Reach Out and Shrink Someone: Technology and Ethics

Bibliography at end of Section C
Information from Social Networking

Therapist Twitter has been working with Laura on the early stages of her sobriety. He was concerned because Patient Laura expressed a desire to break her sobriety in the last few sessions. Patient Laura failed to show up for her session yesterday and also cancelled her session last week. When she failed to return Therapist Hashtag’s calls, texts, and emails, he decided to view Laura’s social networking site where Laura posted pictures of herself with a beer bottle to her mouth and discussed her depression. What should Therapist Hashtag do with this information considering Joan is not responding to the therapist?

Information from Social Networking

Informed Consent

- What was discussed during formal informed consent process?
- The best methods to discuss internet searches:
  - Give a full explanation of online policies in the informed consent
Information from Social Networking

Online Information
Online patient information may not be current and accurate information
- Do not rely solely on social media to assess a patient
  - Sobriety; mental health; diagnosis
- Therapists are not "private investigators"

Who uses the internet?
Research and Statistics
Webb and Widseth, 2012

The internet means…
“the erosion of aloneness.”

The Online World
Lennin and Scott, 2014

“Users are communicating in their virtual underwear with few inhibitions.”

David Rothblum, 2006
IEEE Security and Privacy Conference
The Online World
Lannin & Scott, 2014

- **Facebook**
  - 901 million monthly active users
  - 527 million log on daily
  - 60% medical schools report unprofessional online postings
    - Breached confidentiality
    - Depiction of intoxication
    - Sexually suggestive material
- **Twitter** – 555 billion registered users
Percent HR recruiters using these sites to research potential job applicants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search engines</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networking sites</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>News sharing sites (e.g., Twitter)</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online forums and communities</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual world sites</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web sites that aggregate personal information</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online gaming sites</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional background checking services</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classifieds and auction sites</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Telepsychology Challenges
Asay & Lal, 2014

Use of search engines and privacy
- Googling has switched to searching social networks
- Assumptions of privacy are mistaken

Acquisition of personal information
- Decreased privacy
  - Therapist, patient, student, supervisor
**Telepsychology Challenges**  
*Asay & Lal, 2014*

*The demise of “intentionality”*
- Privacy is a thing of the past
- *Involuntary online disclosures:*
  - Political contributions
  - Home address
  - Family structure
- *Facebook and Linkedin*
  - Suggest “people you may know…”

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**Searching the Internet**  
*Lehavot, Barnett & Powers, 2011*

*Research – 302 Psychology Grad Students*

*Student therapists reported:*
- **7%** had patients get information about them online
- **27%** had sought information about patients online
- Many reported missing an opportunity to explore “trust” issues further with patient
- Should have gotten informed consent to search
Searching the Internet
Lehavot, Barnett & Powers, 2011

Research – 302 Psychology Grad Students
Student therapists reported:
• Sought information on patients to “establish the truth”
• Failed to ask permission (more later)
• Failed to have “informed consent” for searching
• Many reported:
  – “I wouldn’t do it again”
  – “It was unhelpful and inconclusive”
  – Some reported it damaged the therapy

Searching the Internet
Lehavot, Barnett & Powers, 2011, p. 165

Research – 302 Psychology Grad Students
Student therapists reported:
• Missed an opportunity to work collaboratively
• “Accessing client information without their permission is a behavior that holds the potential to result in harm…”
• When done collaboratively as part of the treatment plan, it can be very beneficial to the psychotherapeutic process.
Searching the Internet
Lehavot, Barnett & Powers, 2011

Research – 302 Psychology Grad Students

• **33%** had Facebook profile
  – **6%** were “not sure” who had access
  – **60%** granted access to friends only
  – **34%** had no restrictions

• **3%** posted pictures
• **6%** posted personal information they did “not want classmates to see”
• **11-13%** posted pictures or personal information they “did not want faculty to see”
• **29-37%** posted pictures and personal information they “did not want patients to see”
Cybersecurity

A Two-Way Street

- Use encrypted data transmission
- Password protected storage
- Firewall techniques
- Adequate confidentiality policy for both sender and receiver of information
- Avoid leaving voicemail
  - If necessary, do not reveal patient information in message

Internet

Searching Internet for Client Information

- Could violate client privacy
- **Get consent from client first**
- Internet search policies are made clear in advance
Searching Internet for Client Information

- Could violate trust and integrity
- Should only be done in emergencies
  - Concern about client safety
- Information online not always current or truthful

Dr. Hashtag’s Internet Disaster

Dr. Hashtag finally hired a technology grad student to set up his computer in order to start doing online therapy. With much work, he secured six new patients including Adam, a fragile, shy ballet dancer. It took Adam several months to get comfortable enough to start to discuss the primary reason he wanted to begin therapy. He had never discussed his “secrets” with anyone.
Potential Internet Disasters

Adam had barely begun to discuss his “secret” when he began sobbing and having a panic attack such that he could not continue. It was at that moment that Dr. Hashtag’s computer system crashed and went offline. It took Dr. Hashtag several hours to find a technician from the paper yellow pages who could make an emergency visit. He was horrified to discover that all his office information had disappeared! He was unable to find any billing or personal information for any of his patients, including Adam.

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Potential Internet Disasters

He also lost the presentation he was about to give at the annual convention, all his contacts, and current and past grades for all the doctoral students he was teaching. The worst was yet to come. The computer specialist told him his backup system was whiped out also. He wanted to contact Adam desperately but Adam only had a cell phone that was unlisted. In fact, Dr. Hashtag couldn’t recall in which city Adam was living. When he consulted with his risk management carrier, they were not happy with Dr. Hashtag’s lack of professionalism.

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Internet Issues
Pope & Vasquez, 2011

Concerns When Using Computer Technology

• **Who has access to computer**
  – *Is it left on after work or weekends*
  – *Password protection and encryption*

• **Protect contacts**
  – *Used by nefarious predators*

• **Good antivirus program**

Recommendations When Using Computer Technology

• **Ensure the accurate identifications of the client**
• **Complete standard intakes**
• **Get emergency contact information**
• **Confirm client is an adult**
  • *Minors cannot give consent for telehealth services*
Internet Issues

Recommendations When Using Computer Technology

- Ensure electronic confidentiality
  - Encryption, firewalls, and other means for blocking unauthorized computer access.
- Describe to client limitations of telepsychology
- Is client’s presentation appropriate for this modality

Internet Issues

Recommendations When Using Computer Technology

- Clarify emergency procedures
  - Other than email or text in case internet is down
  - Especially in cases of danger to self or other
  - What are the Tarasoff procedures in the client’s state
- Awareness of cultural and diversity influences
**Protocol for Client Telehealth**

Personal Communication, M. Maheu, 4/13/13

**Appropriateness for Client Telehealth**

- Client capability to use technology
- Insufficient camera resolution
- Environmental problems
  - Adequacy of room lighting and microphone placement

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**Cultural Competence**

Myers et al., 2012

**Internet as Cultural Competence**

- Internet “Generation Gap”
- “Bilingual”
  - Verbal and digital communication
- Patients are extremely familiar with technology
- Trainees often more savvy than supervisors!!!
- Supervisors need to gain competence
Use of Computers
Sturm, 2012; Heinlen & Welfel, 2001

Precautions for computerized records
• Update virus protection
• Do not store identifiable data on vulnerable items:
  – Tablets
  – Phones
  – Netbooks

Security with Client Information
Personal Communication, M. Maheu, 4/13/13

• Precautions for computerized records
• Hackers can find copies of email
• Recipients' laptops or mobile devices
• All those to whom the messages were forwarded
Security with Client Information
Personal Communication, M. Maheu, 4/13/13

Precautions for computerized records
• Be aware of disclosure of client information
• Ask client to confirm his or her identity
• Avoid using the ‘Reply-to-all’ prompt

Consultation Over Internet
Fisher, 2017

Online Consultation
• Clarify this is a professional activity
• Only should be done within boundaries of competence
  – State nature and limitations of expertise
• Online consultation should be done formally
• Informal online consultation is not adequate
  – Anyone can give advice that is not sound
Consultation Over Internet  
Fisher, 2017

Online Consultation
• Document formal consultation
• Clarify confidentiality and security procedures
• Protect client identity
• Comments on listserv are public statements

Practice Vignette

Psychotherapist asks for online consultation
“I am working with an 8 year old girl who attends 2nd grade at La Vista Elementary. She was physically abused by her lawyer father from age 2-6 and her mother is deceased. Resulting problems include enuresis, night terrors and poor grades due to lack of concentration…”

The listserv posting went on to ask questions about the best treatment methods.
Practice Vignette

Ethical issues

• Confidentiality breach (TMI)
• Consultation is dynamic process
• Consultation is professional activity
  – Questions and issues emerge in discussion
  – Should not be public
  – Inadequate information to form opinions

Internet

“Digital Natives”

Born after 1960

Definition: Digital Natives are people who have grown up in the digital world using technology as a way to communicate, record, educate, and understand society.
Sum Up Question

What is a “digital native?”

**ANSWER:**

Sum Up Question

What is meant by an “internet generation gap?”

**ANSWER:**