potential staff reductions in counseling agencies, inability to recognize warning signs that would normally be available through face-to-face therapy, and the prospects of software programs taking the place of therapeutic interventions in the future. In presenting the potential strengths and weaknesses of cybercounseling, Oravec continually reminds professionals to become knowledgeable about Internet counseling and turn to learned colleagues for close supervision if choosing to implement electronic methods into counseling practice.

Bruch (1999) advocates for the use of the web in the development of professional networks and informational resources with which to continually develop competencies to better serve clients. She also indicates that counselors should make lists of their Internet resources available to clients so that they may benefit from the vast and varied information available on the Internet. Although many aspects of Internet usage may preclude clients from dealing face-to-face with career counselors, the medium does not

necessarily overshadow the needs of both professionals and clients to have interpersonal interaction throughout the counseling process (Bruch, 1999).

The Internet is a place that counseling professionals may opt to interact with one another for supervisory experiences (Myrick & Sabella, 1995). Many academic institutions are providing distance education programs whereby the Internet is used to disseminate information between students and faculty, and according to Myrick and Sabella, the Internet also allows for the same sorts of interactions between counselors and their supervisors through email and other communication forms. The authors describe several case studies whereby supervision was successfully conducted through email communication, however they also present the advantages and disadvantages of the process. Myrick and Sabella indicate emails supplement more traditional forms of supervision, and written information provides an exact reference to the discussions of supervision. In contrast, the authors suggest that email limitations include the difficulties individuals may have with typing, the brevity of email messages, and inadvertent omissions of useful information.

Kanz (2001) also purports the Internet's usefulness in the supervision of counseling professionals and indicates that insufficient information is available regarding the ethics surrounding Internet supervision. Kanz suggests that the available information regarding the ethics of online counseling may be extrapolated and applied to counseling supervision via the Internet. He describes that the same issues of confidentiality, lack of nonverbal communication cues, licensure issues, and the differences with traditional relationships affect the overall ethics of online supervision in much the same manner as with cybercounseling. Overall, Kanz advocates for the Internet's usefulness in clinical

supervision, however, he cautions professionals to carefully examine ethical considerations before entering into online supervision.

### Research and Assessment

In addition to the utility of the Internet in counselor education and training, the literature also describes other issues that are pertinent to the practice of counseling. Oliver and Zack (1999) tailor their discussion to how career counselors may use the web to conduct career assessments to assist clients with making effective decisions that are in keeping with overall vocational goals. Through their research, Oliver and Zack examined and evaluated a number of career-related sites on the web and discussed the types of information provided, ethical precautions taken, and potential benefits for clients. Their findings show that career assessment sites may provide clients with a bounty of useful information, but clients must be adept in the use of computers and the Internet in order to make the best use of career websites. Oliver and Zack also caution that many career-related websites do not adequately discuss psychometric properties of the various assessment instruments provided to web users, and that statistical information including validity and reliability should be taken into consideration when using career websites for assessment purposes.

Similarly, Andrew and Sabik (1999) indicate that counselors must also develop and maintain computer competence. The authors report that respondents surveyed regarding computer usage within vocational rehabilitation and career counseling agencies indicate that prospective counselors are expected to have developed adequate computer skills prior to employment. Career counselors routinely utilize the Internet to gather information for clients, research cogent counseling issues, and communicate with peers;

therefore computer proficiency is crucial to the modern practice of counseling (Andrew & Sabik, 1999).

Sampson and Lumsden (2000) assert that the web abounds with many potential benefits for clients and counselors, and such things as career assessments may be conducted using modern methods like the web if careful considerations are taken. Sampson and Lumsden indicate that the ethics surrounding career assessment on the Internet may be viewed from the perspective of either assessment instruments or professional practice. According to the authors, career counselors should concern themselves with the statistical significance of the various instruments available on websites in order to aid their clients in making reasonable and accurate assumptions.

Additionally, the authors suggest that practitioners only promote Internet counseling with those clients who are computer savvy, psychologically stable, and have the mental capacities to use good judgment and strong decision making skills. Moreover, Sampson and Lumsden indicate that practitioners should evaluate their own understanding of computer technologies along with ethical decisions surrounding confidentiality, accuracy of research and services, and client access to services.

Many individuals enhance their career counseling experiences through participation in job and employee support groups (Kahnweiler & Riordan, 1998). Additionally, the researchers indicate that several types of support groups, including transitional groups, single organization groups, and inter-organizational groups have traditionally been available to individuals, however career counseling clients may now communicate with others using the resources on the Internet to form career related support groups. The authors indicate that the Internet is a valuable resource for both

clients and counselors, and that career support groups on the web may provide individuals with an innovative conduit for discussing career goals, problems, and generating resources.

Gilbride (2000b) reports the results of a survey that queried administrators of vocational rehabilitation and suggests that the Internet is a medium through which career counselors may routinely and directly contact prospective employers and others who can assist their clients. His survey results indicate four emerging trends in client career placement: an increasing amount of counseling time is devoted to various placement efforts, counseling services have evolved in recent years, employers are becoming more active in the counseling process, and the Internet is influencing client education, training, as well as the counseling process. Overall, Gilbride reports that employers now expect prospective employees, as well as other professionals, to utilize the many resources available via the Internet.

Kirk (2000) recommends that counselors review several relevant topics to career counseling and the Internet including the incorporation of new technologies into established relationships, recognizing effective career-related websites, and using the Internet to work with specific segments of clients. The Internet is a useful tool for both career counseling client and practitioner if steps are taken to ensure that quality information is obtained and the medium is used in conjunction with more traditional counseling modalities.

Levine (2000) suggests that the Internet provides counselors and researchers access to an abundance of resources and information as well as opens innovative channels for communication. Levine cautions, however, that counselors may encounter

various ethical quagmires that could impede effective practice. Specifically, the author indicates that privacy issues are paramount in cybercounseling discussions and provides several areas of ethical and legal concern for counselors seeking to utilize the Internet in their practice. First, agencies and providers have increasingly relied upon electronic means to communicate, store data, and conduct billing. Levine indicates that with an increasing dependence on computer technology, counselors have an increasing risk of breaching client confidences and privacy since individuals who are not privy to client records may be able to access confidential information through computer systems.

Second, Levine (2000) indicates that limitations of federal law do not adequately protect client privacy, and without the implementation of more stringent laws, better enforcement measures, and administrative oversight many clients may not have the legal privacy rights in which they are entitled. Third, Levine suggests that the continued emergence of managed care exacerbate the potential for privacy infringements. According to Levine, managed care companies store vast amounts of medical and other health-related information and could potentially share this information with individuals or organizations that do not possess the same levels of ethical responsibilities as those to which counseling professionals are bound.

Sampson (2000) also presents a discussion surrounding ethics and counseling research and assessment. Sampson indicates that issues including selection, orientation, administration, scoring, and interpretation should be considered when using Internet applications in assessment. The author expounds on each of these areas, however he also presents a discussion regarding ethical issues. Sampson lists client confidentiality, lacking direct counselor intervention, misinterpretation, limitations to client access,

credentialing, and counselor training as ethical considerations that professionals should examine before undertaking this form of assessment. Moreover, Sampson states that several professional organizations have implemented ethical statements, practice standards, and professional guidelines for counselors to follow.

### Hazards to Cybercounseling

Although the Internet has a number of useful benefits for counseling professionals, Offer and Sampson (1999) warn that the medium is not free from significant hazards. The authors indicate that various technical limitations prohibit a counselor from being completely certain that privileged information will not be intercepted during the cybercounseling process. However, the authors do indicate that improvements are continually being made to make the Internet more secure for all consumers, including those seeking Internet counseling.

Finn and Banach (2000) also describe risks related to Internet counseling. The authors suggest that Internet consumers should be mindful that numerous pitfalls exist on the information superhighway. Specifically, the authors warn that people may become victims of fraud or deceit resulting from so-called professionals misrepresenting themselves on-line. Victims would be communicating with someone they thought to be a therapist, and in actuality they were interfacing with a charlatan who was merely taking their money.

In addition to these cybercounseling risks, Banach and Bernat (2000) indicate that both counselors and clients may experience hazards due to the ambiguity of the Internet. The authors question when the counseling relationship actually begins during an on-line relationship between counselor and client. They also caution that there have been a

number of malpractice law suits in the medical community regarding telephone practices, and indicate mental health professionals should exercise extreme discretion if choosing to utilize the Internet in their professional practices.

### Current Use of Cybercounseling

Masi and Freedman (2001) assert that Internet use in mental health services has increased as a result of increasing healthcare costs, managed care, and issues relating to clients' limited access to traditional face-to-face services. The authors begin their discussion by presenting information concerning telephone usage in counseling relationships and then transition into a discussion of Internet use in modern counseling. Masi and Freedman suggest that counselors currently using the Internet should recognize that once information has been transmitted into cyberspace, there is little or no control over where the information goes or who may have access to it. Additionally, the authors caution that the Internet does not provide modern counselors with abundant amounts of verbal and nonverbal expression from their clients, which could encumber the counselor's abilities to relate with and fully understand their cyber-clients. Although Masi and Freedman support cybercounseling in with both individual clients and groups, the authors report that many counselors lack the technical knowledge and an understanding of the medium's limitations to ethically practice Internet counseling.

Cybercounseling is also being used to educate individuals with HIV and AIDS (DeGuzman & Ross, 1999). Many counselors provide useful resources on their Internet websites, however DeGuzman and Ross indicate that many counseling-related websites do not adequately address ethical limitations to cybercounseling in the information provided on the web. The authors suggest that ethical counselors openly address the

limitations of cybercounseling, however they report that a majority of professionals who use the Internet as a part of counseling rarely address pertinent ethical issues or limitations.

To date, there is a limited amount of research in the literature indicating actual Internet usage by mental health practitioners. Maheu and Gordon (2000) provide an initial study examining how counseling professionals are using the Internet in their practices. They surveyed a number of mental health professionals via an email listserv and found that those professionals in the United States who reported using the Internet as a part of professional services predominantly used the medium for education and advice. Fewer than 15 percent of the respondents indicated that they used the Internet for either therapy or counseling. Maheu and Gordon's research provided the basic premise for this thesis project.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Babbie (1990) suggests that the survey methodology is an effective way in which to gather and analyze information within the social sciences. Following the advances in computer technology, many researchers have utilized the Internet to recruit research participants, distribute survey instruments, and communicate results. The Internet is becoming an increasingly accepted medium among scholars for conducting research.

A survey was distributed to mental health professionals via the Internet in order to obtain information concerning their attitudes about Internet counseling. The results of this survey provide information about the practitioners' perception regarding Internet use as a part of a therapeutic relationship.

#### Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from practitioners who communicate with colleagues via computer listservs targeted toward mental health professionals. Participants include professionals from various mental health disciplines including psychology, counseling, social work, marriage and family therapy, and pastoral counseling.

#### Instrumentation

Earlier research conducted by Maheu and Gordon (2000) used an Internet survey instrument to gather information from mental health professionals. The survey instrument developed for this study utilized several of Maheu and Gordon's questions, however additional questions were added in order to obtain specific information regarding respondent's perceptions of ethics and Internet counseling. The instrument was

comprised of 18 questions asking for information including demographics, Internet usage, and ethics. A copy of the Internet survey is provided in the appendix.

### Procedure

Internet listservs targeting mental health professionals in various disciplines were researched via professional association websites. Specifically, the researcher sought to obtain listservs where mental health professionals discussed issues related to theories, ethics, or practice of counseling, marriage and family therapy, psychology, and social work.

Once the various listservs were obtained, an email message to recruit participants for this study was distributed to the memberships of the listservs. The email message included a hypertext link to a website containing the informed consent information approved by the Austin Peay State University Institutional Review Board. Potential participants were not able to see or complete the survey without agreeing to the informed consent statement provided on the website.

Participants who agreed to the informed consent were asked to complete the Internet survey. To insure the confidentiality of participants, survey results were compiled in database form and stored for analysis. The survey website was active for a total of two months.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Demographic Information

Fifty-two participants submitted responses to the Internet survey between May 2002 and July 2002. A preponderate number of females responded to the survey ( $n = 33$ ) representing 63.5 percent of the total. Nineteen males submitted responses, representing 36.5 percent of the total.

Participants provided information regarding their ethnicity by selecting specific categories of African American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, or Caucasian. Respondents were also provided with an "Other" category and provided space to include their individualized descriptions. Seventy-five percent of respondents ( $n = 39$ ) classified themselves as Caucasian. The next largest classification of respondents ( $n = 5$ ) were those who selected the other category, however only one respondent provided additional information indicating that he is Greek. Four individuals (7.7%) reported their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino, and three respondents (5.8%) reported their ethnicity as Asian. One respondent (1.9%) reported that she was African American. Zero respondents selected the Native American category in response to ethnicity.

Respondents were asked to provide their level of education as a part of the Internet survey. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents ( $n = 33$ ) reported that they had attained a Master's degree, and two additional respondents reported that they were graduate students pursuing their Master's degree. Two participants reported their education to be at the "Masteral" level. Approximately twenty percent of respondents ( $n = 10$ ) indicated that they had attained a doctoral degree, and three additional respondents

indicated that they were pursuing a doctoral degree. One participant indicated that he held a Bachelor's degree, and one participant indicated that she held a "Graduate Diploma."

More than half of the participants ( $n = 28$ ) indicated that they were licensed mental health professionals. Twenty-three respondents reported that they were not licensed mental health professionals. One participant did not respond in this category.

Nearly all of the respondents ( $n = 48$ ) selected a category regarding their area of primary practice. More than forty percent of participants ( $n = 21$ ) reported that counseling was their primary area of practice. Ten respondents (19.2%) selected the other category and provided such descriptions as "health promotion/clinician," "drug work," "education and psychology," "psychoanalysis," "addictions," "educational counseling," "research," "college counselor and advisor," "public school," or "school counselor." Approximately ten percent of individuals responding ( $n = 5$ ) indicated that Social Work was their area of primary practice. Four participants indicated Marriage and Family Therapy, four more participants reported Psychology, and yet another four participants listed Pastoral Counseling as their primary area of practice. Three respondents did not select an individual category of practice, but provided "counselor education and supervision," "college counseling," and "administration" respectively as their primary area of practice. One participant did not respond in this category.

All but two participants provided information regarding the number of years that they have been in practice. More than two-thirds of respondents ( $n = 35$ ) report that they have been in practice less than 15 years. A total of 18 participants indicate that they have been in practice between zero and five years and 11 participants report between six and ten years. Six individuals indicate their time in practice to be between 11 and 15 years. A

total of fifteen respondents report that they have been in practice more than 15 years.

Four participants indicate between 16 and 20 years, five participants indicate between 21 and 25 years, and five participants indicate between 26 and 30 years. One mental health professional reports that she has been in practice more than 30 years. One participant did not respond to this category.

More than 90 percent of respondents ( $n = 47$ ) indicated that they have access to the Internet for professional use in their offices or place of practice. Four respondents (7.7%) indicated that they did not have access to the Internet for professional use. One participant did not respond to this category.

### Survey Responses

Participants were asked for their perceptions regarding Internet counseling in hopes of obtaining a better understanding as to whether mental health professionals would utilize the medium in their clinical practice. Conceptually the survey was divided into three separate parts that examined different aspects of the practitioners' feelings regarding the use of the Internet in counseling. First, information was obtained regarding the respondents' likelihood of using the Internet with clients as well as their perceptions of whether Internet counseling is ethical and beneficial for clients. Second, information regarding respondents' views of the practical aspects of Internet counseling were obtained. Finally, respondents were asked to address competency issues related to their understanding of Internet security measures and their ability to establish a secure website.

Perceptions were measured using descriptive methods. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the various survey items by selecting either strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. Numeric values were

assigned to each response with strongly agree equaling five and strongly disagree equaling one. The mean and standard deviation were calculated from the results for each of the conceptual items (Table 1).

TABLE 1  
AVERAGE RESPONSES TO CONCEPTUAL ITEMS

Item	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Internet counseling is an ethical form of providing services to clients.	3.20	0.89
I am likely to use the Internet as a part of providing client service.	3.27	1.15
Internet counseling is beneficial to clients.	3.24	0.97
I am likely to conduct therapy via the Internet.	2.24	1.12
Client confidentiality can be maintained.	2.86	1.11
Appropriate action could be taken in the event of crisis or emergency.	2.40	1.05
Counselors are able to intervene with clients indicating intent to harm.	2.44	1.11
The Internet is a useful medium through which to conduct counseling.	2.98	1.08
I would rather conduct Internet counseling than counseling face-to-face.	1.75	0.93
I consider myself knowledgeable of Internet security measures.	3.18	1.09
I consider myself technically competent to set up a secure website.	2.25	1.25

Responses varied regarding participants' perceptions of Internet counseling.

Many respondents ( $n = 14$ ) indicated that they were neutral ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ )

regarding the likelihood of their using the Internet as a part of providing client service. Based upon the averages, respondents indicated that they were neutral ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ) to the statement regarding Internet counseling being an ethical form of practice. Additionally, respondents indicated that they were neutral ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) regarding Internet counseling being beneficial to clients.

Overall, respondents did not provide favorable responses related to the practical aspects of Internet counseling. Respondents resoundingly indicated their disagreement with statements concerning their likelihood of conducting therapy via the Internet ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) and that they would rather conduct Internet counseling than work with a client face-to-face ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ). The majority of respondents clearly indicated their neutrality to or disagreement with statements supporting the practical applications of Internet counseling. In other words, respondents did not seem likely to use Internet counseling as a method of conducting therapy. Responses were mixed for the item related to client confidentiality being maintained via the Internet ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ).

Participants indicated their perceptions regarding their competence in developing and securing Internet websites. On average, respondents indicated that they were knowledgeable of Internet security measures ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), but did not consider themselves technically competent to set up a secure Internet website ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ). These data indicate a difference between possessing information regarding Internet security and actually being able to apply the information.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Internet usage among mental health professionals and their clients continues to increase with the enduring expansion of the worldwide computer network. Results from this survey indicate that respondents have mixed feelings regarding the overall effectiveness and usefulness of the Internet as a tool for direct therapeutic services. Although many respondents favored the use of the Internet in mental health services, others indicated reluctance to accept the medium's usage overall.

In keeping with the themes presented in the research literature regarding the Internet and mental health services, the results of this survey may be evaluated from the perspectives of ethical considerations, training and supervision of practitioners, and potential hazards. This chapter will present a discussion regarding the results of this survey as well as expound on the findings from the perspectives presented in the research literature. Moreover, suggestions for future research will be presented along with the overarching implications that the results of this study suggest.

The results of this descriptive study provide information suggesting the positions of respondents regarding Internet usage in counseling practice. Inherent to descriptive research methods, results cannot always be generalized to a larger population, but rather provide a snapshot of the views of those responding to the survey instrument. Therefore, one must recognize that other samples might have reported dramatically disparate information than that provided by the respondents in this study.

## Demographic Information

The demographics of the sample responding to this survey are similar to the overall demographics of the helping professions as a whole in the areas of gender, ethnicity, and education level. According to the American Psychological Association (2002b), increasing numbers of women and people of color have pursued education and careers in the mental health professions since the 1970s. In their survey of graduate students, the APA (2002c) found that women comprised more than 70 percent of the total number of students pursuing graduate study in psychology. In keeping with this general percentage, nearly 64 percent of the respondents to this survey indicated that they were female. Although the percentages are not equal, it would appear that the numbers of women represented in the results of this survey are roughly proportional to the number of women entering the psychological disciplines.

The APA (2002c) reports that African American graduate students comprise seven percent of the total number of students in psychological graduate programs, Hispanic students comprise five percent, Asian students six percent, and Native American one percent. Again compared to these data, respondents to this survey indicate roughly similar demographic information in some of the categories related to ethnicity. Nearly eight percent of the respondents indicated that they were Hispanic/Latino, and nearly six percent indicated that they were Asian. In contrast to the percentages provided by the APA, only two percent of the respondents to this survey indicated African American as their ethnicity, and there were zero respondents who indicated Native American as their ethnicity.

Differing levels of education and training as well as professional orientation are represented among practitioners who use the Internet as a part of their work with clients. Maheu and Gordon (2000) report that approximately 45 percent of the practitioners conducting Internet therapy hold doctoral degrees while the majority are master's level practitioners. Approximately 64 percent of the respondents to this survey reported that they held a master's degree while nearly 20 percent indicated their education status at the doctoral level. On average, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that counseling was their professional orientation and not marriage and family therapy, social work, psychology, pastoral counseling, or others. This disparity may be explained through the clear acceptance of Internet counseling by the American Counseling Association in comparison to the other professional organizations (ACA, 2002). Many of the other associations have issued statements in order to educate or caution their memberships about the concepts surrounding Internet counseling, but they have not vigorously promoted the modality in manners consistent with the organizations whose memberships are predominantly professional counselors and not psychologists, social workers, or other mental health professionals.

Use of computers and the Internet has increasingly become a routine part of helping professionals' academic preparation and clinical practices as the technologies have advanced during the past decade (Wallace, 1999). Therefore it is not surprising that more than half of those responding to this Internet survey indicate that they have been in practice 10 years or less. This is not to say that veteran practitioners have not gained computer literacy, as more than 25 percent of those responding indicated that they had been in practice more than 15 years and approximately 10 percent of the total indicated

more than 25 years in the helping professions. One might assume that individuals who did not utilize the Internet during their formative mental health training or during their initial years of practice might be less likely to utilize the Internet in their work with clients. The results of this survey indicated that is not necessarily the case. Overall, the majority of respondents indicated that they are neutral, agree, or strongly agree with the statement that they would be likely to use the Internet as a part of providing client services. Years of experience did not seem to be an issue with regard to this topic in that many of the respondents who indicated agreement as well as many that indicated disagreement varied in the number of years in the helping professions.

### Internet Use in Counseling Practice

In contrast to the likelihood of practitioners using the Internet as a part of client service, overall respondents vehemently disagreed with the idea that they would conduct therapy over the Internet. Again, the number of years in practice varied for each of the response categories. However, it is interesting to note that of the limited number of respondents who reported either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would be likely to conduct therapy via the Internet, the majority of respondents reported less than 15 years of total experience. Moreover, those who reported that they were neutral to the thought reported less than 10 years of experience. A similar question was presented to respondents asking whether they believed that the Internet is a useful medium through which to conduct counseling. Yet again, responses were mixed and did not vary by years of mental health experience.

Nearly all of the respondents indicated that they had access to the Internet for professional use. Though the numbers were not significant, it is interesting to note that

half of the individuals who reported not having Internet access reported their professional affiliation with pastoral counseling and the other half reported counseling. Also of interest, the respondents who did not have computer access in their place of work were utilizing the Internet and gaining access to professional listservs through means other than in their workplace.

Ethical considerations fill a considerable part of the scholarly literature regarding Internet counseling. Barak (1999) discusses the pervasive nature of the Internet and the potential pitfalls that mental health practitioners may encounter if they utilize the medium as a part of client services. Barak specifically mentions issues of confidentiality as a paramount consideration for practitioners. More than 60 percent of the respondents to this survey were either neutral or disagreed with a statement indicating that client confidentiality could be maintained via the Internet. Only 7 of the 18 respondents who indicated that confidentiality could be maintained also indicated that they were licensed mental health providers. Although many of the other professionals may be bound by various codes of ethics, the majority of those who indicated their agreement that confidentiality could be maintained via the Internet did not also have the stringent licensure requirements with which to contend in the event of a potential ethical breach.

Other ethical considerations such as a provider's duty to protect his or her client and the community-at-large should be evaluated by practitioners who utilize the Internet in direct service (Banach & Barnat, 2000). More than 80 percent of the individuals responding to this survey reported that they were either neutral or disagreed with the statement that they were confident that appropriate action could be taken with an Internet client in the event of a crisis or emergency. Moreover 80 percent of respondents also

reported their neutrality or disagreement with the statement that Internet counselors are able to adequately intervene with a client who indicates intent to harm self or others. Much of the literature surrounding ethics and Internet usage in mental health services devotes considerable attention to issues such as the ones presented in this survey. It is obvious from these responses that many mental health professionals remain uncertain as to how they would maintain their fiduciary and ethical responsibilities to their clients and the community if engaged in Internet counseling.

### Technical Competency

Oravec (2000) indicates that counselors must understand both the strengths and the limitations of the computer medium and various security measures before actively working with clients via the Internet. Responses were mixed regarding respondents' beliefs regarding their computer skills and technical competencies. The number of individuals who considered themselves knowledgeable of Internet security measures roughly equaled those who did not, but the majority of respondents indicated that they did not consider themselves technically competent to set up a secure Internet website. As Internet technologies continue to advance, individuals who do not actively seek to expand their computer competencies will become increasingly less able to utilize the tools and resources available to them via the Internet. Although it can be argued that services of a competent Internet counselor may be obtained, many of these respondents indicated their willingness to conduct Internet counseling and they do not indicate the technical competence with which to establish such a practice. Hopefully, practitioners who seek to utilize the Internet in client services will seek to fully understand both the strengths and limitation that the medium provides.

## Limitations

This project is like most other research studies in that there are several distinct limitations that may have influenced the overall findings. Babbie (1990) cautions researchers to remember that it may not be possible to generalize survey results to larger populations unless the sample surveyed is representative of the overall population. The participants in this study represented a purposive sample in that they were subscribers to various Internet listservs targeting mental health professionals. As such, findings gathered from a purposive sample may not be interpreted with the same level of confidence as the findings obtained from a more random sample.

An additional limitation of this study is its relatively small sample size. Although a total of 52 individuals responded to this survey, the results might have been dramatically different had a larger number of individuals responded to the Internet survey. One factor that may have been significant regarding this small sample is the amount of time that the survey was made available to participants. The survey was on-line for a period of three months during a summer academic term. Time of year and the relatively short period of availability might have adversely affected the results of this study. For example, a number of academics and mental health practitioners may not participate as actively on Internet listservs during the summer months than other times of the year because of vacations, professional conferences, and many colleges and universities in between academic years.

Individuals who participate in Internet listservs were selected for inclusion in this study because it was presumed that practitioners who are computer savvy and might utilize the Internet in client services would likely also participate in Internet discussion

groups or listservs. As such, several listservs were selected and the various memberships contacted and asked to participate. Only a small number of listservs were chosen for inclusion in this study. It would have proven difficult to obtain access to the total number of listservs targeting mental health professionals based upon the fluid state of the Internet with discussion groups changing with some regularity.

It would be difficult to estimate the number of mental health practitioners subscribing to Internet listservs and, therefore, another limitation to this study might be that practitioners who provide Internet counseling services did not choose to participate in this study. As such, their perspectives could not be included in this study and one should take that into account when analyzing the results of this study. Limited participation by prospects is a potential limitation of many research projects and definitely applies to this study.

### Suggestions for Future Research

As more attention is paid to the ethical and procedural aspects of providing Internet counseling to clients, it might prove beneficial to conduct this study again at some point in the future to examine whether practitioner perceptions change. The Internet will no doubt continue its expansion into other areas of modern life and an examination of practitioner as well as client concerns could enlighten future researchers. The influence of professional organizations on the various codes of ethics may also influence the outcome of this study if conducted in the future.

The scope of this study remained broad in that practitioners from a myriad of mental health disciplines were included as participants. If future researchers limited their study to particular professional groups, such as only psychologists or only social workers,

specific conclusions regarding an individual profession could be analyzed and compared with that of other professions. As previously mentioned, professional organizations comprised of professional counselors have taken specific stances supporting Internet counseling. If other organizations choose not to follow suit, or actively oppose the practice of Internet counseling, results obtained from these specific practitioners might be dramatically different from those obtained in this study.

Another suggestion for future research would be to gather the perspectives of Internet counseling clients or prospective clients. Although issues of confidentiality and other ethical concerns might prove challenging for a researcher, it would be very interesting to examine whether clients deem the modality to be useful, safe, ethical, and the like. If the literature contained information regarding clients' distaste for the modality, then practitioners might want to look to other therapeutic avenues from which to serve their clients.

The vast expansion and overall acceptance of the Internet has dramatically changed how many individuals obtain information, conduct business, and communicate with others. Many mental health professionals have embraced the use of modern technologies to seek professional development and serve their clients. As the Internet continues to be a pervasive part of modern life, the helping professions will continue to wrestle with the ethical dilemmas resulting from Internet usage in professional practice.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form is intended to provide you with information about this study. You may ask the researchers listed below about this study or you may contact the Office of Grants and Sponsored Research, Box 4517, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN 37044, (931) 221-7881 with questions about the rights of research participants. No deception is involved, and this study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life).

The title of this study is "A Survey Regarding Internet Counseling." My name is Matthew McCrickard, and I am a graduate student conducting my thesis research at Austin Peay State University under the supervision of Dr. Stuart Bonnington. I am completing the requirements for the Master of Science degree in community counseling.

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of mental health professionals regarding internet use as a part of counseling.

If you consent to participate, you will be forwarded to a website where you may complete a survey and submit it online once you are finished. Participation in this study typically takes five minutes. You will begin by answering several demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, area of practice) and then questions related to internet counseling. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. By participating, you are consenting to the use of your responses as a part of this research project. Your data will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. You should be aware that this study is not being run from a secure computer server, so there is a small possibility that someone other than the researcher could view your responses (e.g. computer hackers). You will not receive any form of credit or monetary compensation. There are no immediate benefits to participation.

Your responses will be held as strictly confidential and you will not be asked to provide your name or identifying information. The data will be published or presented in a way that does not reveal your identity. You can obtain results from the researcher by emailing him at [mpm2437@mail.apsu.edu](mailto:mpm2437@mail.apsu.edu), or by sending a written request to the researcher at the address below.

I have read the above and understand what the study is about, why it is being done, and any benefits or risks involved. I understand that I do not have to take part in this study, and my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of rights. I agree to participate in this study and understand that by agreeing to participate I have not given up any of my human rights. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent and stop participating prior to sending the survey.

If I have questions about this study I may contact Matthew McCrickard (graduate student, Psychology Department, [mpm2437@mail.apsu.edu](mailto:mpm2437@mail.apsu.edu)) or Dr. Stuart Bonnington (faculty supervisor, Psychology Department, [bonningtons@apsu.edu](mailto:bonningtons@apsu.edu)).

## APPENDIX B

**A Survey Regarding Internet Counseling**

1. Gender:       Female       Male
  
2. Ethnicity:    African American  
                     Asian  
                     Hispanic / Latino  
                     Native American  
                     Caucasian  
                     Other
  
3. Education Level:  
                     Bachelor's Degree  
                     Master's Degree  
                     Doctoral Degree  
                     Other
  
4. Are you a licensed mental health professional?    Yes       No
  
5. Area of primary practice:  
                     Counseling  
                     Marriage and Family Therapy  
                     Social Work  
                     Psychology  
                     Pastoral Counseling  
                     Other
  
6. Number of years in practice: 0-5   6-10   11-15   16-20   21-25   26-30   Over 30
  
7. Do you have access to the Internet for professional use (i.e., in your office or place of practice)?   Yes       No

8. Internet counseling is an ethical form of providing mental health services to clients.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neutral
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
9. I am likely to use the Internet as a part of providing client service.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neutral
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
10. I consider myself knowledgeable of Internet security measures, software, and hardware (i.e., firewalls, encryption).
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neutral
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
11. I consider myself technically competent in my ability to set up a secure Internet website.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neutral
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
12. I am likely to conduct therapy via the Internet.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neutral
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree

13. I am confident that client confidentiality can be maintained via the Internet.  
Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neutral  
Agree  
Strongly Agree
14. I am confident that appropriate action could be taken with an Internet client in the event of a crisis or emergency (i.e., duty to warn, duty to protect).  
Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neutral  
Agree  
Strongly Agree
15. Internet counselors are able to adequately intervene with a client who indicates an intent to harm self or others.  
Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neutral  
Agree  
Strongly Agree
16. Overall, I believe that the Internet is a useful medium through which to conduct counseling.  
Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neutral  
Agree  
Strongly Agree
17. I would rather conduct Internet counseling than work with a client face-to-face.  
Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neutral  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

18. Internet counseling is beneficial to clients.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

# APPENDIX C

## Responses by Item

1.	Gender:	Female	33	(63.5%)
		Male	19	(36.5%)
2.	Ethnicity:	African American	1	( 1.9%)
		Asian	3	( 5.8%)
		Hispanic / Latino	4	( 7.7%)
		Native American	0	( 0.0%)
		Caucasian	39	(75.0%)
		Other	5	( 9.6%)
3.	Education Level:	Bachelor's Degree	1	( 1.9%)
		Master's Degree	33	(63.5%)
		Doctoral Degree	10	(19.2%)
		Other	8	(15.4%)
4.	Are you a licensed mental health professional?	Yes	28	(53.8%)
		No	23	(44.2%)
		No response	1	( 1.9%)
5.	Area of primary practice:	Counseling	21	(40.4%)
		Marriage and Family Therapy	4	( 7.7%)
		Social Work	5	( 9.6%)
		Psychology	4	( 7.7%)
		Pastoral Counseling	4	( 7.7%)
		Other	10	(19.2%)
		No response	4	( 7.7%)

## 5. Number of years in practice:

0-5	18	(34.6%)
6-10	11	(21.2%)
11-15	6	(11.5%)
16-20	4	(7.7%)
21-25	5	(9.6%)
26-30	5	(9.6%)
Over 30	1	(1.9%)
No response	2	(3.8%)

## 7. Do you have access to the Internet for professional use (i.e., in your office or place of practice)?

Yes	47	(90.4%)
No	4	(7.7%)
No Response	1	(1.9%)

## 8. Internet counseling is an ethical form of providing mental health services to clients.

Strongly Disagree	2	(3.8%)
Disagree	8	(15.4%)
Neutral	21	(40.4%)
Agree	18	(34.6%)
Strongly Agree	2	(3.8%)
No Response	1	(1.9%)

## 9. I am likely to use the Internet as a part of providing client service.

Strongly Disagree	5	(9.6%)
Disagree	7	(13.5%)
Neutral	14	(26.9%)
Agree	19	(36.5%)
Strongly Agree	6	(11.5%)
No Response	1	(1.9%)

10. I consider myself knowledgeable of Internet security measures, software, and hardware (i.e., firewalls, encryption).

Strongly Disagree	2	( 3.8%)
Disagree	16	(30.8%)
Neutral	8	(15.4%)
Agree	21	(40.4%)
Strongly Agree	4	( 7.7%)
No Response	1	( 1.9%)

11. I consider myself technically competent in my ability to set up a secure Internet website.

Strongly Disagree	17	(32.7%)
Disagree	19	(36.5%)
Neutral	2	( 3.8%)
Agree	11	(21.2%)
Strongly Agree	2	( 3.8%)
No Response	1	( 1.9%)

12. I am likely to conduct therapy via the Internet.

Strongly Disagree	15	(28.8%)
Disagree	17	(32.7%)
Neutral	11	(21.2%)
Agree	5	( 9.6%)
Strongly Agree	2	( 3.8%)
No Response	2	( 3.8%)

13. I am confident that client confidentiality can be maintained via the Internet.

Strongly Disagree	7	(13.5%)
Disagree	13	(25.0%)
Neutral	12	(23.1%)
Agree	18	(34.6%)
Strongly Agree	1	( 1.9%)
No Response	1	( 1.9%)

14. I am confident that appropriate action could be taken with an Internet client in the event of a crisis or emergency (i.e., duty to warn, duty to protect).
- |                   |    |         |
|-------------------|----|---------|
| Strongly Disagree | 12 | (23.1%) |
| Disagree          | 14 | (26.9%) |
| Neutral           | 17 | (32.7%) |
| Agree             | 6  | (11.5%) |
| Strongly Agree    | 1  | ( 1.9%) |
| No Response       | 2  | ( 3.8%) |
15. Internet counselors are able to adequately intervene with a client who indicates an intent to harm self or others.
- |                   |    |         |
|-------------------|----|---------|
| Strongly Disagree | 10 | (19.2%) |
| Disagree          | 19 | (36.5%) |
| Neutral           | 13 | (25.0%) |
| Agree             | 5  | ( 9.6%) |
| Strongly Agree    | 3  | ( 5.8%) |
| No Response       | 2  | ( 3.8%) |
16. Overall, I believe that the Internet is a useful medium through which to conduct counseling.
- |                   |    |         |
|-------------------|----|---------|
| Strongly Disagree | 6  | (11.5%) |
| Disagree          | 9  | (17.3%) |
| Neutral           | 17 | (32.7%) |
| Agree             | 16 | (30.8%) |
| Strongly Agree    | 2  | ( 3.8%) |
| No Response       | 2  | ( 3.8%) |
17. I would rather conduct Internet counseling than work with a client face-to-face.
- |                   |    |         |
|-------------------|----|---------|
| Strongly Disagree | 26 | (50.0%) |
| Disagree          | 15 | (28.8%) |
| Neutral           | 8  | (15.4%) |
| Agree             | 1  | ( 1.9%) |
| Strongly Agree    | 1  | ( 1.9%) |
| No Response       | 1  | ( 1.9%) |

18. Internet counseling is beneficial to clients.

Strongly Disagree	4	( 7.7%)
Disagree	5	( 9.6%)
Neutral	19	(36.5%)
Agree	21	(40.4%)
Strongly Agree	2	( 3.8%)
No Response	1	( 1.9%)

## VITA

Matthew Price McCrickard entered the University of North Alabama in 1987 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in radio, television, and film in December 1991. McCrickard entered graduate school at Auburn University in 1992 and graduated with the Master of Arts degree in communication in December 1993. He entered graduate school at Auburn University Montgomery in 1996 and graduated with the Master of Public Administration degree in May 1997. He entered graduate school at Austin Peay State University in 2000 pursuing the Master of Science degree in community counseling. McCrickard holds memberships in Pi Alpha Alpha, Pi Sigma Alpha, and Psi Chi national honor societies.

Professionally, McCrickard has taught communication, public policy, and psychology at the university level, provided managerial and professional services within universities and public agencies, and filled technical and creative positions within the telecommunication industry. He has also served in many volunteer capacities including service as an Americorps Volunteer in Service to America.