Ethical Responsibility in Weighing Social Media: Staying Informed as the Internet Explodes

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Background:

Private Practice as Campbell Consultation and Therapy, LLC, Charleston, South Carolina.


Instructor and Field Liaison, USC COSW, Teaching SOWK 781 & 782 Field Education Seminar.

Retired from MUSC Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Youth Division 8/31/2015.
Objectives

- Learn the application of ethical thought around social media
- Identify and analyze how the Code of Ethics views social media
- Develop an ethical & professional lens to view of social media
- Learn how to be an effective advocate and empower others
Yahoo Hack
Hack Attack

ROGUE ONE

HACK HACK HACK

PUTIN

[Image of a cartoon character hacking a computer with the text "PUTIN" and the phrase "ROGUE ONE" on the wall.]
Snapchat co-founders Bobby Murphy (left) and CEO Evan Spiegel ring the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange on Thursday morning as the company celebrates its IPO. Murphy and Spiegel initially started the company with Reggie Brown, an S.C. native.
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Hack the Foster Care System

- [http://www.nbcbayarea.com/investigations/Hacking-the-Foster-Care-System-for-Good-415040973.htm](http://www.nbcbayarea.com/investigations/Hacking-the-Foster-Care-System-for-Good-415040973.htm)
Social Media definition

- Forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).

Merriam Webster Dictionary Definition
10 year old feels mother is stalking her on Instagram. Mother has added her child’s friends to her account.

15 year old uses parents debit card to make an online purchase of several Microsoft games $300 + dollars. Once delivered he loaded them onto his computer before parents realized it. Parents returned them but he had access to all the games.

Husband uses cell phone to track his wife, as she leaves the home.

Child is bullied at school through social media, encouraging all to come and watch.

“Mean mugging”—where students post mean comments or photos about others online.

Cyberbullying and online impersonation is growing.

Therapist has Tinder App on the cell phone. A client walks in and it pops up left or right, and you click if you like them or not.
Technology Assisted

- Phone calls
- Video conferencing/ Skype
- Online Therapy
- Emails
- Text-based Therapy
- Self help apps
Apps can be used to help clients with:

- Exercise
- Addiction
- Depression
- Problem Solving
- Motivation
- Dementia
- Mindfulness
- Stress management

Nancy Smyth’s “Social Work Apps” board on Pinterest lists more than 150 apps and 1,000+ followers (https://www.pinterest.com/njsmyth/social-work-apps).

Personal Privacy is Limited

- Businesses track purchases made by individuals
- Identities are stolen (SSNs, credit card, health files)
- Accounts are hacked
- Internet surfing is recorded
- Electronic messages are retrieved by persons other than intended recipients

Today, no professional can guarantee privacy or confidentiality. The professional no longer controls the data provided by the client.

Dolgoff, Ch.7: The Professional Relationship: Limits, Dilemmas, & Problems, p.119
Society has become more litigious

- More and More Attorneys
- Lengthy codes and standards
- Malpractice limits
- Cyber Liability Insurance
Almost everyone experiences sensory overload (pagers, cell phones, text, reminder alarms, computer programs, SKYPE, Apps, Facebook, and other advanced technologies. We live in an era of sound bites, brief messages. We experience stress on the job, stress in personal lives, pressures to be more productive, and must balance input and demand. At times it feels like an invasion of personal and professional spaces, which can lead to burnout. We work in a caring profession, that offers intense treatment, crisis intervention, management of self harmful behaviors, and interpersonal conflicts. As we listen to traumas, we become aware of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress.

Figley, C. (1999) p. 4
Cell phones and other devices allow us to talk or text with anyone, anywhere.

Photos and videos capture life as it happens. Within seconds they can be texted, air dropped, emailed or posted on social media.

If we can't remember we ask Siri or Google.

Neuropsychologists worry that we are altering brain development and behavior with our increasing dependency on electronic devices/technology and built-in artificial intelligence.

Technology disturbs sleep patterns, social interactions and eating habits.

Technology-related activities may limit or exclude our interactions with people.

Academy of Pediatrics is saying we should have one-on-one interactions with children; set limits on their behavior with technological devices, encourage active play time, and provide tech-free zones to promote learning, creativity and development of social skills.
Parents make it clear that they own the devise. You pay for it, and if there is any behavior not true to your family values, you can take it away.

Parents have a right to join any social network they join, know their passwords and check their texts.

Phone will be turned off and put away at certain times of the night (Teens who keep smartphones on at night, are more likely to watch videos, text and have poor sleep habits and higher depression).

Put chargers in a public place outside of their possession at night.

Before posting, pretend you are speaking in front of a crowd, or imagine your mother or grandmother would react in reading the post.

Consider the first 20 minutes of each car ride is reserved for conversation.

Have weekly technology-free activities.

Parents need to ask before posting a photo with a child.

Rules need to be revised with every new child, every new phase, every new device and every new app.

Sexting – a Menacing Trend

- The age of the sextor and victim determine if charges will be pressed after exchanging naked pictures.
- Teach the dangers of sharing sexually explicit images.
- Learn about the harassment, cyberbullying, extortion, and blackmail that can result from saved text and images.
- Do not correspond online with strangers.

Don’t “Friend” Clients (Standard 1.06 Conflicts of Interest)

Don’t Blog, Post or Make Negative Comments About Work Matters or Colleagues (Standard 2.01 Respect, 4.06 Misrepresentation, 2.02 Confidentiality, 2.11 Unethical Conduct of Colleagues, 3.09 Commitment to Employers, and 4.03 Private Conduct)

Manage Your Privacy & Location Settings on Social Media Accounts

Implement a Social Media & Technology Policy
Social Media and Technology Tips

- Make Clients Aware of How Their Use of Social Media May Compromise Their Confidentiality
- To Google or not to Google Clients?
- Become Fully Competent in the Use of Technology Before Implementing it into Your Practice (Standard 4.01 (b) Competence)
- Implement Security & Privacy Measures for Electronic Communications & Records, e.g. Encryption & Password-Protected Access
In 2014, the FBI reported

- Over 5,500,000 laptops were stolen in the U.S. in the past 3 years.
- 1 out of 10 laptops are lost or stolen, and the FBI states that left unprotected, only 3% of lost or stolen laptops are recovered.
- 600,000 laptops are lost or stolen in the U.S. airports every year, with 65-69% of them remaining unclaimed (Ponemon Inst.)
- By 2010, theft of laptops is second to cash for items stolen.

NASW Assurance Trust, Computer and Device Theft.
§ 40-63-30. License as prerequisite to practice or offer to practice; providing social work services through telephone or electronic means.

(A) No individual shall offer social work services or use the designation "Social Worker," "Licensed Baccalaureate Social Worker," "Licensed Masters Social Worker," "Licensed Independent Social Worker-Clinical Practice," "Licensed Independent Social Worker-Advanced Practice," or the initials "LBSW," "LMSW," or "LISW" or any other designation indicating licensure status or hold themselves out as practicing social work or as a Baccalaureate Social Worker, Masters Social Worker, or Independent Social Worker unless licensed in accordance with this chapter.

(b) A person providing social work services to a client in this State, through telephonic, electronic, or other means, regardless of the location of the social worker, who is not licensed in this State, is practicing without a license.

Association of Social Work Boards, Social Work Electronic Practice Policies and Regulations
www.aswb.org

- Chair, Frederic Reamer, Ph.D.
- Members, Appointed by ASWB BOD April, 2013
- Reamer presented draft to Delegate Assembly 11-14-2014
- Final version adopted by BOD 1-22-2015
- Electronic version maintained at www.aswb.org

- Intended audience is governmental regulatory bodies

ASWB Technology Task Force

- Recognized that Social Work Practice vary significantly internationally.
- Ethical Standards and norms vary among diverse cultural groups served by social workers.

The standards of care that have historically protected social work clients in the context of in-person relationships apply to electronic social work services. Social workers who choose to use digital and other electronic technology in their professional capacity have an obligation to do so in a way that:

* honors their commitment to client well-being and to social work’s commitment to assist people in need, including those who have limited access to digital and other electronic technology
* adheres to prevailing ethical standards in social work
Updating 2005 Technology Practice Standards

Will serve as a guide in providing electronic social work services
Electronic Social Work Services

- Use of Computers (including the Internet, social media, online chat, text, and email)
- Other electronic means (smartphones, landline telephones, & video technology)
- Provide information to the public
  - Deliver services to clients
  - Communicate with clients
- Manage confidential information and case records
- Store and access information about clients
- Arrange payment for professional services

ASWB Model Regulatory Standards for Technology & SW Practice (2013-2014) p.1
ASWB Technology Task Force: Conceptual Questions

- What we mean by relationship—Has electronic services changed how we view relationship?
- Who we serve—Who has access to internet and electronic services?
- How we serve—What’s appropriate & what is not?
- Boundary issues- Elastic boundaries between client and social worker
- Informed consent—What does this mean in an electronic environment?

Standards for Technology

- Practitioner Competence & Compliance with Ethical Standards
- Informed Consent
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Boundaries, Dual Relationships and Conflicts of Interest
- Records and Documentation
- Collegial Relationships
- Social Work Practice Across Jurisdictional Boundaries

Competence & Compliance

- Engage in appropriate education, training, supervision
- Use professional judgment; review relevant literature
- Awareness of cultural differences
- Awareness of communication challenges
- Jurisdiction in which therapist is regulated and in which the client is located.
- Review yourself online & correct inaccuracies

Informed Consent

· Obtain informed consent; assess clients capacity to provide informed consent
· Develop policies and inform about benefits and risks
· Verify identity and location of clients.
· Develop and disclose to clients policies on the use of internet-based search engines to gather information; document.
· Continually assess client’s suitability & capacity for online & remote services.
· Provide clear and accessible information about services on your website.

(e) Social Workers who provide services via electronic media (such as computer, telephone, radio, and television) should inform recipients of the limitations and risks associated with services.

(f) Social Workers should obtain clients’ informed consent before audiotaping or videotaping clients or permitting observation of services to clients by a third party.

Informed Consent/Professional Websites

- Professional profile and contact information
- Terms of use, privacy policy and informed consent
- Crisis Intervention
- Risk of interruption in services
- Consumer information (license #, governmental regulatory body’s name, address, number, email and website)

Privacy & Confidentiality

- Inform clients of risks
- Use proper safeguards (encryption, firewalls, password protections)
- Both within your jurisdiction and within the jurisdiction of the client
- Client consent when using search engines to gather data
- Inform family, couple, and group clients that MSW cannot guarantee that all participants will honor such an agreement.
- Inform of limited protection

Boundaries, Dual Relationships, & Conflicts of Interest

- Avoid developing dual or multiple relationships with clients
- Avoid conflicts of interest
- Communicate professionally and only with client’s consent
- Review policies on electronic communication
- Avoid posting personal information on professional websites
- Avoid posting identifying or confidential information about clients on professional websites.

Boundaries, Dual Relationships, & Conflicts of Interest

- Refrain from soliciting digital or online testimonials from clients or former clients
- Refrain from accepting ‘friend” or contact or blog response request from clients
- Refrain from providing service to a person with whom a MSW has a personal relationship.

Dual Relationships

- Practitioners discuss with clients the expected boundaries and expectations about forming relationships online. Practitioners inform clients that any request for "friendship," business contacts, direct or @replies, blog responses or requests for a blog response within social media sites will be ignored to preserve the integrity of the therapeutic relationship and protect confidentiality. If the client has not been formally informed of these boundaries prior to the practitioner receiving the request, the practitioner will ignore the request via the social media site and explain why in subsequent interaction with the client.

http://onlinetherapyinstitute.com/ethical-training
Records & Documentation

- Develop policies on sharing, retention and storage of electronic data
- Document all contacts and services provided
- Inform clients of document back up

Collegial Relationships

- Avoid making derogatory or defamatory comments
- Do not disclose private, confidential, or sensitive information about work or colleagues.
- Correct or remove inaccurate or offensive information
- Take appropriate action if you believe a colleague is behaving unethically

Electronic Practice Across Jurisdictional Boundaries

- Comply with the laws and regulations that govern electronic social work services within the jurisdictions in which the social worker is located and in which the client is located.

Ethical Standards as Guides

- Responsibilities to Clients
- Responsibilities to Colleagues
- Responsibilities in Practice Settings
- Responsibilities to the Social Work Profession
- Responsibilities to the Broader Society

Ethical Decision Making: Four Basic Rules

- Be smart and proactive
- Leave evidence of competence
- Know your limitations
- Remember who you belong to

- You have the responsibility to place the ethics and values of the profession, and the welfare of your clients, above your personal needs.

Case Example (1)

- MSW faculty recognize that students are frequently engaged with social media. It comes to one of the faculty member’s attention that the Masters cohorts have started “Group Pages” for each of the individual cohorts. This issue comes up in supervision one day, when the faculty supervisor is informed that “When I asked the cohort on Facebook about this client....” The faculty supervisor then asked the student more information about this page, finding out that they use it to ask program questions, questions about course work, training opportunities, to connect socially, and to sometimes ask case questions. The student says that it is a private group for the MSW cohort and that she is certain that the privacy settings have been looked into.
Jan is a licensed clinical social worker practicing in a small community. She has made it a routine part of her practice to discuss with clients the likelihood of them seeing each other outside of therapy around town. Over the weekend, Jan was catching up with her friends’ posting on Facebook when she sees a post on her Facebook homepage that her friend Alicia is tagged in. To her surprise, it is a post of some pictures of Alicia at a party and one of her clients is tagged in the album. Jan not only can see the pictures but also anything that Alicia has commented on, and her interactions with other Facebook friends connected to the Facebook post. Jan is shocked to see that her client, who recently left an abusive relationship appears to be with her former intimate partner in the pictures. Being concerned for her client’s safety, and now having the partner’s name, Jan goes to the search engine and looks up the individual online. After much searching she is able to find several stories about arrests due to violent behavior. Jan decides that in the next session she will try to get her client to disclose that she is back in the relationship so they can discuss her safety.
Dr. C. is an LISW-CP and has been providing therapeutic services for over 20 years. After speaking with a colleague who provides e-therapy, Dr. C. thinks this is a profound way to help clients in rural S.C. Dr. C. updates his website to include the offerings of email, text-based, and video conferencing therapeutic services. Dr. C. provides his Gmail account information, his business cell phone number, and his Skype username. His advertisements highlight his 20 years of experience and includes access to his standard informed consent form online, which will allow clients to review and sign digitally. Quickly, Dr. C had 15 new clients seeking a range of different e-therapy services, several of which live in neighboring states and one from Canada who wants help with issues Dr. C. specializes in.
Steps to Consider

- Critical Thinking applied to relationships & social media
- Identify Code of Ethics and Standards that apply
- Consider what other mental health professionals say about the issue
- Question colleagues on how they manage this issue
- Review the literature in the field
- Make sure you are in compliance with program, laws, standards and ethics

Campbell, Sallie (2017). “Ethical Responsibility in Weighing Social Media”