

Social Media and Professional Conduct: Ethical Considerations

Purpose of Study

In what is considered “the digital age,” there has been an increased use of social media outlets. These various outlets include both private and professional users and range from Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and outlets such as LinkedIn and YouTube. Many professional organizations have explicitly addressed what is to be considered appropriate use of these outlets, even including specific guidelines for those in their respective professions on how to utilize and behave on such social media outlets.

The BACB has not released specific guidelines regarding BCBA's and their use of social media. With the growing daily use of these outlets, though proper online conduct may seem intuitive, it is important to remind practitioners of appropriate sharing on such public avenues.

The overlap of professional and personal interactions is a concern to be considered in posting and interactions on social media outlets. Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Johnson (2013) discuss that despite how private a social outlet may appear or be set to be the internet is a public venue and clients, prospective employers, and academia all have potential access to the information.

To Be Considered

Due to the inevitable overlap of personal and professional lives in the world of social media and networking, Kimball and Kim (2013) suggest using some questions as guidelines before posting information online.

What information do you want to share?

Why do you want to share this information?

Who needs to see this information?

Where do you want to share this information?

How does your organization and other organizations' code of ethics guidelines guide the sharing of this information?

Another concept to consider is whether or not to include clients in your social networks. If such a relationship is established, steps should be taken to ensure the client understands the difference in the personal and professional relationships that are present. Due to the complexity of this type of interaction, it would seem to be best not to include clients in a social network community that is not clearly defined as being professional.

BACB Guidelines for Responsible Conduct 4th Edition

9.0 The Behavior Analyst's Ethical Responsibility to Society.

The behavior analyst promotes the general welfare of society through the application of the principles of behavior.

9.01 Promotion in Society.

The behavior analyst should promote the application of behavior principles in society by presenting a behavioral alternative to other procedures or methods.

9.03 Public Statements.

- (a) Behavior analysts comply with these Guidelines in public statements relating to their professional services, products, or publications or to the field of behavior analysis.
- (b) Public statements include but are not limited to paid or unpaid advertising, brochures, printed matter, directory listings, personal resumes or curriculum vitae, interviews or comments for use in media, statements in legal proceedings, lectures and public oral presentations, and published materials.

10.02 Using Confidential Information for Didactic or Instructive Purposes.

- (a) Behavior analysts do not disclose in their writings, lectures, or other public media, confidential, personally identifiable information concerning their individual or organizational clients, students, research participants, or other recipients of their services that they obtained during the course of their work, unless the person or organization has consented in writing or unless there is other ethical or legal authorization for doing so.
- (b) Ordinarily, in such scientific and professional presentations, behavior analysts disguise confidential information concerning such persons or organizations so that they are not individually identifiable to others and so that discussions do not cause harm to identifiable participants.

Social Media

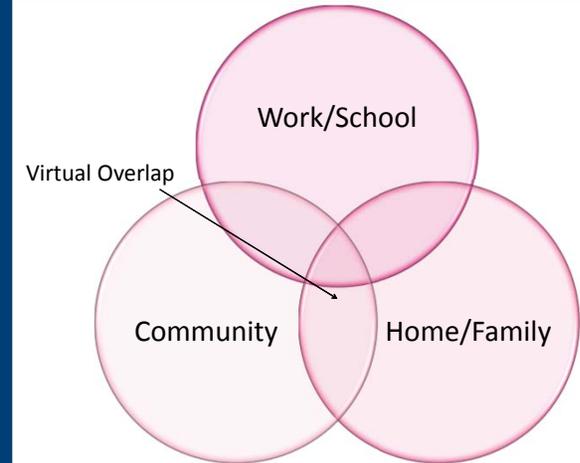


Figure 1: How social media intersects with professional and personal connections

e-Professionalism

Kaczmarczyk et al (2013) said, “E-professionalism is defined as the attitudes and behaviors that reflect traditional professionalism paradigms but are manifested through digital media.”

Currently, primarily medical professions and the American Bar Association have very specific guidelines regarding online information sharing. Within these guidelines, there are some very familiar ethical statements that are repeated. Browning (2013) talks of a paradigm shift involved in being a professional with legal and ethical boundaries and being involved in social media. He discusses the fact that social media is not only being used on a personal level, but also being used as a marketing tool, and emphasizes the importance of not crossing legal and ethical boundaries in advertisement in addition to professional opinions and advice being shared.

Issues surrounding sharing on social media has even reached the Supreme Court with issues regarding the First Amendment being taken in to consideration regarding what individuals share on a “private” social media site.

Various articles have made sure to emphasize that the same guidelines regarding confidentiality and HIPPA should be taken in to consideration before posting any type of information on a social media.