

# THE RAM REPORT

FALL 2023

## Rethinking Counseling Ethics in Technological Era



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## RAM REPORT FALL 2023 NEWSLETTER

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# MEET THE EDITORIAL STAFF

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*Saiber Shaikh*

*Editor in Chief*

**Saiber Shaikh** is a second year doctoral student and the Lead Herr Clinic Supervisor at the Penn State's Counselor Education program. She loves all things art and dabbles in writing, painting, cooking, photography from time to time. When she is not busy, she loves connecting with people, staring at flowers, and watching dog videos on the internet.



*Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos*

*Associate Editor*

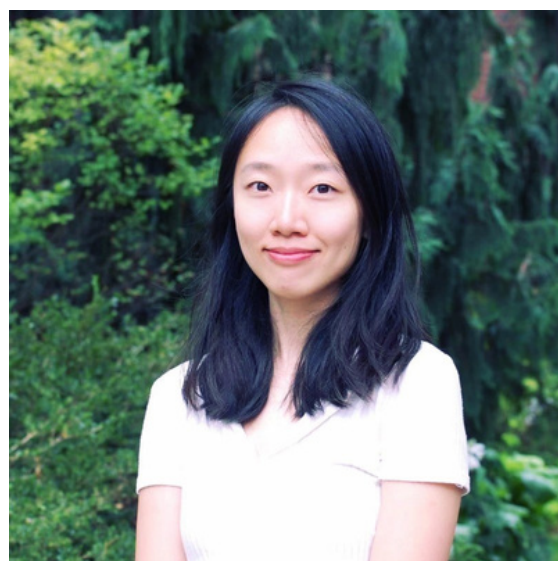
**Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos** is a first-year student in Penn State's Counselor and Education Ph.D. program. She is passionate about working with marginalized populations to eliminate mental health stigmas held by BIPOC and Latino communities through trauma-informed and decolonized care. In her free time, she enjoys walking, practicing yoga, solving jigsaw puzzles, and going to the movies.



*Nikki Weng*

*Assistant Editor*

**Nikki Weng** is a first-year master's student in Penn State's Counselor Education program. During her free time, she can usually be found walking, reading, cooking, painting, volunteering and wishing she had a cat.





# Meet the New Faculty: Dr. Sarah Shrewsbury-Braxton

Dr. Sarah Shrewsbury-Braxton (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at Penn State University. She is a recent graduate of The Ohio State University where she earned her Ph.D. in Counselor Education. During her time as a doctoral student, she focused on social justice issues in education and Critical Whiteness Studies. Her dissertation was titled, "The Impact of the Culture of Whiteness on the Critical Consciousness Development of Counselors in Training".

Her interest in these issues developed from her ten years of experience as a professional school counselor in rural, urban, and suburban settings in Tennessee and Ohio. As a school counselor, she experienced firsthand the disparity in resources and opportunities afforded to students in different settings, particularly those who have been historically marginalized. She earned her M.S. in Professional School Counseling from Tennessee State University.

Dr. Shrewsbury-Braxton is currently working to disseminate her dissertation work into various publications and is developing research teams that use a critical lens to examine the connection between the culture of Whiteness and the following: anti-Blackness, racial identity development, the critical consciousness development of counselors in training, professional identity development of counseling practitioners and counselors in training, and comprehensive school counseling programs and practices.

She is still adjusting to professor life, but she welcomes any students who are interested in doing research or presentations on any of these research areas!



# Considerations in Utilizing Social Media in Counseling

CASSANDRA KAM

Social media is popular, far-reaching, and accessible. Anyone with a device that meets technical specifications can create and comment on any topic. As a result, many counselors are using or are considering one or more social media platforms in working with clients (Khan & Loh, 2022; White & Hanley, 2023a). Should counselors utilize social media for services for the simple fact that it is possible? Technological advances have made another form of communication feasible and possible, allowing clients and counselors to connect more easily. However, there are potential pitfalls that may prove to be harmful to both client and counselor. Counselors may wish to take the following considerations into account when making this decision.

## Focus and Scope

What is the purpose of the counselor's online presence: is the counselor posting information to provide education, to advertise their services or to solicit clients? Is the counselor looking for a following as a mental health influencer (Hynes et al., 2023; White & Hanley, 2023a)? Social media can help the professional with networking, sharing research ideas and collaborating with others in the field on various projects or writing.

## Access to Counseling

While clients may wish to participate in counseling, it can be a hardship for some to make regular physical journeys to a brick-and-mortar office. Many clients are unable to access services due to obstacles such as distance, lack of transportation, a lack of funding, inadequate or no childcare (Alonzo & Popescu, 2021; Snowdy et al., 2016; Tutelman et al., 2018) or severe medical or

mental health conditions which contraindicate in-person services (Naslund et al., 2020). These barriers often disincentivize clients and the benefit they may reap from counseling diminishes. Offering online counseling via social media eliminates or alleviates many of these barriers and clients will most likely be more apt to participate in services (Khan & Loh, 2022). Clients who are able to attend regular sessions may benefit since treatment and progress will be less fragmented, more cohesive and will allow for both clients and counselors to build upon previous work accomplished.

Clients are not the only ones who may experience difficulties in participating in in-person services : counselors may experience many of the same barriers as clients. In cases of emergencies, working virtually allows counselors to minimize service disruption to their individual clients. In situations when a counselor needs to reach most or all their clients at once, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing social media can save time and resources (Alonzo & Popescu, 2021; Palmer & Burrows, 2021). Social media can allow a counselor to communicate a message to a large population at a time, and be able to see how many people received and/or viewed the message with real time analytics (Tutelman et al., 2018). Instead of communicating with each client individually, counselors can send out a mass message that will reach each client at the same time, ideally.

## Standards of Care

Social media is unregulated (Khan & Loh, 2022; White & Hanley, 2023a) : content , structure and access vary across platforms. Many applications

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designed for health or medical care are not created by or with the input of those in the applicable fields (Palmer & Burrows, 2021). At the time of this writing, there were no established standards for providing counseling to clients via social media (Demers & Sullivan, 2016; Hynes et al., 2023; White & Hanley, 2023a). If counselors are looking for education and training in using social media, it is not clear where counselors can seek out reliable and accurate training. This is further complicated with platforms that are owned and operated outside of the United States and therefore may not be subject to federal and state laws and regulations.

A significant ethical and perhaps legal issue for the counseling and mental health professions is the veracity of the person purporting to be a professional on social media. How does a potential client verify that the person stating they are a mental health care professional is legitimate? Will clients verify the information posted to ensure that they are receiving correct information, or will they accept it at face value (Khan & Loh, 2022; Milton et al., 2023)? What does a counselor do when they view incorrect, misleading or unethical information posted by another professional (White & Hanley, 2023a)?

What is the counselor's level of responsibility in ensuring client privacy? The counselor should not be searching for client information without the client's express written authorization and respect the client's privacy. If the client provides such consent, must the counselor now monitor the client's online content? Suppose that the client posts that they will harm themselves or someone

else. Is the counselor responsible for ensuring the client's safety? How often should the counselor monitor the client's accounts to check for this type of content (Demers & Sullivan, 2016; White & Hanley, 2023a)?

## Relationships

Dual relationships are a constant concern for counselors (American Counseling Association, 2014; Demers & Sullivan, 2016; Diamond & Whalen, 2019). Should a counselor not utilize any social media, or should they use a pseudonym for their private accounts (Diamond & Whalen, 2019; White & Hanley, 2023a)? Counselors have a right to their own private lives, but their own privacy can be violated by clients who search for the counselor's personal information. In addition to clients researching information about a counselor, clients may be able to find out about the counselor's family or friends. This can create, at best, an awkwardness and, at worst, a potentially dangerous situation.

How does the counselor's need to constantly self-monitor affect their lives and mental health (White & Hanley, 2023b)? Some counselors may have constant worry about making sure that they are in compliance with the moral, legal and ethical codes of the profession. Others may question whether having a social media presence is worth the additional levels of vigilance to protect both the clients and the counselor. This concern may take a toll on a counselor's mental health, even if the counselor has deleted or deactivated an account since information once posted online may be saved or downloaded.



# Considerations in Utilizing Social Media in Counseling

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How do counselors handle client requests for contact outside of therapy (Diamond & Whalen, 2019)? If a client is requesting contact for non-clinical reasons, the client will need to remain firm in maintaining boundaries to prevent dual relationships. If the client is looking for additional treatment options or guidance, social media might possibly be a helpful supplement to sessions. However, the counselor may wish to tread carefully since the client may misinterpret counseling through social media as permission for services on-demand.

Could the counselor's social media use, whether it be private or public, affect their reputation as a service provider and their employment (Demers & Sullivan, 2016)? Many employers may look into a counselor's social media presence, including a personal account, in addition to conducting the standard criminal and background checks. This practice aligns with the tenets of the ACA's ethical codes regarding distance counseling and social media presence (American Counseling Association, 2014). The counselor's employment status and performance evaluation may be affected by what is online and can be either beneficial or detrimental to their career.

What should a counselor do if they are already on social media and viewers develop an emotional connection to the counselor or have self-diagnosed based on the counselor's posts (Milton et al., 2023)? How might this impact individuals who are considering seeking services? The client's perception of the relationship is tantamount since the client's trust is what helps the client to work with the counselor. The client

has not gone through the intake process and does not have all the information needed to make an informed decision as to whether to proceed with the counseling relationship (American Counseling Association, 2014). In this case, the counselor's online presence may prove to be detrimental to clients or potential clients.

Does the counselor's online presence affect the trust and rapport with current or former clients (Hynes et al., 2023)? Some clients may feel that a counselor is more relatable if they see the counselor using social media just as any "normal" person would. Others may feel that the counselor is not professional by doing so. These positions may vary depending on the demographic of the clients in regard to age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.

## Conclusion

Social media has become an integral part of daily life for many people across the globe and has impacted the way that people interact. As the channels of communication change, counselors may wish to consider social media as another means by which to provide mental health services to clients. However, counselors will need to examine whether the benefit to clients outweighs the challenges that social media presents in this profession. Counselors will need to conduct a thorough self-evaluation to see if this platform protects the welfare of the counselors' clients while maintaining legal, moral and ethical standards of practice (Palmer & Burrows, 2021).

# Considerations in Utilizing Social Media in Counseling

CASSANDRA KAM

While it may be exciting that there is a novel new possibility in the counseling field, the standards and ethics of care are still the counselor's first concern: non-maleficence—do no harm.

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# Reflections after starting a counselor education program: An inspiration for advocacy

NIKKI WENG

It has been just over two months since I started my program in Counselor Education at Penn State. Yet the richness and the depth of the curriculum makes it feel like I have been here for two years. We addressed various topics such as privilege and oppression, social justice, and professional ethics. Moreover, we had the opportunity to delve deep into our own human nature, reflecting on our values, beliefs and biases, allowing us to develop a deeper self-awareness which shapes our counseling approach and affects how we interact with clients. The integration of these subjects feels seamless and purposeful, establishing a solid foundation for us to become competent counselors.

Moreover, I am curious about how I can connect my life experiences with the knowledge I am gaining in this program and my self-reflection allows me to have a deeper understanding of concepts. For example, I can draw on my past experiences as a peer supporter, where I gained an understanding of the distress and vulnerability marginalized groups face from trying to meet societal expectations while overlooking their identity. They face stereotypes and stigmas perpetuated by mainstream society which leads them to internalize the oppression. What truly inspires me is the shift in how we approach these issues, moving from blaming individuals to asking what society can do to create a more just and equitable world. For example, instead of viewing disability solely as a medical condition we now advocate for creating an inclusive society that offers facilities and accommodations as necessary. The change can occur at both

individual and institutional levels, as well as through collaboration within the community.

I came across a heartwarming story online that taught me how this change can occur at an individual level. It involved a café owner who initially turned away a homeless person asking for food and money, but after knowing he had several felonies and not a single company would hire him, she changed her mind and offered him a job at the café (We Are Mitú, 2016, December 7). This act of inclusion and empathy not only provided employment but also instilled hope in him. I can't help but wonder what assumptions those companies made to deprive him of getting employment; and what the café owner had that was different? It made me ponder as well, whether I sometimes too, make assumptions solely based on gender, race, personality, socioeconomic status or previous performance. These biases and stereotypes can hinder our ability to recognize the true value of individuals, and not allow us to form meaningful connections with them. As individuals, we can start from examining our own biases and look for what we can do to help and cultivate a more inclusive world.

On an institutional level, there is a restorative justice initiative at Penn State that offers educational opportunities in correctional facilities. In spring semester, they are launching a bachelor's degree program for incarcerated individuals. Student volunteers will go into these facilities to answer questions and assist with college applications. This initiative mirrors the

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actions of the restaurant owner, providing opportunities for those who weren't offered any. During a presentation at the Pennsylvania State University College of Education Research Conference, Dr. O'Sullivan (2023) talked about the recovery of the formerly incarcerated adults involving in substance abuse, and mentioned significance of the personal, social and environmental resources that support an individual's journey towards recovery. Research can shed light on what actions need to be taken on an institutional level and help to raise awareness of the importance of equity and inclusion, promote actions of creating equal access, fostering the full participation of all stakeholders.

Building on the institutional efforts in addressing providing equitable chance for marginalized groups, we can also take advantage of the collective power of the community to dismantle barriers. An example would be Centre Safe, a non-profit organization based in State College. The organization provides recourses for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. It relies on volunteers who staff their hotline. The collective power of the volunteers makes it possible for thousands of survivors to be empowered to break the silence and access the resources they need. The success of Centre Safe highlights the importance of collaboration, both at the individual level and through partnerships with impactful organizations in the community.

I have been at Penn State for a relatively short period time, but I already see the efforts that

individuals, institutions and community have done in creating a more equitable society for all. These real-life examples have reinforced the concepts that I have learned during my training and prompt deep reflection on the significance and necessity of social justice. Behind every action, I see acts of kindness, empowerment and an unbiased attitude towards marginalized groups and determination to dismantle the barriers in creating a more equitable world. I believe that by doing so, we can collectively benefit from freedom from discrimination and oppression, fostering a better future for everyone in society.

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# CSI HIGHLIGHTS - FALL 2023



## Exec Board:

**Jinny Lee and Christina Cropper** Presidents  
**Mansi Kankan** - VP of Community Development  
**Esther Han** - VP of Professional Development  
**Ashanti Cato** - Secretary  
**Jess Avery** - Treasurer

## Co-Chairs:

**Lauren Bliss and Madeline Jardin**  
Wellness and Social Chair  
**Bill Roberts and Cayleigh Huffman**  
Social Chair

## **Siyi Peng**

Multicultural and Social Justice Chair

**Chloe Kang** - Mentorship

**Erin Sievers** - Fundraising

**Lucy Kim** - Professional Development

**Alice Hargrove** - Historian





# CSI EVENTS - FALL 2023



# DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

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*Congratulations to everyone who*  
Passed program milestones :

## Comprehensive Exams

Sarah Roundtree  
Aazi Ahmadi  
Jess Gerthe  
Meaghan O'Shaughnessy  
Qingyun Zhang  
Dasol Hwang  
Ravza Nur Aksoy Eren

## Qualifying Exams

Saiber Shaikh  
Mihee Woo  
Paris Pruitt  
Fan Fan  
Norah Alharbi  
SungWon Yoon-Lee  
Dominic Augustin  
Ashleigh Johnson

# Presented at National Conferences:

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## AARC

Aazi Ahmadi  
Jess Gerthe  
Saiber Shaikh

## ACES

Saiber Shaikh  
Mihee Woo  
Paris Pruitt  
Fan Fan  
Norah Alharbi  
SungWon Yoon-Lee  
Ashleigh Johnson  
Aazi Ahmadi  
Jess Gerthe  
Sarah Roundtree  
Dasol Hwang  
Nkenji Clarke  
Joy Gray  
Ravza Nur Aksoy Eren

## PCA

Divine Lipscomb  
Ashleigh Johnson

## NCHEP & PA CHEP

Divine Lipscomb

## PSU College Of Education

Meaghan O'Shaughnessy  
Saiber Shaikh  
Jinwon Suh  
Norah Alharbi





# Penn State represented at ACES 2023



# AARC - Nashville 2023



## Awards

### **Aazi Ahmadi**

AARC Doctoral Level Exemplary Research and  
Assessment Practices Award  
NARACES Research Grant  
ACES Diversity Scholarship

### **Mihee Woo**

ACES Diversity Scholarship

### **SungWon Yoon- Lee**

ACES Diversity Scholarship

### **William (Bill) Roberts**

CRLA - SafeProject Fellowship 2024-2025

## Publications

**Clarke, N., Pruitt, P., Cato, A., & Hines, C. (Fall, 2023).**

Promoting K-12 Cultural Responsiveness in School  
Counseling for Black Girls. Chi Sigma Iota Exemplar:  
Commitment, Service, Identity for Social Justice.

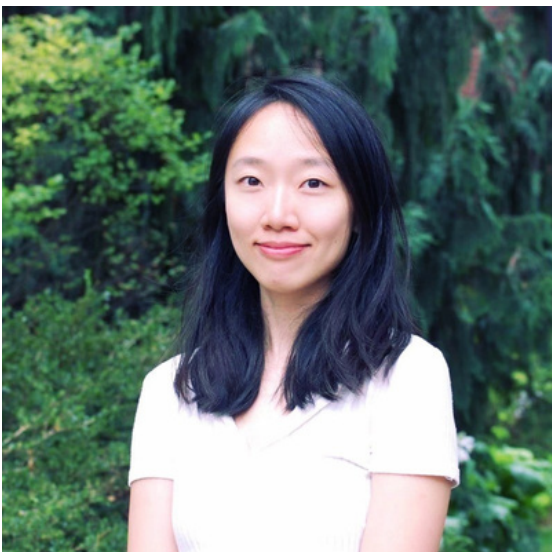


# MEET THE AUTHORS

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**Cassandra Kam** (she/her/hers) is in her first year at Penn State University pursuing her doctoral studies in Counseling Education. Cassandra's research interests are in transition-aged youth with IDD, veterans, vocational rehabilitation and mental health. Cassandra has worked as a state and federal vocational rehabilitation counselor, a Medicaid Waiver services manager, ADA/504 disability rights coordinator and clinical mental health counselor. Cassandra is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, a National Certified Counselor and a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (Hawaii). Cassandra also serves on the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness council for the Hawaii Disability Rights Center. When she is not working on research, Cassandra enjoys traveling, reading, martial arts, music and attempting to learn sewing and other needlecraft.



**Nikki Weng** is a first-year master's student in Penn State's Counselor Education program. During her free time, she can usually be found walking, reading, cooking, painting, volunteering and wishing she had a cat.