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The Lived Experiences of Black College Students and Counseling Based Upon Social Media Influences

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

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Shamanda Burston

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Black College Students and Counseling Based Upon Social

Media Influences

by

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MA, Ed.S, Gardner-Webb University, 2014

BS, Gardner-Webb University, 2012

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

December 2024

Abstract

Despite social media's use as a tool for social influence and increase in mental health disclosures within Black communities, limited literature describes how Black college students, specifically, are utilizing social media related to mental health. This qualitative study includes a description of the influence of social media on the perception of counseling services for Black college students. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) through the lens of Kelman's social influence theory, the influence of social media on Black college students' perception of counseling services was explored. Currently enrolled Black or African American college or university students within the United States, over 18 years old were sought for participation. Data were collected from nine participants using in-depth semi structured interviews to make sense of the participants' lived experiences. Following the IPA analysis approach, three emerging themes and four subordinate themes emerged. The three main emergent themes consisted of (a) connection with family and friends, (b) personal and professional benefits, and (c) evolution of mental health beliefs. The results from this study indicated the social influence through social media can be used as a strengths-based resource to foster social connections and spread mental-health-related messages and awareness. The findings from this study can be used fill a gap in understanding the role of social media as a strengths-based resource, protective factor, and culturally informed intervention for counselors and counselor educators who serve Black college students.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, whose support inspired me as a former teen mom and high school dropout to pursue my purpose against all odds. In memory of my grandparents, Eugene and Josephine Burston, whose limited education motivated me to strive for the highest level of education. To my parents, Lisa Burston and Everette Davis—thank you for doing your best with what you had as teen parents, your love and support have meant the world to me. To my brothers, I love you to the moon and back! In memory of my aunt Josie Mae Burston, your courageous battle with alcoholism and liver cancer gave me the strength to believe in myself. To autoimmune disease warriors: pursuing a doctorate while fighting against fatigue, headaches, and countless doctor's appointments is a challenge, but we are strong. Keep pushing forward. To single parents, continue to pursue your purpose—your children are watching and learning from your resilience. And finally, to my fellow trauma survivors: despite the pain and invisible scars, we will persevere. Healing is possible. Be everything God has called you to be.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Oxford University Press (2024) defined *social media* as a broad genre of communications media that enables social interaction amongst groups of people, localized or geographically dispersed. Popular social media platforms include TikTok, a social media app used to share short videos (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2024); Instagram, a photo-sharing service (Merriam-Webster, 2024); and Facebook, a social networking site to communicate with a group of friends (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024). During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became a haven and source of connection for many Americans. COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease that spread globally, causing millions of deaths. The outbreak was declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2024). During the pandemic, disclosing one's mental health challenges became normalized. The lockdown allowed many people to reflect and share their experiences. Scrolling on social media and viewing a friend's bravery seemed contagious, resulting in a sense of connection and influence. The #MeToo movement, for example, was a social media phenomenon where women across the world shared their experiences with sexual assault (Callender & Klassen, 2020). Viewing other strong, resilient, and bold women sharing their stories gave space for others to do the same.

Historically, Black Americans were least likely to engage in counseling services (Campbell & Winchester, 2020). Interestingly, Black male celebrities started to become champions of mental health and therapy through sharing their struggles with mental

health on social media. Famous Black male celebrities such as comedian Dave Chappelle and Wayne Brady, music producer and artist Kanye West, and athletes such as Brandon Marshall have openly shared their challenges with mental health issues (Francis, 2018). Twitter, a social networking platform and blogging site that allows users to use 140 characters to answer the question: What are you doing? (Oxford University Press, 2024) was used to discuss mental health in Black communities. Pendleton (2023) explored stigma and mental health conversations amongst Black communities on the social media platform Twitter. Additionally, Pendleton (2023) examined how Black mental health messages were framed on Twitter and who contributed to those conversations. Despite the growing influence of social media on Black people, no literature existed that investigated how social media influenced the way Black college students understood counseling services.

In this chapter, I discuss background information about Black college students' perception of counseling based on social media's influence and relevant literature. Next, I state the problem, the purpose of the study, the primary research question, and the theoretical framework. Additionally, I discuss the nature of the study and provided definitions, assumptions, scope, and delimitations. Finally, I explore the limitations and significance of the study.

Background

Social media has become an avenue for Black people to share their thoughts and feelings related to mental health. Black college students during COVID-19 used technology as a communication tool to foster social connections. Mushonga and

Henneberger (2020) focused on the self-care coping strategies of Black college students and found that Black college students who use self-care strategies increase emotional well-being. Further, social media increased conversations among Black male celebrities about mental health. Francis (2018) focused on understanding how Black men are impacted by the depression disclosure of celebrity hip-hop artists via social media. The researcher used an online survey with 182 Black men aged 18-34 to examine the relationship between identification, emotional distress, empathetic reactions, and information-seeking behaviors. Francis (2018) found identification was associated with information seeking when emotional distress was experienced.

Several researchers have explored the impact of social media on Black college students. Using an online experiment, Akhther and Stoycheff (2024) sought to understand how the delivery format of social media messages impacted the attitude and stigmas of mental health by Black and other marginalized college students. The researchers studied how the delivery of mental health-focused social-media delivered narrative messages affected marginalized college students' stigma and perceptions of people with mental illness and those seeking mental health services. Additionally, using theoretical mechanisms, the study examined the effect of stigma reduction between mental health narrative messages from marginalized and non-marginalized lived experiences of mental illness. Akhther and Stoycheff (2024) found no significant difference in narrative versus informational format impact on decreasing stigmatized attitudes via social media. The study identified anti-stigma interventions using social media, specifically with underrepresented groups. Additionally, Williams et al. (2022) explored the impact of

racism on Black college students through the lens of systemic racism. The researchers applied a race-informed trauma approach to a case example to demonstrate a treatment approach for Black college students experiencing systemic trauma. The researchers identified social media as one of the avenues in which Black college students are exposed, indirectly and vicariously, to systemic trauma. The researchers found that acknowledging the role of social media on exposure to racial stress can lead to understanding how to support and foster healing for Black college students.

Despite experiencing racial trauma, scholars show that Black college students utilize a strengths-based approach to mental health, leading to posttraumatic growth and flourishing. Grier-Reed et al. (2023) focused on the idea of Black college students growing or flourishing in the aftermath of racial trauma. The researchers used 96 Black college student participants in a quantitative study to measure flourishing and posttraumatic growth inventory levels in students who reported experience of racial trauma. Grier-Reed et al. (2023) found that students who experienced posttraumatic growth indicated an increased likelihood of flourishing.

Black people and underrepresented groups use social media to foster social connections (Mushonga & Henneberger, 2020) and increase conversation from Black male celebrities about mental health (Francis, 2018). Given the growing use of social media, a study exploring social media as a strengths-based resource would be significant in describing how social influence impacted the attitudes of Black college students regarding counseling services.

Problem Statement

In this qualitative interpretive phenomenology study, I described the influence of social media on the perception of counseling services for Black college students. Black college students reported high levels of racial discrimination and, with increased exposure to trauma, are more at risk of dropping out of college (Grier-Reed et al., 2023). Socioeconomic status, acculturation, and undereducation also plague Black college students (Mushonga & Henneberger, 2020). During COVID-19, social media was used to foster social connections and to engage Black communities with conversations related to mental health disclosures (Francis, 2018). Researchers have recently focused on shifting the focus to a strengths-based lens and promoting positive mental health (PMH) in Black college students (Mushonga, 2021). However, despite social media's use as a tool for social influence and increase in mental health disclosures within Black communities, limited literature described how Black college students, specifically, are utilizing social media related to mental health. In 2024, there is an absence of literature focused on understanding how social media influences Black college students' attitudes and perspectives of counseling services.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenology qualitative study was to describe the experiences of how social media impacts how Black college students understand counseling services. I focused on understanding how the social influence of social media can affect Black college students' attitudes, behaviors, and actions and their understanding of counseling services. Mental health stigma remains the most cited reason

for not seeking mental health services. Amongst Black college men, public stigma related to mental health is higher than others (Shannon, 2024). Despite the stigma, Black male celebrities are using social media for mental health disclosures, resulting in Black males aged 18-34 seeking more information related to depression (Francis, 2018). Given the influence of social media and the change in how Black college students access mental health support, understanding how social media influenced Black college student's perceptions of counseling services can increase knowledge and awareness for counselor educators, counselors, and supervisors.

Research Question

What is the influence of social media on the lived experiences of Black college students regarding their perception of counseling services?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

In this interpretative phenomenology qualitative study, I described the experiences of how social media impacted how Black college students understood counseling services. I used Kelman's social influence theory to as the theoretical framework of this study. Kelman (1958) explored the nature of change in one's attitude brought about by communication and whether those changes resulted in public conformity without public acceptance or with public conformity and private acceptance. Further, he sought to understand how the nature of change in attitude reflected in subsequent reactions to events. The social influence theory provided insight into how social influence affected the decision-making processes of Black college students regarding counseling services. I used Kelman's social influence theory to develop insight

into how mental-health-related messaging through social media influenced the participant's attitudes toward counseling services. I used the theory's concepts of compliance, identification, and internalization to understand how social media influenced participants' attitudes and perceptions. In Chapter 2, I will explain the concepts associated with social influence theory in more detail.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Interpretative phenomenological analysis focuses on understanding how the participants make sense of their experiences (Miller et al, 2018). I used IPA to conduct a qualitative exploratory research study using semistructured individual interviews to gather descriptive data. Qualitative research methodology is used for describing and generating meaning through interviewing and content analysis (Patton, 2015); therefore, I used a qualitative design to describe and understand the participants' experiences in the study.

For this study, I recruited nine Black college student participants by posting on social media and the Walden Participant Pool. I followed the IPA analysis framework. The framework was divided into two phases: first-order analysis and second-order analysis. In this study, I focused on understanding the lived experiences of Black college students who viewed mental health-related messages on social media. Interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed the participants to share their experiences and to understand how social influence impacted their attitudes and behaviors regarding counseling services.

Definitions

College student: An individual enrolled part-time or full-time in an undergraduate, graduate, or professional college within the United States (Schreiner, 2024).

Positive Mental Health (PMH): “A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (Keyes, 2014, p.4).

Social media: Forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos) (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Assumptions

In this study, my first assumption was that the participant's responses would be honest and true. Another assumption was that participants would feel comfortable being transparent due to shared race. Arora et al. (2022) identified a lack of shared identity with the counselor as one of the factors contributing to limited counseling engagement for Black clients (Arora et al., 2022). A third assumption was that the participants would have basic knowledge and experience using social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook. A fourth assumption is that the participants understood counseling services and the therapeutic process. Finally, I assumed that the participants had a general knowledge of using teleconference software to participate in interviews.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I described how social media's portrayal of counseling influenced Black college students' perception of counseling services. The scope and delimitation of this study included college students who self-identify as Black or African American. Additionally, the college student must be actively enrolled at the undergraduate or graduate level during the interview. Transferability is how data from qualitative studies can be applied to other populations and contexts while remaining context specific (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The results from the study have limited transferability to other populations; however, the descriptions from in-depth interviews provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Black college students' perception of counseling services.

Limitations

One of the limitations to address while conducting this study was maintaining confidentiality while using teleconference for virtual interviews. I used a headset and a safe videoconference platform to conduct the interviews. Each Zoom link was password protected and emailed directly to the email provided by the participant on the informed consent form. A second potential limitation was recruiting eight to 10 participants via social media due to college-age students' potential lack of willingness and time constraints. I recruited nine participants through social media and using snowball sampling. One limitation of using IPA is that it is a relatively new approach and could require more time to learn vocabulary and processes. Resources, websites, and a community of IPA researchers are available when needed (Miller et al., 2018). A final

limitation was my assumption that participants would feel comfortable being transparent due to shared race. The participants were open, honest and vulnerable with their responses throughout the interviews. I used reflexive journaling during and after each interview to eliminate biases and increase the study's credibility. Additionally, I used triangulation of data sources by comparing recorded teleconference interviews with transcripts when analyzing the data.

Significance

There was limited literature focused on understanding how social media influences Black college students' attitudes and perspectives of counseling services. The results from my study might fill a gap in understanding the role of social media as a strengths-based resource, protective factor, and culturally informed intervention for counselors and counselor educators who serve Black college students. The results and data from this study can aid counselor education programs and counselor supervisors in understanding how media can be utilized as an educational tool to influence and potentially increase the participation of Black college students who historically were less likely to utilize mental health services. Additionally, the results from this study can aid in social change and policies by better understanding how social influence through social media can be utilized as a strengths-based resource to foster social connections and spread mental-health-related messages and awareness.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the background information about Black college students' perception of counseling based on media's influence and relevant literature.

Next, I stated the problem, the purpose of the study, the primary research question, and the theoretical framework. Additionally, I discussed the nature of the study and provided definitions, assumptions, scope, and delimitations. Finally, I explored the limitations and significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I will give an in-depth review of the current literature on Black college students' use of counseling services, barriers to engagement, and how social media is currently utilized for social influence.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this qualitative IPA study, I described the influence of social media on the perception of counseling services for Black college students. Black college students reported high levels of racial discrimination and, with increased exposure to trauma, are more at risk of dropping out of college (Grier-Reed et al., 2023). Socioeconomic status, acculturation, and undereducation also plague Black college students (Mushonga & Henneberger, 2020). During COVID-19, social media was used to foster social connections and to engage Black communities with conversations related to mental health disclosures (Francis, 2018). Researchers have recently focused on shifting the focus to a strengths-based lens and promoting positive mental health (PMH) in Black college students (Mushonga, 2021). However, despite social media's use as a tool for social influence and increase in mental health disclosures within Black communities, limited literature describes how Black college students, specifically, are utilizing social media related to mental health. In 2024, there is an absence of literature focused on understanding how social media influences Black college students' attitudes and perspectives of counseling services. The purpose of this interpretative phenomenology qualitative study was to describe the experiences of how social media impacts how Black college students understand counseling services. This study focused on understanding how the social influence of social media can affect Black college students' attitudes, behaviors, and actions and their understanding of counseling services. Mental health stigma remains the most cited reason for not seeking mental health services. Amongst

Black college men, public stigma related to mental health is higher than others (Shannon, 2024). Despite the stigma, Black male celebrities are using social media for mental health disclosures, resulting in Black males aged 18-34 seeking more information related to depression (Francis, 2018). Given the influence of social media and the change in how Black college students access mental health support, understanding how social media influences Black college student's perceptions of counseling services can increase knowledge and awareness for counselor educators, counselors, and supervisors.

In this chapter, I identify the current gaps in the literature related to the social influence of social media on Black college student's perception of counseling services. Next, I discuss the literature search strategy used, including specific library searches, search engines, and key terms to identify current literature related to the research topic. Additionally, I discuss the theoretical foundation that I used to ground my research study, the rationale for the selected theoretical foundation, and examples of how the theory was used in previous studies with a similar focus. Lastly, I explore the current literature for key terms consistent with the study.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy began with limiting the search to peer-reviewed articles within five years. The databases searched included ERIC, EBSCO, APA PsycARTICLES, and APAPsycInfo. The keywords used in my search included *counseling or therapy or psychotherapy or treatment, flourishing or thriving or well-being, positive mental health, health disparities, help-seeking behaviors, media influence,*

and Black college student mental health, social influence, social media, and Black college students.

Theoretical Foundation

In this qualitative study, I used through the lens of Kelman's social influence theory (1958) to understand the influence of social media on Black college students' perception of counseling services.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative method initially developed by Smith et al. (2009) based on the traditional phenomenological methods of Husserl. Husserl (1931) conceptualized the qualitative research approach, *phenomenology*, to understand the lived experiences and the meaning of the experiences of the research participants (Alaise, 2017). Husserl applied phenomenology to the study of human consciousness with a goal to describe the essence of phenomena not previously conceptualized (Miller et al., 2018). Heidegger, a philosopher and student of Husserl's, expanded the phenomenology approach, focusing on human understanding and existence (Suddick et al., 2020). Heidegger viewed phenomenology through an existential philosophy lens. He believed that interpretation was necessary to uncover the subjective experience of the participants (Miller et al., 2018). Several theorists expanded the original phenomenological inquiry under the foundation of either hermeneutic (interpretative) or transcendental (descriptive; Suddick et al., 2020). Moustakas (1994) expanded the phenomenology theory of transcendental phenomenology, focusing on describing the participants' lived experiences and bracketing the researcher's personal experiences from the research (Alaise, 2017). Van

Manen (1990) expanded the phenomenology theory with hermeneutical phenomenology, focusing on the lived experiences of the participants and the interpretation of their life experiences (Alaise, 2017).

From transcendental and hermeneutical phenomenology emerged IPA, conceptualized by Smith et al. (2009). IPA is rooted in phenomenology, idiography, and hermeneutics (Smith, 2010). Like traditional phenomenological approaches, IPA is concerned with the lived experience of the participant. In contrast, IPA uses double hermeneutics, as it focuses on making sense of the research participant trying to make sense of their own experience. IPA analyses each case in detail followed by a search for patterns among participants (Smith 2010). Additionally, IPA explores convergence and divergence of experiences among the sample of participants (Miller et al., 2018). In-depth single cases are analyzed for emergent themes followed by superordinate and subordinate themes, leading to cross-case analysis. The first order-analysis is descriptive, and the second-order analysis is interpretative (Miller et al., 2018).

Several scholars have used IPA to explore related phenomena in the literature. Walker and Burns (2022) used interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the experiences of White counseling students who had taken a course by an African American professor. From the study emerged two major themes: (a) expectations, experiences, and racial perceptions influence the classroom experience, and (b) perceived differences in teaching styles of African American counselor educators and white counselor educators. Likewise, Reyna and Minton (2024) used IPA to understand how counselors experienced being interviewed and receiving feedback after the adult

attachment interview (AAI). Their study emerged four superordinate themes (the reaction to the AAI interview process, process with AAI feedback, AAI and intrapersonal processes, AAI and interpersonal processes) and eight subordinate themes.

Kelman's Social Influence Theory

Herbert Kelman (1958) developed the social influence theory as an avenue to understand the nature of one's attitude and communication and whether those changes resulted in public conformity without public acceptance or with public conformity and private acceptance. Kelman theorized that there are three processes of social influence: compliance, identification, and internalization. Compliance is the acceptance of influence from another to obtain a favorable reaction. Identification is the acceptance of influence from another to establish or maintain a relationship based on reciprocity. Internalization is the acceptance of influence from another to maintain congruence of actions and shared values or beliefs (Kelman, 2006). Further, Kelman (2006) theorized that the reactions might be dictated by instrumental concerns such as the attainment of awards and avoiding punishments, living up to role expectations, and managing a public image.

Kelman's social influence theory has been applied to various studies in the literature to explore the impact of social influence on attitude changes and decision-making. Kresovich (2020) used an online survey to examine the influence and identification of audience involvement with celebrity role models who express mental health struggles in their music on college student's mental health empathy, stigma, and behavioral intentions. The results from the study indicated a significant outcome between empathy for mental health struggles and stigma, support of public resources, and a

willingness to offer support to those struggling with mental health (Kresovich, 2020). Additionally, Bhagat and Kim (2023) used survey methodology to test the effects of social influence on news-sharing behavior on social media. The researchers used Kelman's (1958) Social Influence theory as a theoretical background for the study. Moreover, Fairman et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study to examine the experiences of initiation, social use, addiction, and changes in youth use of e-cigarettes due to COVID-19. Results indicated that Kelman's (1958) compliance might explain the initiation stage of youth's e-cigarette use and the social use stage explained by the identification influence mechanism. In this study, I used Kelman's social influence theory to describe the conditions of social media's influence on the attitudes and perceptions of Black college students' understanding of counseling services.

Literature Review

The Impact of Social Media

According to Merriam-Webster, n.d., social media is defined as forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos). According to the Pew Research Center (2024), Americans' top three social media platforms are YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. YouTube, a video-based platform, is used by approximately eight in 10 United States adults; Facebook, a social networking site to communicate with a group of friends (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024), is used by 68% of United States adults and Instagram, a photo-sharing service (Merriam-Webster, 2024) is used by

roughly 50% of Americans (Pew Research Center, 2024). Approximately 27-35% of Americans use the social media platform TikTok, a social media app used to share short videos (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2024), and only 1 out of 5 Americans use Twitter, a social networking platform and blogging site that allows users to use 140 characters to answer the question: 'What are you doing?' (Oxford University Press, 2024; Pew Research Center, 2024).

Social media has evolved since the first social networking website, SixDegrees.com, in 1997 (Mendez-Diaz et al., 2022). According to History Cooperative (2024), the website Six Degrees was named after the six degrees of separation theory, which states that everyone in the world is connected to everyone else by no more than six degrees of separation. The social media platform allowed users to create individual profiles and add friends. After its official launch in 1997, its user count peaked at 3.5 million, but it was shut down a year later. In 2002, the social media platform Friendster launched with over 3 million users. Friendster's site was the first to allow the sharing of videos, photos, and messages among users (History Cooperative, 2024). Social media platforms continued to evolve in 2002 with LinkedIn's launch, primarily used for networking among businesses, companies, and school contacts (History Cooperative, 2024). By 2004, Facebook was launched as a social media platform for Harvard students, but it later expanded to anyone 13 years old and older (History Cooperative, 2024).

Social media's primary purpose is to allow people to engage in social interaction, communication, and entertainment (Olan et al., 2024). At least 20% of social media users

learn about breaking news on social media platforms (Mendez-Diaz et al., 2022). Local, federal, and state law enforcement use social media to help solve crimes. Colleges and universities in the United States use social media platforms to share information. Additionally, approximately 89% of companies use social media to recruit potential employees (Mendez-Diaz et al., 2022). Romance and flirting are also reasons for social media use. Introverts who avoid face-to-face interactions use social media platforms for online dating (Aichner et al., 2021). Social media and digital technology have been used in various industries and have evolved how people interact worldwide (Mendez-Diaz et al., 2022).

Social Media and Black Individuals

Black people participate in social media at higher rates than other racial groups (Hickerson & Stamps, 2023). Traditionally, social media has been used for social interaction, communication, and entertainment (Olan et al., 2024). Professor and researcher David Stamps compared social media and virtual spaces as the digital equivalent of "the barber shop, the church, and the beauty salon" for Black Americans (Mastantuono, 2023, para. 6). Black users who face discrimination on and offline, have found a safe haven amongst other Black users online through *Black Twitter*. Black Twitter is a digital community within Twitter composed mainly of people who identify as Black (Klassen & Fiesler, 2022). Andre Brock, author of *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*, offers an additional definition of Black Twitter. Brock (2020) defined Black Twitter as:

Black Twitter is an online gathering (not quite a community) of users who identify as Black and employ Twitter features to perform Black discourses, share Black cultural commonplaces, and build social affinities. While many non-Blacks and people of color Twitter users have been "invited to the cookout," so to speak, participating in Black Twitter requires a deep knowledge of Black culture, commonplaces, and digital practices. (p. 81)

For Black users, Black Twitter has been used as a space for Black people to commiserate on their shared experiences (Klassen & Fiesler, 2022). Black male celebrities have increased their public discussions and disclosures of mental health struggles over the past few years (Francis, 2018). Suicide was the third leading cause of death in Black men between ages 15-24 in 2016 (Pathak, 2018). Male hip-hop artists, known for hyper-masculinity, are displaying their challenges with mental health through their songs and social media messages. In 2016, hip-hop artist Kid Cudi announced his struggles with suicidal ideations and diagnosis of depression on Black Twitter to encourage Black men on Twitter to engage in conversations about mental health (Francis, 2018). Advocating for mental health disclosure was one of the themes that emerged from Francis' (2018) qualitative study of Kid Cudi's social media mental health disclosure.

Black women have also benefited from using social media health-related campaigns. During COVID-19, social media campaigns were used to increase access to pregnancy-related health information for Black women. Bonnevie et al. (2023) delivered a web series on social media with local prenatal care providers and educational images to examine pregnancy-related knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral changes. Similarly,

social media marketing campaigns were used to increase HIV testing amongst Black men in Atlanta, Georgia.

Social Media and Black College Students

Black college students are amongst the growing number of Americans, ages 18-29 who use social media to form and maintain social interactions (Garrett, et. al. 2024). Across the United States, Black college students are exposed to discrimination, racism, undereducation, and acculturation (Mushonga, 2021). According to Garrett, et. al. (2024), racial socialization is an important aspect of college students as they navigate racial discrimination on campus. For Black college students, increased racial socialization leads to increased college adjustment and improved racial-identity development (Garrett, et. al. 2024). In Garrett, et. al. (2024) study of peer racial socialization (PRS), specifically through social media, cultural socialization was identified as a prevalent theme amongst the participants. Cultural socialization focuses on what being Black means and relating to other Black people with similar values through social media (Garrett, et. al. 2024). One example of cultural socialization on social media amongst Black youth and college students, is the messages of identity affirmation, such as #BlackGirlMagic, cultural appreciation, and counter-narratives to anti-Black messages (Garrett, et. al. 2024). The hashtag, #BlackGirlMagic was started in response to an article in Psychology Today, referring to Black women as less physically attractive than other women (Jadesola, et. al. 2021). Researchers, Porter and Byrd (2023) explored the importance of the social media hashtag, #BlackGirlMagic as a mantra for Black female college students. Similarly, Black college students have led social justice and advocacy campaigns through the use of

hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter on social media. Lu and Steele (2019) describe hashtags as a feature on Twitter and often used for Black discourse.

Sexual health challenges, including acquiring sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a public health crisis among college-aged Black women. Black women college students were twice as likely to report having a STI compared to White college students (Francis et al, 2021). Francis et al, (2021) indicated the online discussions through social media show promise for increasing the reach and efficacy of health communication interventions.

Mental Health Stigma and Black Individuals

The stigma associated with mental health continues to impact Black people negatively. Only one in three Black Americans challenged by mental health issues will receive appropriate treatment (Pendleton, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Black people in the United States experienced significantly higher symptoms of anxiety and depression. Amongst Black people, suicide is the second leading cause of death between ages 15-24 in 2019 (Pendleton, 2023). Despite this data, mental health stigma continues to prevent Black people in America from receiving mental health treatment. As an alternative to professional mental health services, Black people have used *religious coping* as a method of coping with life events and challenges. *Religious coping* uses religious-based rituals and practices to respond to distressing life transitions (Avent et al., 2021). Despite mental health stigma, religion remains a prevalent help-seeking strategy for Black people (Avent et al., 2021). Avent et al. (2021) explored stigma, demographics, and religious coping to determine if religious coping is a stronger predictor of Black

people's help-seeking. The results from the study indicated that participants with high levels of religious coping, both negative and positive, were less likely to attend counseling.

Diagnostic labeling with terms such as *schizophrenia* and *depression* has been associated with increased perceptions of danger, blame, and beliefs that persons with those labels should be punished for violent acts (Abdullah & Brown, 2020). Abdullah and Brown (2020) examined the effect of labeling on mental health stigma amongst Black people in America using an experimental vignette. The results from the study indicated that the potential effects of the disorder and the use of diagnostic labeling influence mental health stigma for Black Americans. Specifically, *Schizophrenia* and *alcohol use disorder* were the most stigmatized disorders (Abdullah & Brown, 2020). Moreover, when Black people engage in mental health treatment, they experience lower healthcare interventions, are less likely to attend outpatient visits regularly, and are more likely to be hospitalized (Pederson, 2023). Mistrust of health care systems and health care professionals, cost and access to medications, bias, and microaggressions are effects of stigma for Black people (Pederson, 2023). Pederson (2023) recommends a shift from culturally informed treatment to using *cultural humility*, a lifelong listening, learning, and self-evaluation approach to patients whose cultural backgrounds differ from the clinicians. More research was needed to address the current gap in literature related to mental health stigma and Black people.

Mental Health and Black College Students

Black college students experience higher levels of academic dropout, substance use, and psychological distress (Shannon, 2024). Despite mental health challenges, Black college students continue to seek mental health treatment at lower rates compared to White and Latinx college students (Shannon et al., 2022). Cultural mistrust, stigma, gender-role socialization, and difficulty with self-advocacy are barriers to help-seeking in Black male college students (Shannon, 2024). Discrimination remains a prevalent barrier for Black college students in need of mental health treatment. Volpert-Esmond et al. (2023) examined the effects of everyday racial discrimination on the mental health of Black college students. The results from the study indicate a substantial correlation between racial discrimination and mental and physical health (Volpert-Esmond et al., 2023). Similarly, Marks et al. (2023) explored the relationship between racial microaggressions and depression among Black college students. The results from the study indicated a positive relationship between racial discrimination and depression symptoms.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for college-aged students. Black college students are underrepresented in research specific to suicide risk. Busby et al. (2021) utilized data from an eBridge study to examine barriers to Black college students with positive screens for elevated suicide risk. The results indicated that younger, undergraduate Black female college students without a history of mental health use screened positive for suicide risk. Fear, stigma, limited time, and limited perceived problem recognition were identified barriers to mental health service use (MHSU)

(Busby et al., (2021). Conforming to gender-role norms is an additional identified stressor among Black college students. Berry and Holloway (2022) explored the correlation between adherence to gender roles and psychological distress. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between Black male and female college students' conformity to gender roles and higher levels of stress.

Further, Black college student-athletes experience stereotyping and stressors related to education and athletics. Many Black student-athletes do not seek mental health services due to their status and mental health stigma (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Over thirty percent of student-athletes identify with depressive symptoms. Black athletes experience higher rates of suicide (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Still, most athletic departments do not provide or employ student-athlete mental health providers (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Wilkerson et al. (2020) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the perceived barriers to Black football student-athletes seeking mental health services using the social learning theory. The two major themes revealed in the results include weakness and silence; subthemes included stigma, toughness, time, awareness, community, and cultural context. Additional research exploring the relationship between mental health and Black college students would be beneficial.

Summary and Conclusions

Black college students are among the highest social media users (Garrett et al., 2024). Despite the negative aspects of social media, it has impacted the promotion of wellness and the fostering of social connections. Researchers have used social media to conduct studies to increase awareness related to suicide for Black college students (Busby

et al., 2021) and to understand the needs of Black student-athletes challenged with depressive symptoms (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Mental health stigma and discrimination remain a barrier to treatment for Black people in America, including Black college students (Shannon, 2024; Volpert-Esmond et al., 2023). Despite an increased focus on the needs of Black college students, limited research is focused on how social media influences the perceptions of Black college students' understanding of counseling services.

In Chapter 3, I provided an in-depth review of the selected research design and rationale and the role of the researcher, participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment procedures, and identify trustworthiness issues. Lastly, I discussed how I implemented ethical procedures throughout the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this IPA qualitative study was to describe the experiences of how social media impacts how Black college students understand counseling services. I focused on understanding how the social influence of social media can affect Black college students' attitudes, behaviors, and actions and their understanding of counseling services. Mental health stigma remains the most cited reason for not seeking mental health services. Amongst Black college men, public stigma related to mental health is higher than others (Shannon, 2024). Despite the stigma, Black male celebrities are using social media for mental health disclosures, resulting in Black males aged 18-34 seeking more information related to depression (Francis, 2018). Given the influence of social media and the change in how Black college students access mental health support, understanding how social media influences Black college student's perceptions of counseling services can increase knowledge and awareness for counselor educators, counselors, and supervisors.

In this study, I focused on understanding how the social influence of social media can affect Black college students' attitudes, behaviors, and actions and their understanding of counseling services. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research design selection and rationale. Additionally, I discuss the methodology, participation selection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The main research question for the study was: What is the influence of social media on the lived experiences of Black college students regarding their perception of counseling services? The phenomenon that I examined in this study was the influence of social media on the perceptions of Black college students regarding counseling services.

There are other qualitative research designs; however, the IPA aligned most with the study. IPA was appropriate for this study as it has been used in numerous studies focused on counseling and counselor education. Bender and Werries (2021) used IPA to understand the lived experiences of Doctoral-level counselor education students pursuing courses online. Pompeo-Fargnoli et al., (2020) used IPA to examine the impact of experiential and transformative learning for school counselors counseling first-generation, low-income, and college-bound students.

The IPA provides flexibility in the diversity of lived experiences of the participants (Miller et al., 2018). I selected a qualitative approach over a quantitative approach as the research questions and topic require in-depth semistructured interviews to make sense of the participants' lived experiences. Additionally, a qualitative study allowed for an analysis of themes and patterns (Patton, 2015). I chose IPA over the traditional Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenological approaches as it integrated ideas from both approaches (Miller et al., 2018). Like traditional phenomenological approaches, IPA allows the researcher to describe the participants' experiences. The goal of the interpretative phenomenological researcher is to make sense of the participant's experience using description and interpretation. Using the

interpretative phenomenological analysis, I described social media's influence on Black college students' lived experiences and their perception of counseling services.

Role of the Researcher

In IPA, the researcher is central to the interpretative process (Miller et al., 2018). Researcher bias can be inadvertently communicated via body language and voice tone, which could lead to participants feeling judged or leading them to answer interview questions to please the researcher (Burkholder et al., 2020). To control for researcher bias, I used reflexivity. *Reflexivity* is a trustworthiness strategy used to document the researcher's biases, role in the research process, and adjustments to the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). Specifically, I journaled my preconceptions, reflections, ideas, and biases in a reflexive journal before, during, and after data collection. Another trustworthiness strategy I used to control for researcher bias is member checking. Member checking is having participants review their transcripts and provide feedback on emerging findings (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Maintaining subjectivity during the data collection process was imperative. As a Black woman and college graduate with lived experience of sharing mental health reflections on social media platforms, I bracketed my biases, preconceived ideas, and thoughts. Bracketing allowed me to set aside my beliefs about the study to avoid altering participant responses (Burkholder et al., 2020). I used interpretative bracketing throughout the data collection process. Interpretative bracketing required me to record my biases before data collection and not allow those biases to suggest responses from the participants.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The participants who meet the eligibility criteria for the study include:

1. Black or African American college students enrolled part-time or full-time in an undergraduate, graduate, or professional college.
2. Enrolled in a college or university within the United States,
3. Must be age 18 or older.

I used a preinterview questionnaire to gather demographic information about participants to ensure eligibility criteria are met. I used a HIPAA-compliant videoconferencing platform to conduct secure, in-depth, semistructured interviews with the participants. I recruited 8-10 Black college student participants by posting on the social media (Appendix A) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. I also posted in the Walden University participant pool. Eligible participants were provided an informed consent form to sign along with a demographic survey.

I used purposive sampling strategies such as snowballing and convenience. Snowball sampling is asking the current participant to refer another participant. Convenience sampling uses eligible and available participants (Burkholder et al., 2020). Phenomenology focuses on the depth of the participants' perceptions. Transcripts from phenomenological interviews are typically 20 to 30 pages, resulting in fewer participants needed for the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). To ensure data collection from a variety and a sufficient number of participants, I used a sample size of nine Black college students. Additionally, I continued to collect data through semistructured interviews until

I reached saturation. Saturation is when no new information is found, and no unexplained phenomena are found (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Instrumentation

Instrumentation was another vital component of the study. For qualitative studies, the researcher is considered an instrument and observer (Rudestambrea & Newton, 2015). Using the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, I provided participants with pre-interview questions to determine eligibility, followed by in-depth semistructured individual interviews with each selected participant. The pre-interview questions were provided to prospective participants electronically. The semistructured interviews were conducted through Zoom, a HIPAA-compliant videoconference platform. I used semistructured individual interviews to ask questions related to my research question and additional probes to gather deeper responses from participants (see Burkholder et al., 2020).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment of participants included social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Additionally, I posted in the Walden University participant pool. Eligible candidates completed the pre-interview electronic form. I posted the social media flyer weekly until I obtained the target number of participants needed for the study or until saturation was reached. When a participant met the criteria for the study, I emailed a request for the participant to select a convenient interview time using Calendly, an online appointment scheduling software. Each selected participant engaged in one 60-minute interview via Zoom, a HIPAA-compliant videoconference platform that was

audio-recorded for transcribing. The interview were not video recorded, and participants received a password to access the interview room to ensure privacy. Each participant received a password to enter their assigned Zoom interview room. The Zoom interview rooms was locked to ensure others could not access the virtual interview rooms.

Additionally, I utilized a headset device during the interview. The study was voluntary, so participants could change their minds and withdraw from the study at any time without judgment or penalty. Participants requesting a referral for counseling would be provided the website <https://www.nbcc.org/search/counselorfind> to access a Nationally Certified Counselor in their area. Upon completing the data analysis phase of the study, I provided each participant a transcript summary via email to review for member-checking accuracy.

Data Analysis Plan

IPA focuses on patterns within the participants' experiences, meaning making of those experiences, and interpreting those experiences within social and theoretical contexts (Miller et al., 2018). Additionally, convergence and divergence are IPA's priorities. Each interview is examined for themes before exploring patterns between multiple interviews (Miller et al., 2018). I used IPA to explore social media's influence on Black college students' lived experiences regarding their perception of counseling services.

IPA is divided into first- and second-order phases (Miller et al., 2018). The first-order analysis focuses on the descriptive understanding of the phenomenon through the lens of the participant. First, each case transcript is to be read and reread with reflection and observation notes from the researcher. The researcher should bracket personal values

and biases using reflexivity. Next, an exploratory line-by-line analysis for descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual codes is identified throughout the transcript (Gajwani et al., 2018). The descriptive phase will focus on understanding the phenomenon from the participant's perspective - what matters to the participant, specific events, and core values (Miller et al., 2018). The linguistic phase focuses on noticeable patterns from the participant related to metaphors, tone, emotions, and objective comments (Miller et al., 2018). The second-order analysis uses a double-hermeneutic lens, focusing on understanding the participant's experience (Miller et al., 2018). Speculation is embedded in this phase and should be noted (Miller et al., 2018).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In this study, I used IPA to understand the lived experiences of Black college student's perception of counseling services. Credibility is an essential aspect of the data collection. Credibility means the data presented is believable (Burkholder et al., 2020). I used member checking and reflexivity to establish credibility in the study. Member checking allowed the participants to review the transcripts from their interviews and provide feedback. I used reflexivity to continuously document my reflections, thoughts, ideas, and biases throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Transferability

Transferability is comparable to external validity in quantitative studies (Burkholder et al., 2020). Within qualitative studies, transferability is applying the data to other populations while remaining context specific (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In

interpretative phenomenological analysis studies, participants should not be selected for generalizability (Miller et al., 2018). Although the results may not be transferable to other populations, I will use thick descriptions, a trustworthiness strategy. *Thick descriptions* encompass three key elements: description of the setting, description of the participants, and adequate support of the findings ((Burkholder et al., 2020).

Dependability

Dependability is comparable to reliability in quantitative studies. In qualitative studies, dependability is the evidence of consistency throughout the data collection, data analysis, and reporting process (Burkholder et al., 2020). The trustworthiness strategy I used is an inquiry audit. An inquiry audit or audit trail describes how the study's data is collected, decisions made, and how categories are selected (Burkholder et al., 2020). The reflexive journal entries and documents are components of the study audit trail.

Confirmability

Qualitative studies recognize the inclusion of researcher subjectivity (Burkholder et al., 2020). In interpretative phenomenological analysis, the researcher is central to the interpretative process (Miller et al., 2018). Confirmability in qualitative studies allows other researchers to arrive at the same findings if reviewing the data collected from the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). The inquiry audit documents can be used to establish confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures are an essential component to consider throughout the research process. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) requires counselors to abide by ethical

principles, state and federal laws, host institutional regulations, and scientific standards. I adhered to the ACA code of ethics and IRB guidelines by maintaining the participant's confidentiality, providing informed consent, protecting the welfare of participants, and reporting results accurately.

Before beginning data collection, I received permission from Walden University's institutional review board (IRB). I provided each participant with an electronic informed consent form. The informed consent document informed participants of voluntary participation, data storage, privacy details, and withdrawal. Each participant could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or judgment. If data was collected at the time of withdrawal, the participant's information was to be destroyed. The data for all remaining participants will be kept confidential through password-protected electronic files, and pseudonyms or codes will be used in place of participant names for deidentification purposes. As a university requirement, data will be kept for at least five years before being destroyed.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the research design and described the rationale for the selection. Next, I will discuss my role as the researcher in the dissertation study. Additionally, I stated the methodology, participant selection, and data analysis plan. Finally, I discussed issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures. In Chapter 4, I will present the results and findings from the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this IPA qualitative study was to describe how social media impacts how Black college students understand counseling services. I focused on understanding how the social influence of social media can affect Black college students' attitudes, behaviors, and actions and their understanding of counseling services.

Mental health stigma remains the most cited reason for not seeking mental health services. Amongst Black college men, public stigma related to mental health is higher than others (Shannon, 2024). Despite the stigma, Black male celebrities are using social media for mental health disclosures, resulting in Black males aged 18-34 seeking more information related to depression (Francis, 2018). Given the influence of social media and the change in how Black college students access mental health support, understanding how social media influenced Black college student's perceptions of counseling services can increase knowledge and awareness for counselor educators, counselors, and supervisors.

The main research question for this study was: What is the influence of social media on the lived experiences of Black college students regarding their perception of counseling services?

In this chapter, I explain the research process and themes identified from the study. Further, I share the research setting used in the study, identify the participants' demographics, and discuss the data collection and data analysis approach. Lastly, I identify evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

I began data collection after receiving Walden University IRB approval 09-03-24-1108133, which expires on September 2, 2025. After posting the social media flyer on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, participants responded with interest immediately. The study criteria were approved and posted on the Walden University Participant Pool approximately three days after the initial social media posting. I completed nine semistructured qualitative interviews over one week. Due to a snowball sampling method, the participants immediately referred colleagues who met the study criteria following their interviews. The social media flyer included the pre-interview questionnaire link, including informed consent, demographics, and study criteria (see Appendix A). Each participant who met the criteria was emailed a Calendly link to schedule the interview. Each interview was completed via Zoom, a HIPAA-compliant videoconferencing platform, to conduct secure, in-depth, semistructured interviews. The interviews were password-protected and audio-only, and I used a headset for additional privacy.

Demographics

The participants included in this study were Black college students actively enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, or professional college part-time or full-time. The participants were 18 or older, and their college enrollment was within the United States. During data collection, participants who were eligible for the study were interviewed (see Table 1). There were no disqualified participants.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Race	Gender	Age	Education Status	Enrollment Status	US Region
Participant 1	Black	Female	25- 34	Graduate Student	Full-Time	West
Participant 2	Black	Female	35- 44	Graduate Student	Full-Time	Southwest
Participant 3	Black	Female	55- 64	Graduate Student	Full-Time	Southwest
Participant 4	Black	Female	35- 44	Graduate Student	Full-Time	Southwest
Participant 5	Black	Male	35- 44	Graduate Student	Part-Time	Southwest
Participant 6	Black	Female	35- 44	Undergraduate	Full-Time	Southeast
Participant 7	Black	Female	35- 44	Graduate	Full-Time	Southwest
Participant 8	Black	Female	35- 44	Graduate	Part-Time	Southwest
Participant 9	Black	Female	35- 44	Graduate	Part-Time	Midwest

Data Collection

Over 1 week, I collected data from nine participants using semistructured qualitative interviews. I recruited the participants using the IRB-approved social media flyer (Appendix A) posted on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Additionally, the study criteria were shared on the Walden University participant pool. The social media flyer included a link to the pre-interview questionnaire and informed consent. The questionnaire required submission of the volunteer's email address to allow follow-up if they met the criteria for the study. I received 13 total responses to the pre-interview questionnaire. I emailed each of the 13 volunteers a Calendly link to schedule an interview. Of the 13 volunteers, nine participants scheduled an interview. Three volunteers did not respond to follow-up emails to schedule an interview, and one volunteer reported scheduling conflicts after saturation had been met.

The nine semistructured interviews were conducted via Zoom, audio recording only, and stored in a password-protected file on my computer. The participants were sent a password-protected link to the email they provided in the questionnaire. Each interview was between 45 minutes to 1 hour. I used reflexive journaling to bracket my thoughts, values, and beliefs immediately following each interview. After nine interviews, I reached saturation. The interviews provided no additional information. Using Microsoft Word, I transcribed each interview, which averaged approximately 20-30 pages. I completed a one-page brief transcript summary of each participant's interview by summarizing their responses to the interview questions (Appendix C). I emailed each participant a copy of the one-page brief transcript summary for member-checking. The

participants were provided a deadline to respond with edits or discrepancies or to add any additional information.

Data Analysis

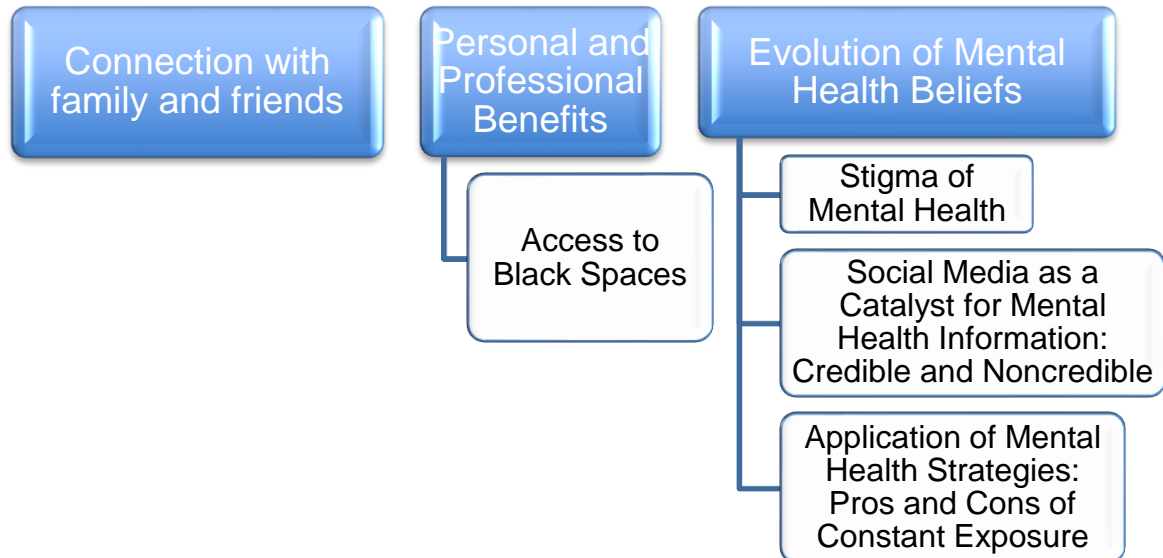
To interpret the data, I used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Interpretative phenomenological analysis focuses on meaning-making, interpreting, and describing the participants' experiences within a social and theoretical context (Miller et al., 2018). Immediately following each interview, I journaled my thoughts and reflections on the data shared by each participant. I transcribed each interview from audio recordings to a Microsoft Word document. Next, I read and reread each transcript multiple times to immerse myself in the data. I identified my observations and reflections about each interview using a memo journal.

Additionally, I bracketed my values, beliefs, and thoughts. Next, I proceeded to the first-order analysis, using exploratory line-by-line analysis, and made exploratory comments as I identified content, linguistic use of metaphors, and characteristics of the participants, such as social status, employment, education level, and gender. Further, I used second-order analysis using a double-hermeneutic lens to understand each participant's experience. Using the identified codes, I identified emergent themes and subordinate themes. I reviewed the emergent themes and subordinate themes for connections among the participants. The emergent and subordinate themes were connected to the research question: What is the influence of social media on the lived experiences of Black college students regarding their perception of counseling services?

There were three emerging themes and four subordinate themes (see Figure 1). The three main emergent and subordinate themes consisted of:

Figure 1

Emerging Themes and Subordinate themes of Black College Students



The three main emergent themes consisted of the following (see table 2):

1. Connection with family and friends
2. Personal and Professional Benefits
 - a. Access to Black Spaces
3. Evolution of Mental Health Beliefs
 - a. Stigma of Mental Health
 - b. Social Media as a Catalyst for Mental Health Information: Credible and Noncredible
 - c. Application of Mental Health Strategies: Pros and Cons of Constant Exposure

For each emergent theme and subordinate theme, I used quotes from the transcript to support the data (see Table 2).

Table 2

Emergent Themes of the social influence of social media on Black college students

Participant	Emerging Themes	Correlating Statement
Participant 1	Connection with family and friends	“I began using Facebook when I was an undergrad...to keep up with my friends from high school and family.”
	Evolution of mental health beliefs	“So much stuff is happening now that was just not happening when I was younger...there was a time when what happens in this home stays in this home. Now, people of the new generation are really seeking mental health. Anything you need is at your fingertips; social media really has come a long way and it’s amazing because you don’t even have to sit in person to see a therapist.”
	Personal and Professional Benefits	

Participant	Emerging Themes	Correlating Statement
		"I tend to follow positive pages, whether it's Sarah Jakes, influential classmates and friends, or just people doing very positive things in the community."
Participant 2	Connection with family and friends	"You can keep in touch with people or share information virtually – connecting with people online."
	Evolution of mental health beliefs	
	Personal and Professional Benefits	"I've noticed the lack of appreciation. People like the idea of it but not actually doing the work – not actually understanding the investment and what you can get out of it."
	Connection with family and friends	
Participant 3	Evolution of mental health beliefs	
	Personal and Professional Benefits	"I use it a lot for staying in touch with family – it's giving me the opportunity to connect with people personally and professionally."

Participant	Emerging Themes	Correlating Statement
Participant 4	Connection with family and friends	
	Evolution of mental health beliefs	"You can keep in touch with people and share information virtually."
	Personal and Professional Benefits	"I think my awareness has increased. I'm talking about mental health all of the time."
	Connection with family and friends	
	Evolution of mental health beliefs	"It's definitely a connector – it's connected to my personal and I do a lot of promoting my organization's testimonies, events and things like that."
Participant 5	Personal and Professional Benefits	
	Connection with family and friends	"I use it for just about everything – school and connecting with people. Social media is important."
	Evolution of mental health beliefs	"I'm learning all of these new pronouns and terms – therapy groups and coping skill sheets. Just

Participant	Emerging Themes	Correlating Statement
Participant 6	Connection with family and friends	different thing to help with therapy.”
	Evolution of mental health beliefs	“Sometimes it’s easier than sending an email blast. I think it’s a good way to meet someone and connect with them.”
	Personal and Professional Benefits	“I used it as a way to communicate back with our family and friends here in the states.”
	Connection with family and friends	“At first it was shunned but now mental health is accepted on social media. 17 years later I have seen social media actually used to embrace counseling. Having platforms where men just get together and say ‘hey, we need to go to counseling and actually address that whole stigma as well in the military. It used to be shunned – you’re not a tough guy, you’re not a soldier if you went to counseling but now
	Evolution of mental health beliefs	
	Personal and Professional Benefits	
	Connection with family and friends	
	Evolution of mental health beliefs	

Participant	Emerging Themes	Correlating Statement
Participant 7	Personal and Professional Benefits	<p>it's actually embraced."</p> <p>"Social media allows you to communicate with another person. Particularly me being in the military, we use it to gather data from all over the world so now it's moving into the workforce."</p>
Participant 8		<p>"You can keep up with people you know and meet new people."</p> <p>"I think more of you guys should let people know that there is a virtual option. I think it will get more people because it definitely grabbed me and led me to continue to go."</p>
Participant 9		<p>"I've received money from Facebook as a content creator. I enjoy it because I like talking and checking in on people."</p>

Participant	Emerging Themes	Correlating Statement
		“I post very seldomly but I’m on there all the time. I interact with family and friends on there.”
		“It really opened the door to see the different varieties of counseling – there’s many ways such as telehealth and in-person. It also shows different businesses and different ways to access services.”
		“It’s a place to go catch up on what may be going on back home and see how families are growing and changing.”
		“It allows people or persons to engage socially whether for your social entity or for your personal.”
		“It’s a really good teaching

Participant	Emerging Themes	Correlating Statement
		mechanism. I use it as a mechanism to learn – whether it’s my mental health or somebody else’s mental health.”
		“I use it for work. I use it for school. I use it for life. Everything.”
		“I actually met some of my closest friends online on social media.”
		“Seeing other people’s experiences with mental health on social media, it kind of normalizes it a little bit. Not necessarily, I thought I was alone in experiencing this but ‘oh, I didn’t realize that this person experienced the same thing. It normalizes it.”
		“It’s a place where people congregate or meet online.”

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is an essential aspect of data collection and establishing trustworthiness. In this study, I utilized member-checking and reflexivity to establish the study's credibility. Each audio interview was transcribed using Microsoft Word software. After reading and rereading each interview, I summarized the responses to the questions and emailed a one-page brief transcript summary for member-checking. Member-checking allowed participants to review the transcript summary and provide feedback. The participants were provided a one-week deadline to respond to the transcript summary with edits, corrections, or discrepancies. The participants who responded to the transcript summary email affirmed the accuracy of the transcript summary. In addition to member-checking, I also use reflexivity to establish trustworthiness. I used bracketing to journal my thoughts, beliefs, and values before, during, and after data collection and analysis.

Transferability

Transferability focuses on applying data from a study to similar populations while remaining context-specific (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, I used Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which does not allow for generalizability (Miller et al., 2018). The semistructured interviews were thick descriptions of the participant's experiences, which addressed transferability. The thick descriptions included a description of the setting, a description of the participants, and sufficient support for the findings (Burkholder et al., 2020). In addition to thick descriptions, I also ensured data

saturation was reached as part of validity and transferability. Data saturation was reached after nine interviews when no new information was found (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Dependability

Dependability is the evidence of consistency throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting process (Burkholder et al., 2020). As a trustworthiness strategy, I used an audit trail to describe how the study's data was collected and how decisions were made. Additionally, I used member-checking by providing each participant with a one-page summary of their interview transcript to check for accuracy. Further, I used reflexive journaling throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Confirmability

In this study, I used Interpretative phenomenological analysis, which embeds the researcher as a central element of the interpretative process (Miller et al., 2018). Confirmability allows other researchers to arrive at the same findings by reviewing the data collected from a study (Burkholder et al., 2020). To maintain trustworthiness using confirmability, I verified the appropriateness of participants using inclusion criteria. Next, I used member-checking by providing each participant with a one-page summary of their interview transcript. Additionally, I used reflexive journaling to bracket my thoughts, beliefs, and values throughout the data collection and analysis process. Further, I utilized an audit trail to describe how data collection decisions were made.

Results

In this qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study, I aimed to explore the following research question: “What is the influence of social media on the

lived experiences of Black college students regarding their perception of counseling services?" In this study, I used semistructured interviews to collect data to allow participants to share their lived experiences as Black college students' social media users. There were three emerging themes and four subordinate themes. The three main emergent and subordinate themes consisted of the following:

1. Connection with Family and Friends
2. Personal and Professional Benefits
 - a. Access to Black Spaces
3. Evolution of Mental Health Beliefs
 - a. Stigma of Mental Health
 - b. Social Media as a Catalyst for Mental Health Information: Credible and Noncredible
 - c. Application of Mental Health Strategies: Pros and Cons of Constant Exposure

Connection with Family and Friends

Social media was an avenue for all nine participants in the study to maintain a connection with family and friends. Many of the participants were introduced to social media during their teenage years. Participant 4 shared, "I started using social media in middle school – back in *Myspace* days." Virtual communication specifically was of importance in allowing consistent connection despite geographical location. Participant 2 stated, "You can keep in touch with people and share information virtually." During the COVID-19 lockdowns, virtual communication became the primary communication between family and friends to ensure safety. Participant 5 shared, "People were using

social media even more during the COVID period. You could not go outside and go to places that you would normally go to on a day-to-day basis, and that's when the social media platform became more of a way of life."

Personal and Professional Benefits

The nine participants from the study agreed that social media provided both personal and professional benefits. Participant 4 stated, "I use social media for just about everything. I use it for school and connecting with people. It plays a pretty important role in my life." Participant 6 shared, "I've received money from Facebook as a content creator. I enjoy it because I like talking and checking in on people." Participant 9 stated, "I actually met some of my closest friends on social media." The nine participants also agreed that following social media profiles that depict positive and educational content is important. Participant 1 shared, "I tend to follow positive pages, whether it's Sarah Jakes, influential classmates and friends, or just people doing very positive things in the community."

Access to Black Spaces

One of the subordinate themes consisted of mixed reviews regarding Black Spaces on social media. Some participants believed Black spaces were informative and relatable. Participant 1 shared, "You can find stuff on *Black Twitter* that nobody else could or everyone else could relate because it's African American students. Participant 5 described Black spaces such as *Black Twitter* as "it's by us, for us... it's very FUBU over there." Participant 6 shared, "I guess it gives a sense of belonging and seeing people that look like you and staying abreast topics in relation to Black or African American

individuals." While some participants felt a sense of connection from Black spaces, other participants found those spaces to be stereotypical and negative. Participant 9 stated, "I don't necessarily like the stereotypical Black narrative that I find in a lot of spaces."

Evolution of Mental Health Beliefs

All the participants shared a sentiment that their mental health beliefs evolved since entering college. Five participants were actively involved in the psychology or mental health profession at the time of the study or studied psychology as an undergraduate. Participant 5 shared, "At first it was shunned, but now mental health is accepted on social media. Now it's actually embraced." Participant 6 stated, "Individuals are being more open and sharing their experiences and stories." The participants were asked about their personal experiences with counseling, which appeared to increase their positive beliefs about mental health due to social media. Participant 4 shared, "Social media influenced my access to counseling because I realized things like adult ADHD...and that's when you're like, ok, I need some counseling." Participant 1 shared, "social media has been very influential because of hashtags.... they take me to a whole other world or different organizations, you know, different things I had no idea about with mental health."

Stigma of Mental Health

Understanding of mental health varied by participant age. Eight participants whose ages fell between 25-44 discussed a shift in perspective related to mental health stigma due to the influence of social media. When describing their upbringing and conversations focused on mental health within the home, the participants expressed a

common theme that indicated continued stigma in the Black community due to a historical narrative. Participant 1 stated, "I will say the younger generation, we're all really big on mental health, whereas the older ones, it was more so 'take it to God' which we do take it to God." Participant 9 agreed and shared a similar thought, "You know, in the Black community where it's like, oh, you don't need a therapist, you need, you know, Jesus." Despite the historical narrative and stigma of mental health, participants expressed hope. Participant 7 stated, "I might still be closed off to counseling and mental health, probably less willing to participate but I'm seeing people who look like me actually encourage to seek help and that's okay to seek help and not okay to keep it bottled up." Participant 9 also expressed hope and decreased stigma, "Seeing other people's experience with mental health on social media, it kind of normalizes it a little bit. I thought I was alone in experiencing this but oh, I didn't realize that this person, you know, experienced this same thing. Yeah, normalizes it."

Social Media as a Catalyst for Mental Health Information: Credible and Noncredible

The participants agreed that social media was a source of mental health information. The participant's opinions differed regarding the credibility of the mental health information found on social media. Participant 9 stated, "I will say, I think NAMI does a good job of, you know, calling things out when something happens. I remember specifically when *Twitch* [a Black celebrity] died by suicide, NAMI put a post out there like, 'Hey, this is how we talk about suicide.'" Participant 9 also added, "There are a couple of Black therapists on *Instagram* who are post information out there, but you know, not enough and it's not really anybody's fault." Participant 8 offered a differing

opinion, "I think we utilize words that we don't understand because we know that on social media like everyone's bipolar, everybody is a narcissist, or everyone is gaslighting you. Like, can we use the words where they fit?" Participants noticed an increase in mental health conversations on social media following a mental health crisis. Participant 2 shared, "I feel like people talk about it more when something happened – someone commits suicide, then everyone's talking about mental health."

Application of Mental Health Strategies: Pros and Cons of Constant Exposure

The participants agreed that increased conversations centered on mental health on social media led to increased awareness. There were differing opinions regarding the constant exposure to mental health-related messages. Some participants believed that mental health conversations on social media led to information overload and contradictory information. Participant 8 shared, "The way social media is set up, anybody can be anything at any time – and that often means that people think they know what they're talking about when it comes to mental health and counseling. These are very serious matters and situations that they actually don't have the capacity or education to do." Alternatively, other participants believed that social media, when used in a positive manner, can increase visibility and access and promote conversations and information related to mental health. Participant 5 stated, "Social media has really given me an education on counseling – the various areas and the terminology. And meditation." Participant 2 shared, "I think I learned about different specialties."

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the research process and themes identified from the study. Further, I shared the research setting used in the study, identified the participants' demographics, and discussed the data collection and data analysis approach.

Additionally, I identified evidence of trustworthiness. Furthermore, I examined the results of the research question: "What is the influence of social media on the lived experiences of Black college students regarding their perception of counseling services?"

I shared the outcome of the three emerging themes and four subordinate themes. The themes and subordinate themes included the connection with family and friends, personal and professional benefits, access to Black spaces, evolution of mental health beliefs, stigma of mental health, social media as a catalyst for mental health information: credible and noncredible, and application of mental health strategies: pros and cons of constant exposure.

In Chapter 5, I will present my interpretation of the findings, identify the limitations of the study, make recommendations for future research for counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors, and discuss implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the interpretation of my study findings in conjunction with the current literature related to my research question: What is the influence of social media on the lived experiences of Black college students regarding their perception of counseling services? Moreover, I explore the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Limited research exists regarding Black college students' perceptions of counseling services based on social media influence. The results from this interpretative phenomenological analysis study provided insight into the lived experience of Black college students understanding of counseling services. The following major emergent themes emerged from this study: (a) connection with family and friends, (b) personal and professional benefits, and (c) evolution of mental health beliefs. The subordinate themes from the study included (a) access to Black spaces; (b) stigma of mental health; (c) social media as a catalyst for mental health information: credible and noncredible; and (d) application of mental health strategies: pros and cons of constant exposure. The emergent and subordinate themes identified align with Kelman's (1958) social influence theory using the concepts of compliance, identification, and internalization.

Connection with Family and Friends

The first major emergent theme of the study was a connection with family and friends. In this study, connection with family and friends is described as maintaining

communication and sharing information virtually. Olan et al. (2024) found that social media's primary purpose is to allow people to engage in social interaction, communication, and entertainment. During COVID-19, face-to-face interactions were limited when the world experienced a global lockdown. Social media allows families and friends to communicate safely and socially distanced. Mastantuono (2023) compared social media and virtual spaces as the digital equivalent of "the barber shop, the church, and the beauty salon for Black Americans" (para. 6). Like these findings, all of the participants described maintaining a connection with family and friends using social media as essential.

Personal and Professional Benefits

The second major emergent theme from the study was personal and professional benefits. In this study, personal and professional benefits describe how social media provides opportunities to connect with family and friends and professional networks, organizations, employment, and dating. Mendez-Diaz et al. (2022) reported that approximately 89% of companies use social media to recruit potential employees. Participants reported using social media to connect with organizations and earn additional income sources. Online dating is one use of social media. Aichner et al. (2021) found that introverts utilize social media platforms for online dating to avoid face-to-face interactions. Participant 8 confirmed the literature and shared their experience using social media for online dating purposes. The participants overwhelmingly described the personal and professional benefits of social media.

Access to Black Spaces

One of the subordinate themes emerged from the study: access to Black spaces. Access to Black spaces described the participant's use of culturally specific platforms or content, such as Black Twitter and Black TikTok. Researchers Klassen and Fiesler (2022) defined Black Twitter as “a digital community within Twitter composed mainly of people who identify as Black” (para.2). Klassen and Fiesler (2022) found that Black Twitter has been used as a space for Black people to commiserate on their shared experiences. The participants expressed mixed feelings regarding Black spaces such as Black Twitter. While some participants believed the Black spaces created cultural connections and a sense of belonging, others believed the spaces continued a negative stereotype of Black people.

Francis (2018) found that Black male celebrities have increased their public discussions and disclosures of mental health struggles over the past few years. The hip-hop artist Kid Cudi shared his struggle with suicidal ideations and depression on Black Twitter in 2016. Using Black Twitter, he encouraged Black men on *Twitter* to engage in mental health conversations. The participants in the study described how witnessing other Black people engage in mental health conversations normalized their experience with mental health. Considering Kelman's (1958) social influence theory, the subordinate theme of access to Black spaces aligned with the concepts of identification and internalization. Participants were influenced by witnessing others share their struggles with mental health, leading them to express their opinions and feelings on social

media publicly. Additionally, witnessing celebrities share their experiences validated their experiences, leading to identification.

Evolution of Mental Health Beliefs

The third major emergent theme was the evolution of mental health beliefs. The evolution of mental health beliefs describes a participant believing one thing and changing it to something else due to social media. One of the methods for learning new information on social media is *hashtags*. Lu and Steele (2019) described hashtags as a feature on Twitter often used for Black discourse. Garrett et al. (2024) found that social media hashtags such as #BlackGirlMagic were used for identity affirmation, cultural appreciation, and counter-narratives to anti-Black messages. Participants described hashtags as a method used on social media to inform them of new ideas, concepts, and information, leading to an evolution of their mental health beliefs.

All the participants expressed a noticeable evolution in their mental health beliefs since entering college and using social media. Prior to social media, participants expressed limited knowledge of various mental health diagnoses, treatment approaches, or virtual counseling platforms. Considering Kelman's (1958) social influence theory, the major emergent theme of the evolution of mental health beliefs implied identification as participants were influenced by mental health messaging on social media.

Stigma of Mental Health

Another subordinate theme from the study was the stigma of mental health. In the study, the stigma of mental health described the negative connotation and perception of mental health from oneself and others. Pendleton (2023) found that only one in three

Black Americans challenged by mental health issues will receive appropriate treatment. Participants described mental health stigma within their family systems, resulting in resistance to mental health treatment.

Religious coping was a prevalent concept described by the participants. Avent et al., (2021) described religious coping as using religious-based rituals and practices to respond to distressing life transitions. Avent et al. (2021) found that religion was a prevalent help-seeking strategy for Black people. Moreover, Avent et al. (2021) found that high levels of religious coping, both negative and positive, resulting in participants being less likely to attend counseling. The participants in the study overwhelmingly described the use of religious coping strategies amongst themselves and family members in response to mental health stigma, resulting in minimal engagement with counseling services.

Moreover, participants from the study acknowledged a historical narrative in the families related to continued stigma in the Black community. Eight participants between the ages of 24-44 distanced themselves from the former narrative with a perception of hope and change related to mental health due to exposure to mental health conversations on social media. Using Kelman's (1958) social influence theory, the subordinate theme of the stigma of mental health implied participant identification as participants accept a new belief related to mental health and share their feelings both publicly and privately.

Social Media as a Catalyst for Mental Health Information: Credible and Noncredible

Another subordinate theme from the study was social media as a catalyst for mental health information: credible and noncredible. Social media as a catalyst for mental

health information: credible and noncredible described the participant's experiences with mental health information from both credible and noncredible sources on social media. According to Mendez-Diaz et al. (2022), approximately 20% of social media users learn about breaking news on social media platforms. Participants described learning about mental health terminology, virtual mental health counseling platforms, and other mental health resources such as books on social media platforms.

Pathak (2018) found that suicide was the third leading cause of death in Black men between ages 15-24 in 2016. Participants described limited information and terminology related to suicide as a barrier to mental health conversations prior to social media. Participants described the value in a credible source such as the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) providing suicide-related terminology on social media when Twitch, a Black celebrity, died by suicide.

Social media has become a significant source of mental health information, according to eight of the study participants. There were mixed feelings related to the credibility of the sources, as some believed the information was inaccurate and lacked validity. Other participants found credible sources such as mental health professionals and organizations helpful and encouraged increased information on social media from mental health professionals.

Application of Mental Health Strategies: Pros and Cons of Constant Exposure

A final subordinate theme from the study was the application of mental health strategies: pros and cons of constant exposure. Application of mental health strategies: pros and cons of constant exposure described the participant's feelings related to applying

the mental health information obtained through social media and the pros and cons of increased exposure. There was an absence of literature specifically related to the application of mental health strategies: pros and cons of constant exposure; however, Kim and Cohen (2017) described message fatigue as overexposure to similar or redundant messages, resulting in an adverse motivational state. In their study, Kim and Cohen (2017) found that Black individuals may avoid vital information or disengage if experiencing message fatigue. Participants in my study described experiences of disengaging with social media due to an overload of mental health messaging.

With the increase in conversations related to mental health on social media came differing opinions from the participants related to mental health messaging on social media. Most of the participants found the information on social media helpful and informative. Four participants were mental health professionals and expressed displeasure with social media influencers and podcasters positioning themselves as professionals on social media, leading to potential misinformation.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study was the requirement that participants be actively enrolled in an undergraduate, graduate, or professional program at the time of the study. Some volunteers reported being on a break from school or beginning their programs in the Fall, failing to meet the criteria for the study. A second limitation of the study was the geographic location, which was limited to the U.S. region. Social media is a global network that provides access to Black college students worldwide. Because the study

criteria required students from the U.S. region, those students outside the United States were not eligible.

A third limitation of the study was participant homogeneity. Participant homogeneity or homogeneous are cases or participants that who are very similar (Patton, 2015). The study included predominately female participants; however, with the snowball method, one male participant reported having several potential male volunteers. Prior to recruiting more male participants, the data reached saturation. Including more male Black college student participants would have increased the diversity and transferability of the study.

Lastly, transferability may be a limitation of this study. Transferability is how data is applied to other populations and contexts while remaining context-specific (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The population used in this study was Black college students actively enrolled in an undergraduate, graduate, or professional school in the United States. In this study, the participants were Black college students, primarily mental health professionals. Future studies could include participants from various backgrounds, such as military personnel, business owners or entrepreneurs, and individuals from different age groups, among others.

Recommendations

The results from my study indicate a need for continued research related to understanding the influence and impact of social media on Black college students. The participants from this study expressed a need for research focused on mental health messaging on social media, specifically for Black people. While most of the participants

believed social media positively influenced mental health conversations, two participants expressed a need for safeguards surrounding who can provide mental health information. Based on my study's findings, there are three recommendations for further research to advance the literature related to Black college student's perceptions of counseling based on social media influence.

The first recommendation is to increase messaging from mental health professionals due to information overload and uninformed sources. Kim and Cohen (2017) found that Black individuals may avoid vital information or disengage if experiencing message fatigue; however, participants from the study indicated a desire for increased mental health information from mental health professionals or other credible sources and organizations. Despite increased conversations on social media related to mental health, participants reported inaccurate terminology used on podcasts and social media influencers. Participants expressed frustrations with inaccuracies. Participant 2 stated, "I feel like it can be pros and cons because I feel like social media... Sometimes it's too much information so that access it can be information overload." Participant 8 expressed a similar sentiment and shared, "Sometimes I think people confuse podcasts with counseling and everybody that got a podcast is not a counselor."

The second recommendation is to increase focus on access to counseling services on college campuses. Banks (2019) found that access to services, long wait lists, and limited knowledge of where and how to seek services may serve as barriers for underrepresented college students. Participants in the study described a lack of awareness

of available counseling services on college campuses. Participant 9 stated, "I didn't even know that you could get a counselor on college campus." Participant 1 stated,

So I think that was the biggest transition I saw a lot of students needed it, but didn't know how to ask for it, didn't want help, or didn't want to look like they were in need. They were also scared they were walking to the counseling office and see other students and then those go back and tell other people, you know, so that was caring what other people might think.

The third recommendation is to increase education and advocacy related to virtual counseling services due to barriers to access and stigma. Hadler et al. (2021) found that college students view telemental health options as convenient, accessible, easy to use, and may help reduce barriers of stigma for ethnic minority students. Further, Hadler et al. (2021) suggested increased awareness of telemental health services to improve student perceptions of telemental health. My study participants reported increased social media ads promoting virtual counseling programs such as *Better Help*, a subscription based online therapy platform for individuals, couples, and teens available via video, audio and chat (Bacon et. al, 2024) and telephone or Zoom options with their current outpatient therapists. Participant 4 stated, "I think that it's making us aware of different things like, you know, like the better health platform for instance, it is posted everywhere on social media." Barriers such as stigma could prevent engagement in counseling services, virtual options provide an alternative and confidential opportunity for counseling services. Participant 6 shared, "I think that more of you guys should let people know that there is a

virtual option.” Additional research is essential to understanding the influence of social media on Black college student’s perception of counseling services.

Implications

Several social change implications developed through this study. The identified social change implications would benefit Black college students, counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors. The findings from this study can impact social change by addressing an increased need for advocacy through social media, increased visibility to and awareness of counseling resources on college campuses and the continued need for destigmatizing mental illness and counseling services for Black college students. Insights from this study can aid in social change and policies by better understanding how social influence through social media can be utilized as a strengths-based resource to foster social connections and spread mental-health-related messages and awareness.

Increased Mental Health Advocacy and Information through Social Media

One social change implication identified by the participants was a need for mental health advocacy on social media. Participants expressed an increase in conversations related to mental health on social media platforms. Participants shared that reading about the positive counseling experiences of others via social media increased their willingness to engage in counseling services. The information shared by mental health professionals and organizations was beneficial as it provided new terminology and understanding of mental health diagnoses. Chandran et al. (2019) noted that increased involvement of mental health professionals in mental health-related media is needed. Participants who

currently work as mental health providers also found the information valuable through learning new treatment approaches and coping strategies for their clients. Conversely, participants expressed frustration and confusion due to conflicting information shared on social media by non-professionals, thereby leading to a need for increased information on social media from counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors. The results from my study indicated that mental health advocacy and information shared on social media provided personal and professional benefits.

Increased Visibility and Awareness of Counseling Resources

Access to therapy has been a significant barrier to counseling services. Recently, telehealth platforms have provided increased access to counseling services using virtual sessions and college campus counseling centers. Telehealth or virtual telehealth refers to telecommunication technologies that deliver mental health care, such as telepsychiatry, telecounseling, or telemedicine (Schuh, 2021). Participants implied limited knowledge of virtual options and college counseling centers for counseling services before social media. When entering college, participants expressed a need for understanding and awareness of counseling and mental health services. Schuh (2021) noted that using telepsychiatry with college students may lead to decreased barriers to mental health services, increased accessibility, and patient satisfaction. Mental health conversations online exposed participants to information about virtual providers, insurance benefits, and other relevant information. Information from university counseling centers and counseling telehealth software providers might also increase awareness and visibility for Black college students seeking counseling services.

Destigmatizing Mental Illness through Social Media

Despite an increase in mental health conversations on social media, stigma related to counseling services continues for Black college students. Participants with personal experience with counseling services expressed positive experiences and a desire to continue. The results from the study indicated that participants whose ages fell between 25-44 embraced mental health and rejected the former narrative of “what happens in the home stays in the home.” However, the stigma continues in the Black community due to the historical narrative of “go pray about it.” And “take it to God.” Avent et al. (2021) found that Black people with high levels of religious coping were less likely to attend counseling. Participants reported an increased awareness and acceptance of counseling in Black families despite past narratives when the newer generation engaged and normalized.

Social Media as a Culturally Informed Intervention for Counselors and Counselor Educators

Limited literature is related to the ethics of social media use and counselor preparation (Willow et al., 2018). The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) mandates that counselor educators or supervisors provide instruction within their areas of knowledge and competence based on current information and knowledge available in the profession. According to Garrett et al. (2024), Black college students are among the growing social media users ages 18-29. Counselors could utilize social media to provide mental health advocacy by sharing valuable counseling resources. Participants from the study indicated a desire for increased mental health information from professional mental health

providers on social media. As the demand, willingness, and openness for virtual counseling services increases, counselor educators are encouraged to train and develop counselors who can provide quality tele counseling services. As the use of social media increases within the counseling profession, counselor educators and supervisors must be knowledgeable of innovative and culturally informed interventions for counselors and counselors-in-training to use strengths-based resources and protective factors.

Conclusion

In this interpretative phenomenological analysis qualitative study, I aimed to answer the following research question: What is the influence of social media on the lived experiences of Black college students regarding their perception of counseling services? I explored the lived experience of Black college students' perceptions of counseling using in-depth semistructured interviews with nine participants. From the study were three emerging themes and four subordinate themes: connection with family and friends, personal and professional benefits, access to Black Spaces, evolution of mental health beliefs, stigma of mental health, social media as a catalyst for mental health information: credible and noncredible, application of mental health strategies: pros and cons of constant exposure. The findings from the study indicated a need for increased mental health advocacy and information through social media, increased visibility and awareness of counseling resources, and destigmatizing mental illness through social media.

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Appendix A: Invitation for Social Media



There is a new study about the experiences of Black college students that could help counselors and counselor supervisors better understand how social media impacts how Black college students understand counseling services. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences using social media related to mental health.

About the study:

- Each participant will complete a demographic questionnaire (5 minutes)
- One 60-minute interview via Zoom that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)
- A transcript summary review via email for accuracy (10 minutes)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- Black or African American
- Enrolled part-time or full-time in an undergraduate, graduate, or professional college.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Shamanda Burston, LCMHC, LCAS, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during August.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click here:

<https://form.jotform.com/242178149286162> or email/private message me.

Appendix B: Demographics Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Please respond to the following demographic questions:

How do you self-identify? (Mark all that apply)

Black or African American

White

Hispanic or Latino

Asian American Indian and Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander

Other _____

Gender

Man

Woman

Non-binary

Transgender

Other _____

Age: _____

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65 and over

What best describes your educational status:

Undergraduate student

Graduate Student

Other _____

What best describes your enrollment status:

Part-time student

Full-time student

What best describes the type of educational institution that you attend?

Face-to-face

Online

Hybrid (face-to-face and online)

What best describes the type of educational institution that you attend?

Historically Black College and University (HBCU)

Predominantly White Institution (PWI)

Other _____

What best describes the US region in which you live:

Northeast

Southwest

West

Southeast

Midwest

Thank you for completing this form. Please select a time via the link to schedule a 60-minute virtual interview via zoom. Thank you for your time and interest in the study.

Preferred Email: _____

Schedule Interview: <https://calendly.com/shamanda-burston-waldenu/researchinterview>

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. Describe your definition of social media.
2. When did you begin to use social media and what platforms have you used?
3. What role does social media play in your lifestyle?
4. Describe your experiences with any culturally specific platforms or content.
5. How would you describe mental health or counseling and what that means?
6. Describe how the topic of mental health has been addressed in your family or culture.
7. How have your views of mental health changed as you have entered college?
8. In what ways have you seen mental health addressed on social media?
9. How has social media exposed you to topics related to mental health or counseling?
10. Tell me about your experiences with counseling.
11. How has social media influenced your perception of counseling?
12. How has social media influenced your access to counseling?
13. How do you think your relationship with mental health topics or counseling might be different without social media?
14. What would you like to add regarding the link between social media and counseling?