PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING AND SOCIAL WORK ETHICS:

DESIGNING GUIDELINES FOR TRAINING

by

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Abstract

Social networking has created an online community that leads to new ethical challenges that have not yet been addressed by the social work profession. There is a current lack of education, training, supervision, and policy to guide professionals on the ethical navigation of social media. The purpose of this study was to gather information to design an outline for a training program to assist social work professionals in decision making when their personal use of social networking leads to ethical dilemmas. A participatory action research approach was utilized. A sample size of 11 focus group members was utilized. Two semi-structured focus group were used to design this training outline. Data was gathered through transcripts of the focus groups, a demographic questionnaire, and a field journal. Qualitative data analysis was used. Findings from this study fall under six themes; professional boundaries, unintended disclosure, security and privacy, professional use of social media, policy and, training and education. Participants agreed that increased education and attention to policy will provide social work professionals with the tools and knowledge necessary to make informed decisions when confronted with potential ethical challenges in their personal use of social networking. There is some existing literature regarding social networking and behavioral health ethics and even less literature specific to social work ethics. This study attempted to add to the literature by engaging in an action research study that focused on the intersection of social work ethics and social workers' personal use of social networking.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to Dr. Vallery Coats. She convinced me that I could go further in my career than I allowed myself to believe. When I expressed doubt she challenged me to prove that my fears were founded. When I could not find anything to validate my fears she continued to nudge me until I grew in spite of myself. She helped me find light when I was only seeing the darkness. She is an inspiration to me, an asset to the field, and a blessing to humanity.

It is also dedicated to Laura Kittle. She reminded me that I made a difference. She was everything I wanted to be when I grew up as a social worker.

Lastly, I dedicate this study to my Yiayia. The sacrifices that she made to give her family everything that she could never have were beyond amazing. I believe that she is always watching me and I hope she is proud of what I have accomplished.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

A lack of consistency exists in how policies, rules, and regulations are written regarding the use of social media by social workers and other licensed behavioral health professionals (Mishna, Bogo, Root, Sawyer, & Khoury-Kassabri, 2012). Currently only 10 states have policies on social networking for behavioral health professionals (Kaplan, Wade, Conteh, & Martz, 2011). In the absence of sufficient policy or education, social work professionals are making their own judgment calls on how to navigate ethical decisions they encounter through their personal use of social networking sites (Mishna et al., 2012). This lack of guidance in informed decision-making could potentially lead to repercussions for professionals as well as their clients. Social workers need to be educated regarding how to safeguard themselves and their clients against boundary crossing or ethical violations as they relate to the use of Facebook and other social networking sites. This may help social workers avoid repercussions that could adversely impact themselves or their clients.

Social work has historically recognized the cultural implications of working within different types of communities in social work ethics (Miller, Villanueva, Tonigan, & Cuzmar, 2007). There are ethical challenges presented by the personal use of social networking and there is little being done by governing bodies in the social work profession to help provide guidance. Professionals are being sanctioned by agencies and

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licensing entities for their online behaviors, even in the absence of policy (Arizona State Board of Behavioral Health Examiners [AZBBHE], 2014). The majority of participants in numerous studies have indicated they would like guidance regarding how to handle ethical challenges that arise when personal social networking and professional boundaries intersect (Mishna et al., 2012). Some of the ethical challenges include unintended disclosures, dual or multiple relationships, boundary issues, and confidentiality concerns.

Many behavioral health professionals use social networking in both their personal and professional lives. Lehavot, Barnett, and Powers (2010) studied graduate psychology student use of social networking and found that 81% of respondents maintained a personal profile on a social networking site. Interestingly, 21% did not use privacy settings and reported that their profiles were open to public view. However, 37% shared personal information on their profiles that they would not want a client to know. This finding is interesting because it illustrates a potential lack of forethought on the part of students since there is a 16% difference between those who use privacy settings and those who post information that they would not want a client to know about them. This lack of forethought leaves 16% of the students vulnerable to unintended self-disclosure of information they would not want a client to know.

Lehavot (2009) applied the APA Code of Ethics to illustrate further implications for students who post personal information online. Lehavot (2009) stated that although little of the APA Code of Ethics can be applied directly to issues around social media to find guidance, the principles underlying the ethical codes can be applied. The underlying ethical principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, fidelity, justice and autonomy can be applied to guide decisions made with or about social media by (Lehavot, 2009). Not only

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can clients access online information, but graduate school faculty and potential employers can view these personal details posted online as well. This leads to many ethical questions, not only questions about those who are posting personal information but also about those who are seeking it. Issues of privacy, informed consent, boundaries and autonomy arise when information about a student's personal life is sought and used to make decisions impacting the student's professional life (Lehavot, 2009). Students are not the only ones who have their online presence examined and used to make decisions about their future (Vatamanescu & Constantin, 2015; Greenwood, 2009). Job seekers are also finding that what employers find on their social media profiles could be used for and against them in their job seeking efforts (Greenwood, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The use of social networking has resulted in the development of a new community that has its own ethical challenges and there are no clear guidelines to navigate these challenges (Mishna et al., 2012). Many professionals engaging in social networking see it as an area for potential problems and are unclear regarding the ethics involved with social networking (Kaplan et al., 2011). A simple search of one state licensing board's website shows that since 2010, Facebook has been mentioned in five ethical violations resulting in sanctions; two of these professional licenses were suspended or revoked (AZBBHE, 2014). Each of the professionals sanctioned described a lack of knowledge and understanding of social networking and professional ethics. Ethical violations of these three cases differ, but all include the use of social networking and all of them show how communication on Facebook that began innocently became more ethically questionable as communication progressed.

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The aforementioned cases also illustrate that professionals were not clear on transparency and boundary issues regarding social networking and were entering an ethical grey area. O. Zur (2011) also argued professionals who engage in social networking frequently encounter self-disclosure, transparency and boundary issues. O. Zur (2012) discussed the confusion among professionals regarding how to deal with these challenges, the lack of ethical guidelines by professional associations and licensing boards, the need for guidelines and the desire of professionals to have such guidelines. Mishna et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative study of 15 social workers and found that respondents were concerned with four predominant themes in regards to social networking. Three of these themes included concerns about opening a "Pandora's Box", entering an "ethical grey zone", and forming "permeable boundaries" (Mishna et al., 2012, p. 277). Mishna et al., (2012) also found that respondents overwhelmingly expressed a desire for guidance from agencies, state regulatory boards and National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics regarding social networking ethics.

Numerous articles about behavioral health ethics as they relate to social networking found a gap in literature about the lack of attention given to the ethical challenges of social networking by the behavioral health professional gatekeepers (Mishna et. al., 2012; Kays, 2011; Kimball & Kim, 2013; O. Zur, 2012). The existing literature and the guidelines are more focused on the use of technology in practice with clients and not on the personal use of social media (Kimball & Kim, 2013). Even the guidelines set forth by the National Association of Social Workers examine how to use technology while engaging in social work practice but make no mention of how to apply

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ethical principles to personal use of social media (NASW, 2008). Social workers and other behavioral health professionals who try to navigate personal use of social media alone are already at a disadvantage when it comes to technology due to the lack of formal training on computer technology and social work practice

Students and behavioral health professionals recognize that they are lacking information and knowledge about how to manage social networking sites and express confusion about where to go to learn the ethical and clinical implications of social networking (Lehavot et al., 2010). Guidelines formulated by some agencies and licensing boards "conflict or are incompatible with the ways therapists use technology" (O. Zur, 2012, p. 2). Students and professionals frequently make poor choices in the attempts to manage social networking without education, training, or guidance (AZBHHE, 2014; Gabbard, Kassaw, & Perez-Garcia, 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010). Some of these poor choices include putting information on social media that leads to unintended disclosure, communicating with clients on social media sites, accepting friend requests from clients on social media sites, and breaching confidentiality on social media sites. These poor choices are leading to clinical and professional implications for both clients and for professionals.

These implications could be avoided if professionals received better education, training and guidance (Gabbard et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010). Professionals expressed a desire for guidance on navigating social networking with regards to ethical and professional decision-making. Educators are aware of the problems presented by social networking, yet they continue to be hesitant to formally address these ethical challenges (Gabbard et al., 2011). Gabbard et al. (2011) found that younger professionals

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showed a strong desire to have guidelines from their professional association. Mishna et al. (2012) also supported the argument that there is a desire for agency policies and professional association guidelines regarding social networking. Participants in that study also reported that existing agency policies varied greatly between agencies and were not always sufficiently addressing ethical challenges. Participants reported the need to make decisions about whether or not complying with agency policies is the best ethical decision.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gather information that would be used to design an outline of a training program for social workers who engage in personal use of social networking. The online community presents another type of community, within which individuals need to learn to exist and navigate. The online community has its own culture and presents a new forum, which requires consideration for defining ethical parameters for social workers and other behavioral health professionals (Young, 2009). This study focused on the social workers' personal use of social networking and applicable ethical principles and potential ethical dilemmas this may create. Professional use of social networking is also a fast growing issue in social work and other helping professions. Professional use of social networking also warrants discussion of boundaries, ethical dilemmas, and application of ethical code (NASW, 2008). However, professional use of social networking was largely excluded from this study except as how participants related it to their personal use. The focus of this study remained solely on ethical dilemmas and application of ethical code as they arose in the personal use of social networking among

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professional social workers. Social networking provides another type of community, with a new form of cultural implications, for which ethics need to be considered and defined.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may be significant for social workers who may encounter clients on the Internet. It may also provide information for employers and educators who are seeking guidance on how to teach others about ethical use of social media (Ginory, Sabatier, & Eth, 2012). The participants in this study and those in the field who read this study would have access to more information about the challenges of personal use of social networking for professional social workers. This will provide additional knowledge to the social work field about the personal use of social networking and professional ethics. This knowledge can be used to continue to develop theory and best practices for social workers who engage in the personal use of social networking.

Participants shared in ownership of the training program information that was designed as a result of their participation. Participants were encouraged to take the information and use it to design a training program they can take into their work places and implement in their own environments. Policies, rules, and regulations that do exist vary greatly and do not always practically cover the ways in which professionals utilize technology and are not designed to address the ever-changing nature of technology (Mishna et al., 2012). This can result in continued confusion and professionals still attempting to navigate on their own as they determine which policies or rules to comply with or how to work around policies that do not make sense (Mishna et al., 2012; O. Zur, 2012). This study adds to the knowledge base that guide policies, rules, and regulations since participants discussed the practical ways in which they utilize social media and

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what they feel would be relevant in a training program. Participants, who were all professionals in the field could provide information to future social workers and social work supervisors regarding what could be included in training programs in an effort to alleviate confusion in the personal use of social media.

Social work students and professionals engage in personal use of social networking with a lack of judicious decision-making about their online behaviors. This is unintentionally putting their professional and academic lives in jeopardy. (Gabbard et al., 2011; Judd & Johnston, 2012; Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, & Chang, 2010). There is also evidence that agencies and organizations have been slow to respond to the issue (Gabbard et al., 2011; Taylor, et al., 2010). There are few policies, educational programs, training programs, or supervision opportunities that assist students and professionals seeking to make ethical decisions in regards to their use of social networking.

Experts in the field of digital ethics have called for policy and education to guide professionals through their use of social networking (Kolmes, 2009a; Young, 2009; O. Zur, 2012). This research study was designed to begin find some guidance for professionals on their personal use of social media. The findings in this action research study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in a way that will answer the calls for guidance for professionals.

Research Design

In this action research study, data was gathered through qualitative research methods, including a focus group, a questionnaire, and a reflective field journal. A recruitment letter was drafted to invite social workers who are currently working in the field. Eligible participants were individuals currently employed in the social work

profession. The letter included an introduction of the study, contact information for the researcher, and a brief statement about the problem. This letter was given to a few members of the researcher's professional network and they were requested to invite other members of their own professional networks. Two focus groups of four to six members were formed from participants who met the eligibility requirements. These eligible focus group participants received an informed consent form, which described the risks and potential benefits to participating in this study and a confidentiality statement. They were also informed regarding time and location of the focus group meetings.

Two focus groups each met one time. Focus group members each completed a demographic questionnaire. Notes were taken in a field journal for each focus group. During the focus group meetings, participants answered open-ended questions and discussed what needed to be included in a training intervention regarding professional ethics and how the topics developed can be applied while engaging in personal use of social networking sites. These groups also generated information to design a plan for what they believed needs to be included in this training.

One focus group meeting was held in a local community room and was recorded. The other focus group meeting was held in a secure online conference room. These two focus groups were each scheduled for a two-hour time period. Participants discussed a number of topics, including: how professionals see personal and professional use of social networking intersecting, ethical issues that arise from the personal use of social networking, what should be included in a training on professional ethics and personal use of social networking, and how a training can be constantly adapted to remain up to date with the current technology. The second half of these two focus groups took the ideas

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from the first half, collaboratively analyzed them, assessed them, and attempted to organize them into information for a plan for a training. This resulted in information, which could be used for the outline of a training. Each participant has equal ownership of the training material.

Data were further organized and categorized, to find themes that were not noticed while in the focus groups. All data were coded after being organized into categories or themes. All analysis and outcomes were shared with participants via email. Future cycles of this project will include designing the actual training and presenting the data to professionals through implementation of the training that was produced as a result of findings from this project.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The problem studied was the very little ethical guidance to assist social workers engaging in personal use of social networking. The purpose for this project was to provide information that can be used to design an outline of a training program for social workers who engage in personal use of social networking. Therefore, research questions needed to address how professionals are using social networking, what problems they are encountering, what consequences that are facing, and what can be done to address these issues. The research questions included:

1. How do professionals perceive their ethical responsibilities as they relate to their personal use of social networking sites?

2. What ethical challenges do professionals need to anticipate facing and be prepared to navigate?

3.   What can be done to help professionals ethically navigate their person use of social networking?

By reviewing the literature, themes, subthemes and research questions can be identified. (Craig, 2009). The first research question in this study was about the overall use of social networking by social work professionals and how those professionals perceive their ethical responsibilities surrounding that use.   There are two research sub-questions that fit in this category.

1. How do professionals perceive their ethical responsibilities as they relate to their personal use of social networking sites?

a. How are social workers using social networking?

b. How do social workers apply social work ethics to their personal use of social networking?

The second question involved the ethical challenges that arise from the personal use of social networking among behavioral health professionals. There are three related topics under this question: unintended disclosures, boundary crossing, dual relationships, and small community challenges. The sub-questions that emerged from this question are listed below the related research question.

2. What ethical challenges do professionals need to anticipate facing and be prepared to navigate?

a. What ethical challenges have social workers encountered while engaging in social networking?

b. What ethical challenges can social workers predict encountering when thinking of their own personal use of social networking?

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The last research question related to interventions developed to inform and prepare professionals to ethically navigate their personal use of social networking sites. There are two types of interventions that could assist professionals: policy and education. The research sub-question that emerged from this research question are listed below the related research question.

3. What can be done to help professionals ethically navigate their person use of social networking?

    a.   What needs to be included in a training program to help professionals to learn to ethically navigate their personal use of social networking?

The goal of this study was to answer the aforementioned research questions and use that information to design an intervention that can be implemented to help guide professionals through ethical decision-making regarding their personal use of social networking. This study could help to minimize consequences to professionals and clients by providing professionals with information about what ethical challenges can arise, what consequences can result and how to engage in ethical decision-making in the otherwise uncharted territory on the online community. Without guidance, professionals are forced to guess how to navigate online activities and are likely to make mistakes that result in negative consequences. Professionals and clients could benefit from this project since increased education and preparedness among professionals would decrease the likelihood of ethical mistakes and confusing boundary-crossing events.

Assumptions and Limitations

There were several assumptions in this study. First, it was assumed that professionals engage in personal use of social networking (Lehavot et al., 2010; Taylor,

et al., 2010). It was assumed that professionals will be interested in exploring ways in which they can apply ethical principles to their personal use of social networking since other studies have indicated this professional interest (Gabbard et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010; Mishna et al., 2012). It was assumed that professionals will support training as one way to prepare professionals to apply ethical principles to their personal use of social networking (Gabbard et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010; Mishna et al., 2012;). It was also assumed that participants will be truthful with their statements in the focus group. Another assumption was that action research would lead to important findings that could be useful to social workers. The final assumption was that the project would result in an outline for a training program.

There were several limitations in this study. Since participants consented to participate in a focus group in a large metropolitan area, it was likely that some participants may have to drive more than an hour; this could have been a limitation. Furthermore, committing to involvement in a focus group that was two hours long could have been a limitation because it could have limited the number of people willing to participate. The online focus group had an additional limitation of not having in-person communication. Another limitation was that only two focus groups were conducted, and that each was conducted in a different milieu. These limitations were considered and choices were made based on what was most convenient for more participants. The ability to draw conclusions based on the data was limited because of the small number of participants. Another limitation was the lack of extensive literature that already existed on this topic.

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Definition of Terms

Confidentiality. The legal and ethical concept that promotes the sharing of client information only with the expressed and written consent of the client (Garthwait, 2012).

Digital Divide. This describes the gap between those who have access to technology and those who speak the digital language and those who do not have access to or a native understanding about the digital world (Howland, 1998).

Digital Ethics. The refers to the impact of computer and information technology on society, including ethical concerns regarding the Internet and social media (Capurro, 2011).

Digital Natives. These are individuals who were born into a digital world that included widespread use of the Internet, these individuals do not know a life without Internet technology and speak the language of Internet technology (Prensky, 2001)

Dual Relationship. A social worker and a client having both a professional and personal relationship. Discouraged and often labeled as unethical based on the power differential that exists in the therapeutic relationship (Garthwait, 2012).

NASW Social Work Code of Ethics. Publication by the National Association of Social Workers that is designed to guide social workers' ethical conduct and decision-making. Includes core social work values and ethical principles (Garthwait, 2012).

Social Networking. Computer networks that link people, organizations, and knowledge (Wellman, 2001).

Social Media. This term describes an array of digital media that includes sites like YouTube, Myspace and Facebook (Fernando, 2007).

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Utilitarianism. The process of ethical decision-making that is influenced by what option will result in good outcomes for the most people rather than considering right and wrong (Cavalier, 2002, sect.1).

Expected Findings

There were numerous expected findings in this study. First, it was expected that participants would have thought about professional ethics and the impact of personal use of social networking. It was expected that participants would report having little prior education or training on ethics and how they relate to their personal use of social media. It was anticipated that participants would be aware of ethical dilemmas that they could potentially encounter while engaging in social networking and would learn more during these focus groups. It was also expected that participants would agree on what they believe should be included in a training program outline for social workers' who engage in personal use of social networking.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remainder of this study has four additional chapters. Chapter 2 contains a review of relevant literature that supports this study and identifies contributions to the field of social work and digital ethics. In Chapter 3, a review of the methodology used in the study is presented. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the data in the study. In Chapter 5, there is an overview of the study, a discussion of the results, implications of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

This literature review contains information that guided this study and justified the focus of this study as an appropriate academic topic. The theoretical foundation of the study is discussed in this chapter. Literature regarding current trends in use of social networking among behavioral health professionals includes the history, growth, and current use of social networking. An explanation and impact of the digital divide is discussed and applied to personal use of social networking among behavioral health professionals. The frequency in use of social networking, the application of privacy settings and the differences between public versus private and professional versus personal use is analyzed. The social work ethical codes and the importance of education on ethics is compared with the infrequent inclusion of digital ethics in educational and training programs and the limited response of the social work profession regarding digital ethics. Literature is synthesized and recommendations are outlined. Prior research studies are critiqued and gaps in literature are discussed.

Theoretical Orientation for the Study

There was a lack of theoretical perspective contained in the literature on the issue of social networking among behavioral health professionals. The theory of utilitarianism was applied to this ethical decision-making process. Utilitarianism can be summarized as making an ethical decision by weighing out the options and choosing the option that will result in greater good for most individuals who will be impacted by the decision (Reamer,

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2006). Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill developed utilitarianism before the turn of the 19th century (Cavalier, 2002). (Cavalier, 2002). Both theorists agreed that ethical decision-making should be influenced by what option will result in good outcomes for the most people rather than considering right and wrong. Mill referred to this greater good as the "The Greatest Happiness Principle" (Cavalier, 2002, sect. 2). Bentham referred to this pursuit of the greater good as "The Utility Principle" (Cavalier, 2002, sect.1). Many ethical decision-making models that social workers use are grounded in utilitarianism (Reamer, 2006). Social workers using social networking can use the utilitarian theory through a chosen decision-making framework to consider what will be most beneficial and the best decision for all who will be impacted.

This research study was designed to guide social workers through some of the ethical implications and issues that can arise when engaging in social networking. The type of action research used for this project was participatory action research. Since the nature of the subject matter was ethics, which are dependent on people's subjective experiences, the type of research was naturalistic inquiry rather than objective science (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). A major factor in this research project was the way in which social workers and other behavioral health professionals are being sanctioned by state licensing boards based on their decisions regarding the use of social media. These sanctions could indicate that political power is a factor in how social workers and other behavioral health professions need to consider ethical dilemmas regarding the use of social media.

The professionals sitting on licensing boards and making decisions regarding what is and is not considered unethical decision-making or behavior are typically older

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and may have knowledge of ethics, but not about technology and social media. This relates to the postmodern view of how knowledge is formulated and controlled. Participatory action research was the best form of inquiry for this project since a collaborative effort at improving the system and advancing knowledge were the key goals for this project. This study provided an opportunity for stakeholders who may have more experience with technology to collaborate with stakeholders that may have a more experience and deeper understanding of the supplication of social work code of ethics. The postmodern view includes taking into consideration diverse sets of attitudes and cultural differences, which was accomplished in this study by including participant with different knowledge and skill sets (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). All stakeholders involved in the project owned all knowledge generated during the study

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Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature
Specific to the Topic or Research Question

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Trends in Use of Social Networking among Behavioral Health Professionals

Social networking, in its current form, is only about ten years old. Prior to Myspace and Facebook, social networks existed in the form of chat rooms and live journals. These older social networking sites allowed people to use screen names that were able to hide the individual's true identity.   Social networking, as it exists today, not only identifies the user but also provides varying levels of personal information. This personal information can include, but is not limited to: date of birth, relationship status, place of employment, educational institutions attended, information about preferred leisure activities, and pictures of the individual with family and friends.

The opening of Myspace in 2003 started a new form of online community and communication. Facebook followed in 2006 as a private site for college students and an

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alternative to Myspace and its younger user audience. Two years after its introduction, Facebook surpassed Myspace in popularity. Facebook has grown immensely since its public introduction in 2006 and is currently the most popular social networking site (Mishna et al., 2012). The number of Facebook users on nearly doubled in a one-year period with nearly 500 million users in 2010 to over 900 million users in 2011 (Fowler, 2013). Facebook reported more than one billion users in 2012. Individuals over 50 made up the fastest growing population on Facebook between 2005-2010 (Bavonese, 2010). Facebook has also grown to offer more than a place to connect socially, it also has become an arena for marketing promotions, free business advertisement, and an avenue to advocate for political and social causes.

Facebook remains the most popular social networking site, although this could change as quickly as it did for Myspace shortly after Facebook was introduced. New social networking sites are being introduced all the time. There are currently many other popular social networking sites that include Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Facebook will be the social networking site that is the focus of this review since it continues to be the most widely used social networking site.

Digital divide among social workers and behavioral health professionals. The personal use of social networking has been increasing among social workers and other behavioral health professionals. However, the increases have not been equal among the different age groups. A. Zur and O. Zur, (2011a) discussed the differences in understanding of technology based on age. A. Zur and O. Zur (2011a) referred to this as the digital divide and explain that the digital divide explains the gap in understanding between two groups, which they refer to as digital immigrants and digital natives.

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A digital immigrant refers to an individual who grew up with no computers in the home and was not taught computer technology in school (A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011a). Digital immigrants were typically introduced to computer technology later in life and were not born into a world saturated by personal computer technology. There are three distinct categories of digital immigrants; avoiders, reluctant adopters, and enthusiasts (A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011a). Avoiders are those who do not use technology if there are other options to accomplish their tasks. Avoiders do not see the value in using technology, nor are they interested in learning about it. Reluctant adopters are those who are willing to engage in some limited use of technology and are not comfortable with technology use. Reluctant adopters only use technology when they find a specific beneficial use and they do not participate in social networking. Enthusiastic adopters are interested in the use of technology. They make efforts to learn about technology and to use it regularly. They are comfortable with technology, participate in social networking and seek ways to increase their comfort level with newer technologies. Enthusiastic adopters do not represent the majority of digital immigrants (A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011a).

A digital native refers to a person who was born into a world that was already immersed in technology (A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011a). A digital native does not know the world without daily computer use and without the Internet being used worldwide. There are also three distinct categories of digital natives; avoiders, minimalists, and enthusiastic participants. Avoiders are those who have very little, if any, interest in technology and do not use technology on a regular basis. Digital native avoiders differ significantly from digital immigrant avoiders. They do regularly use cell phone technology and engage in some use of Internet technology. Minimalists are those who use technology more

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regularly but only in a way that they believe to be necessary use. Minimalists are comfortable with technology. They do participate in social networking and web browsing but may only participate one time a day or every few days. Enthusiastic participants are those who love technology. They use technology multiple times a day, typically every time they have a chance. They expect immediate access to information and fast communication. Enthusiastic participants make up the overwhelming majority of digital natives (A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011a). The digital divide is not just divided by two separate age groups, but is also comprised of two distinct cultural belief systems.

Frequency of Social Networking Use Among Behavioral Health Professionals

   Frequency of social networking and privacy. Many behavioral health professionals have frequently participated in social networking. Their social networking activities often include both personal use and professional use of social networking. Lehavot et al. (2010) examined social networking use patterns of graduate psychology students and found that 81% of study participants engaged in personal use of social networking and had at least one personal profile account. Social networking sites do have privacy setting options; however, behavioral health professionals reported they did not always utilize these privacy settings. In one study, 21% of the participants reported that they did not utilize available privacy settings (Lehavot et al., 2010). Without the privacy settings, those respondents' profiles were open to public viewing. Out of the participants that were not using privacy settings, 37% reported sharing personal information on their social networking profiles that they would not want future clients or other professionals to view.

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Some findings illustrated a possible lack of forethought on the part of students who were not using privacy settings and were also posting online content that they would prefer their patients did not see (Lehavot et al., 2010). This lack of forethought seemed to leave a significant number of behavioral health students, and possibly behavioral health professionals, vulnerable to unintended self-disclosure which may cross the boundaries of professionalism. Lehavot (2009) discussed further implications for students posting personal information online. Online information can be viewed not only by clients, but potentially by future employers and graduate school admission committees. When social workers post information, educators or potential employers may see that information and that can influence their perception of the individual This poses some ethical questions for both the professional posting the information and also for the professionals who are seeking information about others online. Lehavot (2009) applied the APA Code of Ethics to examine issues of privacy, informed consent, boundaries, and autonomy. Educators or professionals must consider professional ethical codes when they seek information online about a student or a professional and then used to make decisions that impact their professional lives. This applies to the NASW code of ethics as well since ethical codes apply to the relationships between teacher and student and supervisor and supervisee. This violates informed consent if students and employees are not being informed that their online presence will be examined and used to evaluate them as professionals.

Social networking and the digital divide among professionals. A major factor that determined the frequency of use of social networking among behavioral health professionals was age (A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011a). Age differences of those participating

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in social networking may be one of the impacting factors explaining reasons why there is a current lag in education, training, and/or guidelines for professionals who do engage in social networking. Taylor et al. (2010) studied doctoral level psychology students and licensed psychologists to determine their social networking use patterns. Taylor et al. (2010) found that 77% of the study participants reported maintaining an account on at least one social networking site. Of those who maintained any account, 85% utilized privacy settings. These findings on the use of privacy settings were similar to what Lehavot et al. (2010) found. Another major finding from Taylor et al.'s (2010) study was in relation to age differences of professionals who did participate in social networking. Younger participants were significantly more likely to report engaging in social networking. Eighty-six percent of participants under the age of 30 reported that they do participate in social networking. Interestingly, not one of the participants over the age of 54 reported any use of social networking sites (Taylor et al., 2010). This finding was interesting because it illustrates the clear digital divide among behavioral health professionals.

There were clear differences in attitudes and beliefs among professionals about the need for intervention by professional associations. These differences were significant because they make clear that age difference has been a variable in attitudes and beliefs about the need for intervention (Taylor et al., 2010). In Taylor et al.'s (2010) study, participants were asked if they would like their professional associations to formulate guidelines or rules regarding social networking. While Taylor et al. (2010) indicated there was no consensus on the desire for professional association guidelines, there were differences in responses based on age.

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Older and more experienced participants were significantly less likely to respond in favor of professional association guidelines. Younger and less experienced participants were more likely to respond in a way that was in favor of professional association guidelines. Their responses also reflected a clear desire for help with navigating ethics in regards to their use of social networking. It does make sense that older professionals in the Taylor et al (2010) study showed less participation in social networking and that might be why they are less interested in professional association guidelines.

Power within the profession may also be a variable that impacted the infrequent inclusion of social networking in policy and training agendas. Older and more experienced professionals may be more likely to have held positions of power. They may have been more influential in decision making at the association and administrative levels. The behavioral health professions appear to be currently lacking in guidelines or policies regarding ethical use of social networking, even though in at least one study, younger professionals desire rules or guidelines. Collaboration between older and younger professionals may be one way to increase the number of guidelines or policies regarding the ethical use of social networking.

Professional Versus Personal and Public Versus Private Use of Social Media

This study focused on the personal use of social networking but mention should also be made of the growing professional use of social media in social work and the other behavioral health professions. Many professionals are using social networking to advertise and connect with consumers (Reardon, 2011; Taube & Kolmes, 2010). A personal social networking page is one that includes a person's family and friends

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(Kolmes, 2009a). A professional social networking page is one that includes access by a person's co-workers, colleagues, and consumers (Kolmes, 2009a). Some professionals maintain one personal page and one professional page (O. Zur & A. Zur, 2011b). Both use of personal and use of professional pages can lead to ethical dilemmas and unintended disclosures or boundary crossing (Kolmes, 2009a). Behnke (2008), Reamer (2013a, 2013b) and Childs and Martin (2012) agreed that this discussion of personal versus professional behavior online was unclear and can cross over, even when social networking is used with caution.

Public versus private online activity was another consideration when looking at the ethics of professionals who chose to engage in use of social media. This has been partly related to the use of privacy settings. However, privacy settings cannot guarantee who does and does not see the information a person has posted online; public versus private also refers to the understanding of the difference between what is appropriate to post, in the likelihood that privacy is breached. Some students and professionals were posting content online that is highly personal and viewable to a public audience, yet reported they were using privacy settings to safeguard against unintended disclosures (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). Other students and professionals reported that they do not believe that their profession's code of ethics applied to what they do when they are not acting in a professional capacity, which gave them less concern about personal online activities (Mukherjee & Clark, 2012). Young (2009) discussed the social work ethical standards as they related to private conduct, and argued that regardless of state laws on private conduct and professional identity, it was the ethical obligation of social workers to avoid private conduct that would negatively impact their role as a

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professional social worker. This standard on private conduct is important to remember when engaging in personal use of social media.

Education on The Code of Ethics for Social Workers

Social work has a formal Code of Ethics, which has been a vital part of social work training and education since the early 1900s (Reamer, 2012).   While this Code of Ethics does not define what to do for specific ethical dilemmas, it does provide a framework of guiding ethical principles. Education and training help social workers to understand the ethical code, how to apply the ethical principles and a variety of approaches to ethical decision-making (Reamer, 2012). Even with education on ethics, there is little consistency in the application of ethical principles among professionals (Pawlukewicz & Ondrus, 2013).

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting entity for social work programs, requires that social work education include formal training on the Social Work Code of Ethics and Social Work Values (CSWE, 2008). The topic of ethics is so important in social work education that it is listed as the first competency in the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. While CSWE does outline what competencies need to be included in social work education, they do not inform programs of how to cover these competencies. CSWE requires the following topics to be covered in accredited social work programs: social work values, social work ethics, relevant laws and regulations that impact social work practice on each level, ethical decision making frameworks, differences between personal and professional values, personal bias and professional judgment, roles and responsibilities of the social work profession, professional demeanor, use of technology, and use of supervision and consultation

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(CSWE, 2008). These topics are expected to be included in course work and supported in field education through field supervision. Reamer (2012) discussed essential ethical content in field education as including social work values, ethical dilemmas which arise as a result of conflicting social work values, ethical decision making models, and ethics risk management.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the leading national professional organization for social workers. Part of their mission includes providing training and education for social work professionals. NASW provides training opportunities on a variety of specific issues. A simple search of their training offerings does show that there is an online course that addresses ethical issues related to use of social media. This course covers some issues that relate to personal use of social networking, but is much more focused ethical issues that arise when using the Internet to provide services to clients. NASW and the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) published *NASW & ASWB Standard for Technology and Social Work Practice* (NASW, 2005). This publication does provide guidance for the use of technology as it relates to direct practice, but does not offer any mention of personal use of technology and how to solve ethical dilemmas that arise while engaging in technology use that is not related to direct practice, which renders them as less than helpful (Voshel & Wesala, 2015). A new version of the Standards is being drafted have yet to be released (ASWB, 2014). Discussions about this newer version have included social workers personal use of social media but since the Standards have not yet been published (Hymans, 2015), it is unclear what will be in the final publication.

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Educational ethics could be complicated by the more recent trend of online social work education combined with the rising use of social media. Some of the ethical challenges presented by online learning include an online record of personal disclosures or client information not properly disguised that was shared in the classroom and is at risk for security breaches (Reamer, 2013a). Many online instructors use social media sites in education to enhance connectivity and interaction among learners. However, online communications can be easily read by others and are open to misinterpretation (Fang, Mishna, Zhang, Van Wert, & Bogo, 2014). Online communications, even after deleted, could be permanently accessible to a larger world wide audience. It is likely that social work students and professionals do not fully consider the potential life-long consequences of their online discussions and posts. These unintended consequences can negatively impact the individual and any institutions the individual is affiliated with; they may even indirectly harm the reputation of the profession (Fang et al., 2014). In their study, Christofides et al. (2009) found that undergraduate students disclosed extensive personal information on social media, but perceived themselves as exercising privacy on social media sites. This shows a disconnect between what young people are doing online and what they believe they are doing online (Christofides et al., 2009).

There are some serious ethical challenges that could arise with the use of social media and these challenges need to be addressed in the process of ethics education. Fang et al. (2014) utilized case examples to study the aforementioned disconnect and make recommendations, based on what they found in the case examples. Mukherjee and Clark (2012) found that 81% of students surveyed believed that the NASW Code of Ethics does not apply to social workers' activities on social media sites. This is a dangerous belief

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since many states licensing laws include social workers being always on duty, which means that ethics and laws apply even on social networking (Voshel & Wesala, 2015). Voshel and Wesala (2015) used the example of mandated reporting laws that applied even during non-working hours. In their study, Mukherjee and Clark (2012) also found that 83% of their MSW student participants would accept a request from a client to be included in the professional's social networking circle. This leads to numerous ethical concerns regarding dual relationships, confidentiality, conflict of interest and blurring of professional boundaries (Mukherjee & Clark, 2012).

Field placement and supervision are two vital parts of social work education (CSWE, 2008). Educators and field placement supervisors need to work together to open conversations with students about what is public and what is private on the Internet (Judd & Johnson, 2012). They also need to help students to understand how professionalism and professional roles can be impacted by online behaviors (Duncan-Daston, Hunter-Sloan, & Fullmer, 2013); however, this does not always seem to be accomplished (Mukherjee & Clark, 2012). One issue in role modeling relates to educators and field placement supervisors engaging in online social networking with students. (Duncan-Daston et al., 2013). Educators and Field Placement Supervisors can use the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) to avoid entering into dual or multiple relationships with students.. Unfortunately, some social worker supervisors and educators are still connecting with students online (Duncan-Daston et al., 2013). Although some believe that this leads to more interactive and collaborative environment in which to learn, it can also be perceived as unprofessional, unethical, and inappropriate.

Infrequent inclusion in educational programs. Struggles with social networking have become more common for both professionals in the behavioral health fields and students. Educators, administrators, and supervisors have often been aware of the problems students and professionals are facing with ethical use of social networking. However, the following studies show that those in power are slow to respond to offer guidance to those struggling with these ethical dilemmas.

Educators may be one group that could offer some guidance or intervention for students or professionals struggling with ethical use of social networking. However, in spite of their awareness of the problem, educators have not always taken action to intervene or provide education and guidance. Gabbard et al. (2011) analyzed literature to examine how frequently deans of medical schools report students posting content on social networking sites. They closely examined the deans' knowledge of students posting online content that would be considered unprofessional, unethical, and in violation of professional boundaries. Gabbard et al. found that 60% of deans of medical schools reported incidents involving students posting content that was unprofessional, unethical, or crossed professional boundaries. Only 19% of the deans Gabbard et al. surveyed reported that they formally addressed these incidents. This disparity illustrated the lack of guidance for students and in these educational programs. Educational programs are instrumental in developing professionals' understanding of ethical principles and the application of professional ethical codes. When educational institutions do not respond to the needs of students, it is likely that they are producing professionals who are not sufficiently prepared to fulfill their professional roles.

Limited Response from the Social Work and Other Behavioral Health Professions

Educational programs have not been paying significant attention to the ethical dilemmas regarding the use of social networking. Those who could respond once the person enters the profession, such as agency administrators and professional association members, have also not been responsive. O. Zur, Williams, Lehavot, and Knapp (2009) discussed the challenges for the behavioral health professions in keeping up with the rapidly changing nature of technology. It has been nearly impossible, even for the most technologically savvy individuals, to keep up with the demands of constantly emerging technological advances. Computer training has not always been included as a requirement in social work education. Behavioral health professionals report that they feel general discomfort about the use of computer technology in the workplace and ethics of electronic record keeping and computer hacking. Educational institutions, employers, professional associations, and licensing regulatory boards have yet to address these issues The previously mentioned sanctions that have been taken against some professionals should alert the professional associations and licensing boards that there is a problem.

Even with an awareness of the problems presented by social networking, the profession continues to be hesitant to proactively and thoroughly address these ethical challenges (Gabbard et al., 2011). Professionals and students recognize that they do not have the necessary information and knowledge to ethically navigate social networking sites. They also acknowledge that they are not sure where to seek out knowledge and guidance about the ethical and clinical implications of participating in social networking (Lehavot et al., 2010). While some agencies and licensing boards have attempted to formulate guidelines, professionals report that these guidelines "conflict or are incompatible with the ways therapists use technology" (O. Zur, 2012, p. 2). Other

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researchers have supported   O. Zur's (2012) assertions.   Behavioral health professionals reported that existing policies vary significantly from one agency to another and do not always sufficiently address ethical challenges the professionals are encountering (Mishna et al., 2012). This has led to behavioral health professionals and students who must make decisions not only about social networking, but also about whether or not compliance with agency policy is the best ethical decision.

Behavioral health professionals and students were frequently making poor ethical decisions in their attempts to navigate social networking without the help of training, education, policies, guidelines, or supervisory guidance (AZBBHE, 2014; Gabbard et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010; Voshel & Wesala, 2015).   These poor ethical decisions led to clinical and professional implications that impacted both behavioral health professionals and the clients they served. Researchers studying the topic agreed that such implications could be prevented if behavioral health professionals and students received increased education and guidance (Gabbard et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010). These same researchers indicated that behavioral health professionals and students expressed a desire for more guidance on how to navigate social networking while maintaining ethical standards and professional boundaries. Participants in Mishna et al.'s (2012) study expressed a need for agency policies and professional association guidelines regarding the use of social networking. The lack of social networking policies left behavioral health professionals and students to muddle through ethical decision-making on their own.

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Synthesis of the Research Findings

Professionals and experts had different recommendations on ways to address the ethical challenges presented by personal use of social networking. Consideration of professional ethical codes is necessary when formulating training curriculum, guidelines, and policies that help professionals to navigate their use of social networking. Numerous professionals recommended adding technology and social networking ethics to academic ethics course curriculum and continuing education ethics training courses (Fang et al., 2014; Gabbard et al., 2011; Kays, 2011; Taylor et al., 2010). A second recommendation was to have administrators from academic and educational programs develop policies that guide professionals using social networking and that outlines standards for how ethical violations that occur on social networking sites will be handled (Fang et al., 2014; Gabbard et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010; Voshel & Wesala, 2015).

Another recommendation was that organizations that provide professional training and continuing education begin to merge ethical and clinical challenges posed by technology and social networking into their courses. These organizations are in a unique position to advocate for digital ethics issues to be included in future continuing educational courses (Gabbard et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2010; Voshel & Wesala, 2015). A fourth recommendation was to have agencies formulate policies that include a comprehensive and technologically useful and savvy social networking policy (Voshel & Wesala, 2015). This may include seeking the assistance of a consultant, if necessary, to ensure that relevant and useful social networking policies are in place (Mishna et al., 2012).

It was also recommended that professional associations formulate guidelines that professionals can refer to when seeking guidelines for the use of social networking (Fang et al., 2014; Kays, 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010). Young (2009) believed that professional associations may be best suited to formulate professional guidelines for use of social networking with attention to the interpretation and navigation of ethical codes that guide professional behaviors and decision-making. Even professional associations, such as NASW, maintain their own Facebook, which indicates that professional associations are aware of marketing benefits and other benefits that can be gained through the use of social networking.

There were many recommendations for professionals who are in private practice or who choose to develop their own social networking policy when they are not guided by agency policy (Kolmes, 2010). There were researchers who addressed the application of ethical codes to social networking challenges that are resources for professionals who wish to formulate their own social networking policies to guide their own online behaviors (Gabbard et al., 2011; Kolmes, 2009a, 2010; Young, 2009; A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011). Kolmes (2010) published her own social networking policy as an example of how professionals can develop their own policies regarding social networking. Kolmes' (2010) discussion on her own social networking policy included privacy issues, confidentiality, informed consent, the ever-changing nature of technology, and that clients would be notified in writing of any policy changes. One limitation of a professional developing one's own social networking policy is that most agencies do not welcome professionals enacting their own policies that are independent of established agency policies. This could be overcome by the professional developing his or her own

policy and submitting it to the agency for approval, and possibly even suggesting it as a new agency policy for all professionals.

Fang et al. (2014) recommended focus groups or task force groups of professionals, involving a variety of stakeholders to help to develop appropriate and helpful guidelines that address ethical concerns and ethical decision-making in regards to social media. Voshel and Wesala (2015) also mentioned the need for professionals to come together to discuss and engage in research to help develop thorough guidelines and policies to direct social media activities.

Critique of the Previous Research

There was a clear and notable lack of literature regarding the ethical challenges posed by social networking for social workers and other behavioral health professionals. Older articles were included in this literature review since there are few more current articles.   Many articles cited in this literature review mentioned the lack of literature currently available (Kolmes, 2009b; O. Zur, 2012). Social networking is a relatively new topic and preliminary studies have only begun to emerge in the past five to seven years. One specific area that has been especially overlooked were the special challenges of professionals practicing in small, rural communities or in specific sub-communities, such as the deaf community or twelve-step recovery communities. Professionals working in these small communities and with these special populations are more likely to also be members of these communities or part of these special populations. They may already face challenges regarding dual relationships with clients who they may run into on a regular basis. They may participate in the same social activities, attend the same spiritual centers, shop in the same stores, have children in the same schools, among other

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circumstances. Social networking, combined with the other already present ethical challenges, for social workers in the other communities would be an interesting focus for further research.

Summary

Social networking has been a growing trend among social workers and other behavioral health professionals that is not expected to dwindle. The growth has not been equal among all populations and all age groups, however, leaving a digital divide that separates those who are technologically savvy and those who are not. Some serious ethical issues for social work professionals to consider accompany this trend. The differences between what personal and professional use of social media and the differences between what is public and what is private on social media are differences that need to be taken into serious consideration when engaging in social networking as a behavioral health professional. There was a clear call in the literature for increased education, training, and policy on digital ethics. There is a need for an increased response from the social work profession. This study aimed to contribute to filling the current gap in literature regarding how digital ethics in social work can be applied.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to gather information that could be used to design an outline of a training program on ethics for social workers who engage in personal use of social networking. Participatory action research and naturalistic inquiry were used by working with focus groups that contributed to the design of the training program outline. Social work has a history of special consideration of specific cultural needs in different types of communities, such as cultures of rural communities and the deaf community (Lannin & Scott, 2013; McLaughlin, Brown & Young, 2004; Scales, Streeter & Cooper, 2013). Social networking represents another type of community with another set of cultural implications and new ethical considerations (Lannin & Scott, 2013). Young (2009) theorized that the social networking community has grown so quickly that it is irresponsible to continue to ignore the impact on professional ethics. Social media sites such as Facebook have grown to an estimated 500 million users in 2010 to over a billion users in 2012 (Fowler, 2013). Facebook users include individuals of all ages, small businesses, and large organizations. Facebook is currently the most popular social networking website, although there are many others such as YouTube, Twitter, Myspace, and LinkedIn (Sareah, 2015). Popularity of social networking continues to rise, but it is not growing equally among all age groups (Fowler, 2013).

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The gap between those who were raised with technology and those who were not is referred to as the digital divide (A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011a). Two primary groups make up the digital divide. Digital immigrants were not born into a world with online technology. Digital natives were born into a world where Internet technology was already prevalent (A. Zur & O. Zur, 2011a). This study utilized participatory action research and focus groups in an attempt to bridge the divide by bringing together digital immigrants and digital natives to design a training program to help social workers navigate digital ethics as it relates to social networking. A qualitative questionnaire provided before the focus group and the researcher's field journal also supplemented the focus groups

Research Design

This was a participatory action research study, utilizing naturalistic inquiry through qualitative focus groups. The focus groups each consisted of four to six social workers who were currently employed in the social work field (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). The focus group meetings, occurred one time each over an approximately two-hour time period. The focus groups included open-ended questions were designed to initiate discussion on what ethical training is needed for professional social workers who engage in personal use of social networking sites. The groups produced information to guide an outline for what they believed needed to be included in social media ethics training. The in-person focus group meeting was held in a local public meeting place and was recorded and transcribed. The online focus group meeting was held in a secure online videoconferencing room, which was also recorded and transcribed. Questions for the focus groups included: how professionals saw personal use of social networking and

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professional ethics intersecting, ethical issues that arise while engaging in personal use of social networking, and what they believed would need to be included in a training on professional ethics and personal use of social networking, and how a training could be kept current with the ever changing nature of technology. These focus groups were structured in two halves; in the first half participants answered questions and sharing ideas about social networking and social work ethics. In the second half of these focus groups was structured so that participants took ideas from the first half, analyzed them, assessed them, and organized them into information for an outline for a training program. Each participant had equal ownership of the training material.

Data were organized and categorized to find themes (Creswell, 2014). After data were organized into categories and themes, they were coded. All analysis and outcomes were shared with participants via email. Future cycles of this project could include designing the actual training and presenting the data to professionals through implementation of the training that was produced from the project.

Target Population and Participant Selection

The population was social workers, who had worked in at least one behavioral health job. Snowball and convenience sampling were used to recruit eligible participants for this study. Snowball sampling allows an already identified group member to enlist other members while convenience sampling identifies participants based on their availability to take part in the study. The first group members were chosen from the researcher's professional network of social work professionals. Snowball sampling is supported as both an appropriate way to generate social knowledge and a way to truly allow participants to have power over the study by giving them power over choosing

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from within their own professional network by enlisting other members for the study (Noy, 2008).

The sample size was eleven participants. Sample size in research utilizing focus groups can range anywhere between four to twelve participants; most authors support a focus group of four to six participants (Jayasekara, 2012; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). Wheelan (2009) advocated for smaller groups—even as low as three to four—but does support groups that include from three to eight participants. Participants were included if they identified as social workers based on their education or their job title. Participants were required to have at least one prior job in the social work field to be included in this study. Exclusionary criteria included those who had no prior work experience in the field of social work, those who had no prior experience with social networking, and those who worked with the researcher.

A recruitment letter was drafted to invite participants to join the study. The letter included an introduction to the study, contact information for the researcher, and a brief statement about the problem. The participants recruited in the initial group were requested to invite other members of their own professional networks. Eligible participants received an informed consent form describing the risks and potential benefits to participating in this study and a confidentiality statement. If they still opted to participate, they were informed of the time and location of the focus group meetings.

Procedures

Participants interested in the study were contacted through a recruitment letter. Recruitment occurred through email and via telephone to inform participants of meeting

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times and places for the focus groups. Participants were contacted through email to follow up and share results.

Instruments were field tested by three doctoral level researchers. One of the field-testing researchers instructed college level ethics courses. Another of the field-testing researchers was a doctoral level social worker. The third field-testing researcher had been an administrator for behavioral health service agencies and had research published in the behavioral health field. Both the demographic questionnaire and the focus group discussion questions were included in the field testing. Questions on instruments were adjusted, according to suggestions by the field-testing researchers.

Instruments

Creswell (2009) discussed data collection procedures as a three-step process of defining boundaries for the study, collecting data, and deciding how data will be recorded. During this study, participants in two focus groups determined what issues needed to be included in a training that addresses how social work ethics apply to personal use of social networking among social work professionals. This study included data from multiple sources: demographic data obtained from the questionnaire, focus group discussions, and researcher's field journal. The demographic data was used to support assertions that participant age and time in the field would be important variables. The data collected were used to measure the participants' experiences with their personal use of social networking and the point where that use crosses over professional ethics. This is in line with the focus of naturalistic inquiry in qualitative research, which is to examine the lived experiences of a group of individuals (Creswell, 2014).

- A questionnaire was used to gather demographic data on participants and assisted researcher in coding and identification. (Appendix A)

- The focus groups discussed guiding questions, which included both grand tour and mini-tour questions designed to determine participant experiences with social networking and professional ethics. The questions were designed to address social networking and measured how their social network use intersects with their professional ethics, how professionals interpreted their ethical responsibilities when engaging in personal use of social networking, and what they would like to see included in a training program about personal use of social networking the intersection with professional ethics. (Appendix A)

- Field-testing was done through a consultation agency, which employs numerous doctoral level researchers.

- Field-testing included three doctoral level professionals. These professionals had experience with social work, other behavioral health professions, education, or ethics. Information regarding the qualifications of the individuals performing field-testing was provided with the results of the field-testing. See Appendix B for instrument.

- A research journal was used to process participants' responses and record communications that cannot be recorded on audio recording devices (Appendix C)

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Social workers who use social media are given limited ethical guidance. There is lack of policy or education for professionals who encounter ethical dilemmas of social networking sites, which is problematic when professionals are being sanctioned for their

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online behaviors. The purpose of the study was to provide information that will be used to design an outline of training program on ethics for social workers who engage in personal use of social networking. The research questions needed to address how professionals were using social networking, what problems they were encountering, what consequences that were facing, and what could be done to address these issues. The research questions included:

1.	How do professionals perceive their ethical responsibilities as they relate to their personal use of social networking sites?

2.	What ethical challenges do professionals need to anticipate facing and be prepared to navigate?

3.	What can be done to help professionals to ethically navigate their personal use of social networking?

By reviewing the literature, themes, subthemes and research questions can be identified. (Craig, 2009). The first research question of this project was about the overall use of social networking by social work professionals and how those professionals perceived their ethical responsibilities surrounding that use.   There were two research sub-questions that fit in this category:

1.	How do professionals perceive their ethical responsibilities as they relate to their personal use of social networking sites?

    a.	 How are social workers using social networking?

    b.	How do social workers apply social work ethics to their personal use of social networking?

The second research question involved the ethical challenges that arose from the personal use of social networking among behavioral health professionals. There were four related topics under this question: unintended disclosures, boundary crossing, dual relationships, and small community challenges. The sub-questions that emerged from this question were:

2.   What ethical challenges do professionals need to anticipate facing and be prepared to navigate?

    a. What ethical challenges have social workers encountered while engaging in social networking?

    b. What ethical challenges can social workers predict encountering when thinking of their own personal use of social networking?

The last research question included interventions to inform and prepare professionals to ethically navigate their personal use of social networking sites. There were two types of interventions that could assist professionals; policy and education or training. The research sub-question that emerged from this research question was:

3.   What can be done to help professionals to ethically navigate their person use of social networking?

    a. What needs to be included in a training program to help professionals to learn to ethically navigate their personal use of social networking?

The goal of this study was to answer the research questions and to use information gathered to design an intervention that could be implemented to help guide professionals through ethical decision-making regarding their personal use of social networking. This could help minimize consequences to professionals and clients by providing professionals

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with information about what ethical challenges can arise, what consequences can result and how to engage in ethical decision-making in the otherwise uncharted territory on the online community. Without guidance, professionals are forced to guess how to navigate online activities and are likely to make mistakes that result in negative consequences. Professionals and clients could benefit from this project since increased education and preparedness among professionals would decrease the likelihood of ethical mistakes and confusing boundary-crossing events.

Data Analysis

The main sources of data were demographic data from the questionnaire, the researcher's field journal and transcripts from recordings of focus group discussions. The field journal held notes on focus group discussions and was analyzed and compared to analysis of focus group transcripts to determine if similar themes and categories emerged. Focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. All transcripts were then read and processed to find keywords and themes. Grand tour questions were expected to lead to themes and the responses to those questions were examined closely when looking for themes.

Qualitative data analysis was utilized to find themes and significant statements. Categories were found based on the responses of participants and were used to determine emerging themes. Coding was used to further organize the data from focus group discussions and the field journal. All data from the aforementioned sources were compared with existing findings in current research. Data from the demographic questionnaire were used to observe any differences in responses related to participant age and professional experience. Participant age was used to observe differences in

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responses between digital immigrants and digital natives. All data were organized in a manner that showed what common themes and categories could be included in a training the addressed the personal use of social networking among social work professionals and their application of professional social work ethics.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the study, all participants were given a detailed description of the study that ensured informed consent and explained that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent statement. Each participant was also asked to sign a confidentiality statement regarding responses of other participants in the focus group. Because the researcher could not ensure confidentiality, participants were made aware of the risk on the informed consent form.

Some members of the researcher's professional network had already heard about the dissertation in casual conversation that previously occurred in professional forums. Some of those professionals expressed interest in participating. During the initial conversations, there was only exploration of the dissertation topic. Initial discussions did not include any recruitment or obligation to participate. There were only a few people who expressed interest and three people had provided contact information previously as part the inclusion in the professional forums.

No participants were recruited from the researcher's work site. The focus groups were held in a private location, either in person or online, and were not held at any participant's work site. Participants were assigned an ID number and the ID number was used in place of names in order to maintain confidential identity. All information shared

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was held in confidentiality. All information was and will be kept in a locked file cabinet maintained by the researcher. All data will be destroyed after being kept for seven years. Data on paper will be cross-cut shredded; data on recording devices or flash drives will be incinerated after the seven-year period.

Expected Findings

There were a number of findings that were expected from this study. It was expected that participants would have thought about professional ethics and the impact of personal use of social networking. It was also expected that participants would report having little prior education or training on ethics and how they relate to their personal use of social media (Lehavot et al., 2010; Mishna et al., 2012; O. Zur & A. Zur, 2011b). It was anticipated that participants would be aware of ethical dilemmas that they can potentially encounter while engaging in social networking and will learn more during these focus groups. It was expected that participants would be able to come to an agreement about what they all believe should be included in an outline for a training on how social work ethics could be applied to personal use of social networking among professional social workers.

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CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction: The Study and the Researcher

This qualitative participatory action research study was used to address the issue of social workers' personal use of social networking and how it intersects with their professional social work ethics. Participants were all professional social workers. Participants were recruited via email and phone calls. Eligible participants were provided an informed consent form, which described risks and potential benefits of participation in the study. Those who were still interested were asked to sign a confidentiality statement. Two focus groups were conducted. One online group had six participants and one in-person with five participants. Participants were asked 10 open-ended questions that were designed to answer three main research questions. The research questions that guided the study were used to formulate the main questions on the focus group discussion guide. The guiding questions were:

1.   How do professionals perceive their ethical responsibilities as they relate to their personal use of social networking sites?

2.   What ethical challenges do professionals need to anticipate facing and be prepared to navigate?

3.   What can be done to help professionals ethically navigate their personal use of social media?

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The position of the researcher in this study was that of an insider collaborating with other insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I am a social worker recruiting social worker participants and I also utilize social networking in my personal life. When the researcher is an insider collaborating with other insiders, the researcher is working as a team with other insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In this study, this meant that as a social worker or behavioral health professional, I was collaborating with other behavioral health professionals. One goal of action research is to turn over control and decision making to participants (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). Taking this into consideration, the position of insider collaborating with other insiders allows an increased opportunity for the sharing of power between the researcher and the participants. While working as an agent of change by bringing challenges of social networking and professional ethics to the attention of others, I also could not allow my own experiences to monopolize the discussions or allow my opinions to influence others. Because of my own experiences with social networking and professional ethics, it was important to exercise the skill of containment and the skill of facilitation of the focus group when pursuing this project.

Description of the Participants

Convenience and snowball sampling were used to recruit eligible participants. First, a convenience sample of professionals from the researcher's own professional network were chosen and recruited via email and phone calls. Then snowball sampling was utilized by asking participants who had already consented to the study to invite other professionals from their professional networks. Snowball sampling was chosen to support the underlying power sharing in this study by allowing participants to choose with whom they would like to work (Noy, 2008).

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Participants self-identified as social workers who had at least one prior job in the social work field during the recruitment process. They shared whether or not they were licensed and how many years they had worked in the social work field on the demographic form. Licensure status and years of experience, as well as age, were also shared on the demographic form. Online participants also shared their state of residence since some participants lived in various other states. In person participants were identified by the first letter of their identifier being a P. Online participants were assigned an identifier with the first letter O. Demographic information can be seen in Table 1.

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 54. Work experience in the social work field ranged from one year to 30 years. There were 10 female participants and one male participant. While it would have been desirable to have a more balanced gender distribution, it is not surprising that it was easier to recruit female participants since the ratio seems to mirror what is seen in the field. Sampling methods may also have contributed to the lack of gender diversity.

Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through the lens of participatory action research and naturalistic inquiry. Since the nature of the subject matter is ethics, which are dependent on people's subjective experiences, the type of research is naturalistic inquiry rather than objective science. As previously stated, my own personal experiences were considered and kept out of the focus group discussions, these experiences were considered for bias and objectivity during analysis. This data was analyzed by reading transcripts and

researcher's field notes, identifying categories, uncovering emerging themes, and then coding for statements for data recording.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Identifier	Gender	Age	Licensure Status	Years	State
PP1	Female	54	Unlicensed	30	AZ
PP2	Female	30	Unlicensed	6	AZ
PP3	Female	41	Licensed	6	AZ
PP4	Male	31	Unlicensed	4	AZ
PP5	Female	44	Licensed	15	AZ
OP1	Female	31	Licensed	8	PA
OP2	Female	25	Licensed	1	OR
OP3	Female	27	Licensed	2.5	PA
OP4	Female	44	Licensed	12	AZ
OP5	Female	47	Licensed	5	AZ
OP6	Female	38	Unlicensed	16	PA

Note. Years = Years of experience in the social work field

Focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were read one time without highlighting any statements to get a sense of the themes. Accompanying field notes were read to ensure consistency between transcribed data and field note data. Transcriptions were read again and statements were highlighted. Categories began to emerge from the information and themes were identified. Statements were then organized under each theme, in an outline format. Coding included matching

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statements to participants and looking for patterns regarding age and years of experience.

Coding also allowed a clearer method to report data (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). Since

data presentation was organized by themes and categories for this report, Table 2

illustrates the themes and categories for reference.

Table 2

Themes and Categories

Themes	Categories
Professional Boundaries	Separation of professional life and personal life Dual Relationships and friend requests from patients Confidentiality Seeing other professions post inappropriately
Unintended Disclosure	Pictures and information that others may post Religious and political posts Public groups and online dating
Security and Privacy	Security settings and how to use them Other measures to safeguard security and privacy Viewing patient info online
Professional Social Media Use	Social media as a way to reach out or provide support Charting and reporting
Policy	Lack of mention in ethical code and formal policy Agency guidelines Reactive responses versus proactive responses Personal policy and guidelines for connecting
Training and Education	Lack of formal education and training Educating peer support and BHTs in social work agencies Making ethically sound decisions Ongoing updated education NASW emails or newsletters

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Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis

The data from these focus groups will be presented by sharing each theme and explaining the categories that led to the themes. The data presentation includes coded data with specific examples of significant statements made by participants. Facilitation of the focus groups was minimal and participants were instructed to guide themselves through the questions and ask the researcher questions as needed. This led to the focus group discussion guide questions being discussed out of order and in an overlapping manner. Also since there were two focus groups, each group handled the discussion guide questions and the ensuing conversation in a different way. Even with the different approaches, the data from each group were similar. The data generated from these focus groups are presented in a manner that clearly shows the content, categories and themes that emerged from the data.

Introductory Question

Each focus group began with an introductory question to examine what experience participants have with social networking and which social networking sites participants are using. Facebook was mentioned by every participant, although extent of use of Facebook varied greatly from everyday use to one participant that chose to close her Facebook account permanently. Twitter, LinkedIn and Meet Up were also mentioned. Participants used Facebook for personal purposes and also for professional reasons. Some of the personal use included communicating and socializing, staying touch with friends and family, buying and selling used goods, searching for business reviews, finding social events, joining interest groups, and online dating.

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Professional Boundaries

During the focus group, participants were asked to explain how they feel their professional ethical responsibilities apply to their personal use of social networking. Participants from both groups agreed that ethics apply to social networking in the same way that ethics apply to other areas of their personal lives. This led to a discussion of ethical issues and some agreement and disagreement about separation of professional lives and personal lives of social workers.

This was also where participant responses naturally began to overlap. As they answered discussion guide questions about how to apply the social work code of ethics and they also began to provide examples of ethical dilemmas and challenges. It should be noted that participants were asked not to share to whom they were referring when they gave examples in order to protect themselves and others. Much of the discussion surrounded Facebook and other social networking sites being part of the public domain and participants in both groups all agreed that what is put online could be seen by anyone and could be out there forever. Concerns were expressed over employers viewing personal online profiles and posts.

Separation of professional life and personal life. Participants agreed that while it was important to keep professional and personal life separate, the two parts of a social worker's life cannot be mutually exclusive.

OP3 stated, "…you keep your personal and professional boundaries separate when you engage with clients."

OP1 stated, "...professional issues do bleed into your personal things."

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OP2 agreed, commenting, "…you could find that balance between professional and personal on social media."

There were two differing viewpoints shared about the separation of professional life and personal life online. One set of participants discussed being careful about what is posted online, considering that all posts could be seen any clients or employers. Another set of participants discussed freedom of speech and the right to have a personal life apart from the professional life, including online activities as part of their private life.

PP5 commented, "I haven't really posted anything on Facebook that I wouldn't want anyone to know. Whether it is friend, family, or stranger."

PP2 stated, "Employers now, they will look at your Facebook page before they hire you. You're going to not end up getting that job because of something you've done in the past."

OP2 mentioned, "I am trying to maintain a professional boundary and Facebook is usually my space, that I can post whatever I want personally because it is more for my friends and I try to keep my friends list limited."

PP4 determined, "We should be free to exercise our freedom of speech, without betraying confidentiality"

Finally, PP2 stated:

I want to be my authentic self on the Internet, but maybe my authentic self shouldn't be posting me doing twenty shots. As much as I would like that piece of my authentic self to be out there, this could be something to consider as well.

Dual relationships and friend requests from patients. Social networking and the online community provide another arena in which social workers need to navigate

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potential dual relationships. Some of the dual relationships included having friends online that are also friends with a client, having former clients that are hired by the agency as staff so that former clients are now coworkers, or having online contact with clients before becoming a social worker. PP5 described these instances as "sticky situations, not sticky in a bad way but sticky as in what should I do about this?" These situations seemed to be more challenging for participants since there was a potential for dual relationships or contact with clients outside of the agency that is unavoidable. Participants expressed concern that there is little guidance on how to deal with these situations.

One common way that dual relationships can present is through friend requests on Facebook. Every participant shared that either they personally had to handle friend requests from clients or they knew someone else who had the experience of having to navigate friend requests from current or former clients. Participants unanimously agreed that social workers should not accept friend requests from clients on the social worker's personal social networking site. There were some differing views on how to approach the friend request. Some participants sent private messages to the client sending the friend request explaining why they could not accept; some participants waited until they saw the client again and addressed the request in person; others simply ignored the request. One participant talked about having to unfriend clients after becoming a social worker and changing positions from a support staff position to a clinical position. Two participants had to address the feelings of rejection a client may experience and the challenge of clients who attempt to discontinue services after a friend request or attempt to engage on social media has been declined.

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OP3 stated the following:

so I had to have a conversation with him…I kind of feel like it broke our rapport.

To this day, I still feel kind of iffy about it because he never came back to the

program…he never returned and he needed the services. I still feel kind of guilty

over that because I caused more harm than good but I didn't know.

PP5 came up with the decision of:

Not friending people. That happened fairly early with me for active clients. The

next day, they would say something about me now friending them on Facebook.

Then I would have to have that conversation with them, then I would have it in

my whole group so that everyone would have it.

That is one of those things that becomes an ethical thing. I have to think

how is this rejection taken? Again, that's always something that I think is not

going to be that big of a deal because I explain it well. Then again, sometimes I

have some work to do with the client to get them to come back.

Confidentiality. Confidentiality is not only a vital ethical responsibility of social

workers but also has legal implications. Participants discussed coworkers consulting with

one another over private messages on social networking sites which are not secure and

could be accessed by others, breaching confidentiality. More of the discussion focused

on making casual comments about anything that happened at work or with a client. Even

something as seemingly innocent as stating where a social worker transported a client

that day or sharing a sad part of a story from a client can lead to a breach of

confidentiality. One participant, PP3, pointed out comments made on social media "we

might think it is benign, but you would be surprised at who you know".

Another issue that was discussed regarding confidentiality involved pictures of work events with clients. Sometimes agencies will post these pictures but those tagged in the pictures will also have the picture show up on their online pages. This means a social worker and client who are both at an agency event can be identified publicly in the same picture. Participants agreed that caution should be used when agencies or social workers take and post pictures of agency events.

Seeing what other professionals post inappropriately. This category could fit with a number of the themes but seems to fit best with professional boundaries since our professional boundaries apply not only with clients but also with other professionals. Not only do social workers need to be mindful of their professional boundaries, but they also must be wary of other professionals they connect with on social media sites, we may also run across ways in which they are crossing professional boundaries. NASW's (2008, sect 2.11) Code of Ethics is clear that social workers are responsible to address unethical conduct of colleagues when they have knowledge of that conduct. All of the participants reported that they knew of at least one person who struggled with ethics online; some of them also shared that they witnessed the struggles and mistakes of other professionals. Participants discussed these online posts covering a range of seriousness with boundary crossing, from poor taste jokes to violations of confidentiality.

OP1 stated, "I see a lot of posts {by other professionals} that are not in support of those core values we have."

OP2 noted,

I get that it was a tasteless joke but part of that got in the way of that person's reputation starting the program. I mean personally I feel that the people who were offended didn't approach it in a professional way. They were very attacky.

PP2 shared the following:

I know of someone who got in trouble, it was during their schooling. They said something about how a family member helped them transcribe a session for their final. Someone… reported it. The university got involved and there was this whole investigation. The issue wasn't with the family member transcribing; the issue was with the person talking about it online.

OP5 stated:

A coworker at a different place, I used to watch her Facebook posts and she would come home and bitch about her clients all night. She would say stuff like "I can't believe this happened and that happened". I asked myself what is she thinking?

While the NASW Code of ethics is clear that unethical conduct should be addressed either by going directly to the colleague or by reporting to "appropriate formal channels" (NASW, 2008, sect 2. 11c-d), professionals were unclear about what to do with posts online that may violate these policies. Participants discussed whether or not to report, when to report versus when to go to the person directly, and if they really wanted to even get involved since sometimes they will be met with defensiveness. While they

agreed that the ethical code supports going directly to the professional first, they wondered if that would still be true for more egregious acts.

PP5 asked, "What do we have to do now that we know things? I think for me, that's always been one of the vaguest or the most grey of the ethics."

PP3 also was concerned about this topic. PP3 stated,

I ask, what is my responsibility? Do I talk to them directly? That's definitely a grey area. That's hard. I know the basics, but the application is different, not different, but what is the boundary there? When is it something you call the board on?

PP2 stated,

Plus, I think…is this something that you're willing to take on if it becomes a bigger issue? Maybe as far as saying "Hey, I don't really think you should've said that on Facebook". Because you just don't know what kind of reception you're going to get from that person. They could be defensive; they could disagree with you.

Unintended Disclosure

Unintended disclosures occur when social workers are not thinking about what a patient might seek out about them or see on their social networking sites. Regardless of whether or not the disclosure was intended, it can change the way a client views a social worker and it can impact the therapeutic relationship. Discussions included how information that is seen online is open to the interpretation of the person who saw it. A client may or may not share what they have viewed online about a professional, but regardless, this information could shape or alter their view of the professional and of the

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profession. Participants agreed that when they are posting to social networking sites or commenting on another person's post, they are not always thinking about their clients or how a client may perceive what they posted. Participants also agreed that there was a lot to learn about an individual's personal life if you can see their activities on social networking.

OP3 stated, "You just don't know who is going to read it (anything posted). People can find out a lot about you and your personal life, if you are not careful about monitoring that."

PP2 stated,

I think it's easy for people on social media to think that what they're posting, even though it is vague, no one is going to read into it, no one's going to think it's about a client. I think it's easy on social media to forget the whole ethics thing, that your client doesn't see anything that you post. But what it they do?

PP5 stated,

I think that there is something that happens, well for me, if it's a computer we are one step removed from actual people. If I have a family in front of me, I don't even think of what the appropriate thing to say is. There is something about me sitting in my living room, in my pajamas, with my laptop. I have to be very cautious about it. This is my house and I have my slippers on and I am not thinking about my client.

Pictures and information others might post. If social workers are not always thinking about what their clients may see when they are posting on social media, it is even less likely that the social workers' friends and family are thinking about what they

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post about the social worker. Participants discussed concerns that arose when family and friends posted pictures of them at family or social events.

PP3 commented,

I was tagged in a photo with a former coworker. A former client of mine, which was also a current client of theirs was hired as an employee. They had a relationship prior to our mutual friend being hired. So now I am in the picture with the current co-worker and the client says "Oh, there is (PP3)".

OP3 stated,

I also think it is important that we tell our friends and family to keep it private. I usually ask to not be tagged in photos because you just never know. You know I can't control their setting and I've also had to unfriend a good friend of mine because she shared one of my posts and her Facebook is not private.

Religious and political posts. Participants recognized everyone's right to have and share their own political or religious beliefs. They also shared concern that some of the beliefs shared by other professionals were not in line with the core values of social work. One participant was concerned with posts they felt promoted bigotry. While acknowledging a person's right to their beliefs, participants wondered how people perceived those things being posted by a social worker. OP3 stated "It is very important that we make sure that we share ethical posts and not promote bigotry". Another participant shared concern over posts that divided Christian-based social workers from secular social workers in a way that implied that one group was better than the other and that the two groups could not work together effectively.

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PP2 noted,

> he talks a lot about secular counselors and Christian counselors, being completely
>
> separate entities. I don't think that is how it has to be. They can work together.
>
> You can be a spiritual person, and I can respect you for your spirituality with
>
> having to feel that I need that same belief.

Another participant shared about a post that implied that homosexual individuals could change their feelings through religion and wondered how this was aligned with social work core values.

OP3 noted,

> It said something like "Jesus can save you and you can transform from the LGBT
>
> community…". And I was wondering if she was serious. She is putting her
>
> personal belief out there for the world to see and I thought to myself "That's not
>
> OK." Your personal beliefs are your personal beliefs, but when you make those
>
> public and you have people sharing it, I felt as if that was inappropriate.

Public groups and online dating. There are a variety of public groups on social media. These range from yard sale type groups, special interest groups, and online dating opportunities. Participants discussed concerns about all of these special groups. Though none of the participants shared experiences where they encountered a client on any of these sites, they still discussed these groups as a potential way to cause an unintended disclosure. One participant did share about a person she had bought and sold with on a yard sale site who then tried to seek services from her professionally. This forced this participant to think about how to handle a potential client showing up at her agency after she has already had a different relationship with that person online. Some yard sale sites

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include going to people's homes to buy items. Participants shared concerns about that and other information that people can learn from buying their used item.

OP1 stated,

a local yard sale group on Facebook. I had met this one woman and she and I had been going back and forth on selling things...so we kind of became friends through Facebook. She knew that I was a therapist and she contacted me because she needed to talk about something. Even there I had the conversation with her, "I cannot be your therapist, and I cannot be your friend whether it is on Facebook".

Participants also discussed online special interest groups and how clients can learn information about their personal beliefs or relationships from seeing their involvement in those special interest groups. One participant shared that she identified as polyamorous (engaging in intimate relationships with two or more consenting people) online and indicated that this could become an ethical challenge if a client would run across her in this group. She also brought up online dating and the potential ethical issues she could encounter through posting an online dating profile. Other participants changed the subject each time the one participant brought it up, indicating to this researcher that the other participants felt uncomfortable talking about this topic. There was follow up with that participant to see if there was more she wanted to discuss about any ethical challenges and online dating. She was open to talk but did not have anything additional to add.

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Security and Privacy

Most social networking sites do offer ways to utilize security and privacy settings so that there is some control over what a person posts publicly and what is posted only for their friends to see. These settings can be confusing and not everyone fully understands how to use these settings. Some participants shared stories of online client interaction that became dangerous (stalking and harassing) to them. Participants also discussed both their own rights to privacy and the rights of clients to privacy. While recognizing their own right to privacy, participants also recognized that at some point clients will likely search for information about them online and that it is the responsibility of each professional to take steps to safeguard their own online presence and privacy.

Security settings and how to use them. All participants were aware of security and privacy settings on social media sites, but each utilized those settings differently. Some participants report adjusting settings in a way that they believe blocks anyone, other than the people they choose, from seeing their information. Some participants allow some information—such as a profile picture and name—to be public, but adjust settings so that any other information is more guarded. One participant reminded the others that even the most secure profiles could be hacked and all of their personal information would be accessible for the hacker to post from the hacked account. Another participant stated that she believed her settings were high but that people were still able to see things that she had not intended to release to the public.

Security and privacy settings are not usually very self-explanatory or easy to navigate. Two participants mentioned that they would like more guidance on how to properly use the security and privacy settings on social media sites. Another participant

mentioned how often settings changed on social networking sites and that not everyone reads all of the information about the updates and changes.

OP3 stated,

Self-awareness. When we get a notification from a Facebook app that there are updates…no one really likes to read the fine print and policies, but you never know what you are agreeing to when you update it. Just knowing what you are agreeing to in the terms and conditions.

Other measures to safeguard security and privacy. Participants had already thought of numerous other measures to attempt to ensure their own online privacy and security. Three participants reported use of an alias or use of their middle name as their last name, making it more difficult for others to find them. This could also mean using a different picture so that no one can identify them through a profile picture. This is not necessarily an ideal solution since this could also keep other people from finding them, and sometimes they may want to be found by old friends or distant family members. While some of the other participants indicated they would consider using an alias, one participant did not feel this was an option.

PP4 believed,

I can have a personal principle with that. That resonates with me like, I am not going to go by an alias, and I am not going to live my life worrying about my client. I am not going to change my name. I am not going to change my profile picture.

Another solution one participant mentioned was to have two pages, one that is for professional contacts and one that is limited to personal contacts. Participants also

mentioned not identifying on any online profile where they work or what type of work they do.

On many social media sites, users can 'check-in' at a real geographic location, such as a restaurant, airport, or movie theater. This could be considered dangerous, as clients could find professional outside of the social work setting. This can be particularly troublesome for professionals who have been stalked or harassed by a client. Two participants described these dangerous situations with clients; one was stalked online and another had a person target and harass all of the professionals at her agency after finding all of the professionals' information online connected to the agency's Facebook page. This serves as a reminder that social workers' need to protect themselves not only in person, but also online.

Viewing patient information online. Participants discussed how social workers would not follow a client home to spy on a client but do spy on clients online. Viewing patient information online without their consent, four participants agreed, was a violation of privacy. Two participants described confronting colleagues who were viewing patient information online without patient permission. One participant, OP3, stated that her colleague responded with surprise that this would be an ethical concern. The other participant, PP5, stated that her colleague responded, "It is the modern day version of reading their chart." There was agreement among the participants that this practice was not acceptable.

OP2 worried about the boundaries. She stated,

What I was just thinking is that boundary and if they {the client} ever found out, how would they feel? That is player information not character information. If

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you knew that information, you might end up pushing the conversation in that direction because you are thinking to yourself, "I know they did this and I want to get it out of them." And this is not the way to get that kind of information.

PP3 believed, "I wonder if inadvertently he (a behavioral health professional who viewed client information online) learned some information that could break the bond of the relationship that they could develop. It's a dangerous slippery slope."

PP5 agreed, commenting that once you learn information online about a client, "you can't unknow stuff."

Professional Use of Social Media

While the emphasis of this study was on the personal use of social media among professionals, professional use cannot be excluded. Participants related how their professional use of social media intersected with and impacts their personal use of social media. Numerous participants shared experiences where their agencies have expected them to reach out to clients via social networking. Those same agencies do not provide the tools to do that, thus these participants have used their own personal social networking accounts to contact clients. This can lead to an ethical grey area for these professionals, since clients were permitted to view the professional's online profile and open lines of communication through that medium.

Social media as a way to reach out or provide support. Many agencies are beginning to use social networking sites as a way to advertise for free, as a way to reach out to new clients or keep existing clients engaged in services, a forum for educating

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clients and the public, and to offer resources for support. Some participants have maintained their agencies' social media pages as part of their job duties.

OP3 shared,

I was asked to kind of keep updated on that {agency social media page} and I just put out some positive things, some messages about the group and the events coming up. So I would just post from the agency's page, that program's page and I felt that was appropriate to do that through there, because that's monitored, it's already established. It is not me personally engaging with them on social media. It's more so the group events, and just like regular, you know, good reads, and positive quotes.

Some client populations may be easier to reach via social media. The youth and homeless are two populations who may be better served with the use of social networking. The homeless do not typically have phones or reliable ways to be reached. The youth culture has adopted social media contact and texting as the norm for communication.

OP2 commented, "I think it's kind of smart for us to be ahead of it (technology). Especially with the homeless population, that is how they communicate, via Facebook. With a lot of younger people, that's how they talk now."

PP4 agreed, stating that,

regarding the younger youths, social media is going to be a common way that they communicate and engage. For some people it might even be the best way to engage, because this may be the place where they can be the most authentic version of themselves or this is the way that they connect with each other.

OP6 shared,

I've used Facebook a lot for clients that were homeless, because a lot of them would hang out in the library and be on Facebook, that was what I had to do in order to keep in touch with them. They were never my friends, but it worked a lot to keep in touch with them when they were difficult to find otherwise, because they were homeless.

There are life lessons that can be learned from any situation, and social workers are particularly skilled at finding opportunities to help clients see an opening for growth. Social media provides plenty of such opportunities. Participants discussed ways social workers can use social media to educate, advocate, share current research, and promote social justice.

Participants also shared about how setting boundaries with clients around social media has been a great way to open up teaching opportunities for clients. Participants explored the idea of using their own boundary setting with social media to role model assertive boundary setting to clients. Participants also saw an opportunity to help clients to challenge their own thinking and reframe their perceptions on situations.

PP2 offered the following advice,

Instead of it saying "I am rejecting you", I would consider it more of establishing a boundary. Rejection has a negative connotation and when I think of rejection, it would contribute to my feelings that I have about myself that may be negative. So I think looking at it through the lens of this is the boundary that I am going to set with you, and I want you to know that it has nothing to do with you personally.

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It has to do with me and how I put this space between myself and my clients because that is part of my ethical responsibility. It's not going to be that you are rejecting me, it's that you are telling me that this is something that has to happen on part of your ethical responsibility.

There is also an opportunity to promote healthy communication and help clients explore ways to connect, other than relying on connection through technology.

PP5 asked the following,

How can I give you the stuff you feel like you need in a way that is different from using social media? They want to feel connected to people and they want to make friends. Well it's like how can I help them facilitate that in the real world?

PP4 shared their experience,

As I set the boundary…I was re-shifting it back to where they could find me. I was older than them {clients} so I feel that them wanting to relate to me in the real world, is probably uncomfortable to them but I want to say "Let's try it! It is still a thing!"

PP2 suggested the following,

Try to have the conversation in person. It seems like a lot of people have social awkwardness…don't really talk to people face to face. Encourage them to get out there…out of that social media trap. Our job is to instill confidence and the tools that they need to feel comfortable, where they can go and do that.

Charting and reporting. Most social workers learned that good record keeping can be a benefit and poor record keeping can be a liability. Charting is one way that social workers protect themselves; contacts on social media are no exception, according

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to the participants in this study. Participants agreed that charting contacts, whether they were planned or not, is essential to protect against future problems; however, only two participants stated they learned to chart those contacts and have actually done so. One of those two participants even included contact with clients via social media sites in the treatment plan so that it was documented even before it happened and documented that other options for connecting were explored.

Reporting is another issue that can arise on social media. Social workers are mandated reporters and also have the duty to protect and a duty to warn. Participants discussed how these reporting issues can present on social media and what dilemmas were posed. If a social worker sees something online that could be abuse of a person within a vulnerable population, they must report. Duty to protect can be implemented when a person is seriously threatening or engaging in self-harming or suicidal behaviors. Duty to warn covers information that a social worker receives that a person is intending to harm another person. Participants discussed suicidal posts and posts about harming self or others and confusion over the seriousness of the post, whether the post might just be song lyrics or a movie quote, or when other posts by the person are positive and hopeful. Participants discussed mandated reporting requirements and how to handle these reports. There seemed to be a great deal of confusion over what would need to be reported with one participant wondering if they needed to report any illegal activity they saw online. Another participant expressed concern over liability if they reported something that was not disclosed or discovered in the office. All participants agreed that more information was needed regarding what to do when confronted with reporting issues.

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OP3 stated, "We are mandated reporters. What if someway, somehow you stumble upon some kind of status that would be something that you should report? So how would you be protected liability-wise but still able to report it?"

PP4 mentioned, "I am a mandated reporter, if I saw illegal activity...suddenly we are these representatives and there's this principle that we can't have these kind of things."

Policy

Participants shifted their focus from the issues that occurred while engaging in social networking to discussion guide questions that involved looking at the ways in which policy is or is not supporting or guiding social workers. This section and theme relate to the second grand tour question of the focus group discussion guide. This section demonstrated how participants experience the profession's response to social media, agency response to social media and how they are navigating those responses or policies.

Lack of mention in ethical code and formal policy. The NASW guides policies for social workers, maintains the Code of Ethics, and advocates for the advancement of the social work profession. Participants expressed awareness of NASW having established some guidelines for the use of technology in practice, but none of the participants were aware of any guidelines for the use of technology when it is not being used for practice. There was little agreement among participants about how social media could be included in the Code of Ethics or how NASW could publish guidelines for use. The participants were able to agree that it is unclear how to apply ethical codes to personal use of social networking sites.

PP2 suggested the following amendments:

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The Code of Ethics needs to have: this is what is acceptable; this is what is not acceptable. Kind of be clearer about it because the grey area can get so many people in trouble. Why not have a clear, concise way that gets addressed in the Code of Ethics? …it needs to be addressed…what is in there now, it is not a direct guideline. I think that all behavioral health fields have stuff about this already but it is all still in the baby stages.

OP3 agreed stating, "I want the steps and protocol to handle something like this". OP1 believed that,

this type of training or something should be done as a whole for social workers to say, "Okay, related to the Code of Ethics, here is how you deal with social media". But then I start to think that agencies should start to do more on it…

PP5 wanted advice relating to "…the ethical decision making tree that asks those specific questions. The use of social media is yet another grey area that we need to think about through an ethical lens."

OP2 stated "I definitely kind of disagree with having a policy written out and have explicit conversations on what exactly it is that we should do."

PP4 believed "we're dealing with a realm where there is no etiquette for it and with the idea that we are supposed to have etiquette."

Other discussions included the lack of direct guidelines regarding many ethical dilemmas, which leaves ethics to be something social workers have to think through and consult about with others. Participants wanted both direction and empowerment to make decisions that work for their specific situation in their own agencies. When discussing

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policy, not one participant could identify any formal policy outside of agency policy to guide decisions on personal use of social networking sites.

Agency guidelines. Participants acknowledged that some of their agencies do have social media policies or guidelines. Participants described existing guidelines as inadequate and inconsistent. Some participants described agencies with policies that sent mixed messages, that only cover what occurs in the workplace, or that make blanket statements that are not helpful. One participant received a mixed message from their agency when they were instructed to contact clients, but not use a personal device to connect with them. However, the participant was not provided a device through the agency. Another participant received a mixed message when asked to used their personal device to connect with clients, but was told not to answer client attempts to contact outside of work hours.

Three participants expressed the desire for agency specific policies that are customized to the specific client population and the needs of the population served by that agency. Two participants shared that even though there were no specific guidelines or policies at their agencies, there was someone assigned to address ethical issues at work. One of those participants stated her agency has a risk management department. The other participant described her agency's consulting person as a security officer. Another participant pointed out that most agencies do "what they need to do to just sort of cover their [behind]". Two participants reported that their agencies just instructed them to not have contact with clients outside of the parameters of the agency. Two other participants stated that their agencies have policies that only cover what happens while at work and do not address in anything that happens outside of work. Participants pointed

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out how agencies are also not collaborating with each other what is working or not working for them in regards to social media policies or guidelines.

Reactive responses versus proactive responses. Participants expressed frustration over the reactive nature of agency administration and expressed a desire for proactivity from NASW and from agencies. Participants wondered how many people would need to get in trouble before there was a response from the profession. Participants felt as though there were missed opportunities for growth when there was no open dialogue about mistakes that other professionals made.

PP5 stated, "It's never a problem until it's a problem."

PP1 said, "I think we all probably learned from our mistakes on the way, what is acceptable behavior. Sometimes we think it wasn't a big deal, but it was."

PP3 remembered a social media issue she had with a former client, "When I had the person as a client, I did not have that conversation. I can't re-have a conversation that I never had."

PP2 believed, "...the agency has to have a problem before they realize it is a problem…it wasn't an issue until it was an issue."

Personal policy or statement and guidelines for connecting. In the absence of policy or guidelines by NASW or their respective agencies, many participants are making their own decisions about what to do by formulating their own personal policy or statement and guidelines for connecting. Two participants developed their own personal social media statement, including appropriate ways to reach that professional and a standard statement that is consistently given to every client. These two participants described this proactive approach as taking some of the discomfort out of the

conversation by assuming it will be an issue and preparing for it ahead of time. While other participants have not drafted a formal personal statement or policy, some do have some informal personal guidelines they already apply to their contacts with clients. The biggest concept discussed among participants who do apply informal guidelines is transparency. Contacts with clients online were transparent because they were through the agency page; social workers and clients did not connect through private messages. If there was contact through private messages, it was only for clearly pre-defined and agreed upon reasons. A few participants shared support of transparency but had not yet formulated any guidelines for themselves. All personal policies, statements and guidelines can be included in their new client paperwork.

Informed consent. Informed consent was a standard part of the intake process for most of the participants in this study. Social media policies can be included in the informed consent forms and in the intake process. This helps both the professional and the client, as PP2 stated, "They need to know what they can expect from you as a professional but also what you're going to be looking for from them." Informed consent could also be a time to explain to clients if a professional will be viewing any of the client's online activities or accounts. PP2 went on to state, "The informed consent is a living document, you continue to have to go back to it." Addressing these issues at the start of the therapeutic relationship can prevent future problems, and as PP5 pointed out, "You get really good information on what's important to the clients when that stuff comes up".

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Training and Education

The purpose of this study was to gather information that would be used to design an outline of a training program for social workers who engage in personal use of social networking. While much of the information has already been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, this final section addresses the last research question of the study and the last grand tour question of the focus group discussion guide. Participants were asked direct questions about what training or education they had already received, what they believed should be included in a training program, and how training information could be kept up to date.

Lack of formal education and training. The first line of defense against ethical errors is in social work education programs. Seven of the participants were recent graduates of a Master's level education and one participant was an instructor in a social work education program. None of the participants stated that they were aware of or received sufficient education on ethics and technology in any formal social work education program. Two participants shared that it was mentioned in their MSW college ethics course but only when brought up by a student and not as a standard part of the curriculum. None of the participants reported ever receiving any training post-graduation on social media and ethics in social work. It is a very important finding that not one participant had any formal education or training curriculum that included how to ethically respond to social media contacts or issues. Every one of the participants knew of an individual who got into trouble regarding ethical challenges on social networking sites.

Participants also stated they had education or training about cyber liability insurance. One participant stated she did learn to get liability insurance, but she did not

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know about cyber liability insurance until she signed up for her regular liability insurance and it was offered to her as an option. Other participants did not have already have information on this and wondered why more information is not available about cyber liability insurance, considering how many people they know who have gotten into trouble for their online behaviors.

Just as the participants learned from one participant about cyber liability insurance, consultation with other professionals is an important way to learn about new developments in the field. OP3 discussed how older and younger social workers could consult with and learn from one another; this participant also mentioned how supervisors and their supervisees could consult on important ethical issues. PP5 stated she was surprised to learn how few supervisors were having these conversations with supervisees.

Participants would like more formal training and education on technology and social work ethics beyond how to handle providing services online. They would like it formally added into higher education curriculum and required ethics training curriculum for continuing education. Participants expressed a desire to see some of the outdated materials removed from ethics course and replaced with information on digital ethics. It was also recommended that graduate level ethics courses become required core courses instead of electives in graduate education; participants expressed this should not be something social workers are only required to do after they got into trouble. They would like to have open discussions about how other people are handling these issues. These discussions could include more examples of what people are encountering online, what mistakes people are making, and how those who are successfully navigating social networking sites are doing it. Participants wanted these issues addressed in supervision

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and they would like to know who to go to when they encounter these dilemmas. Participants believed education should start earlier and cover everyone in agencies, not just those bound by ethical codes.

Educating peer support and behavioral health techs (BHTs) in social work agencies. Some of the participants started their careers in other positions within social work agencies before pursuing education to become a social worker or while they were working their way through college. Some of the participants also currently work in agencies where there are peer support staff members or BHTs, some of whom are pursuing further education. One participant is currently working on a training curriculum for peer support staff and BHTs. Participants shared about the importance of learning good ethical practice early and not allowing non-clinical staff to have boundaries that they will need to go back and correct if they become clinical staff.

PP4 believed,

The problem is with the people who are doing social work, that don't realize they are doing social work. They're not bound by ethics so they're not aware of it. I was doing social work before I was a social worker.

PP2 stated, "I think it would be a good start, if you teach people when they are down here, when they get up here, they will have some knowledge base".

PP5 commented "Agencies need to…make that part of that training program, especially if you're talking about staff who are not educated. {Letting them know} this is our stance and this is why".

Making ethically sound decisions. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that it is important to know how to apply ethical codes to activities on social networking sites.

They also discussed at length the importance of why these ethical codes must be applied. Participants agreed that knowing the reasons why it is important to take certain steps it could help them to make more ethically sound decisions. Participants felt without understanding why certain actions (such as privacy settings) must be taken, there was not as much motivation to follow through on action. Three participants brought up the importance of knowing what the impact of decisions might be and what possible consequences, including unintended consequences could result from decisions. Consequences and impact are associated with why and not how we make ethical decisions. Participants would like any education or training to include both the how and the why of ethical decision making.

Ongoing updated education. The continuing education requirements for licensure that are designed to ensure that social workers consistently update their training. Without the increasing inclusion of digital ethics, training that social workers are receiving is not updated but redundant. Seven participants agreed that the most important factor in making sure that ongoing education is up to date is to have trainers who are tech savvy. PP2 also mentioned the importance of tech savvy people being able to teach the tech savvy information to people who may not be tech savvy at all. Another important factor, mentioned by four participants, is knowledge about the most recent trends and features being used on social media. PP5 pointed out this person does not even need to work in the field but just be a "friend of the agency". OP3 shared that her agency used interns to show professionals how to use Twitter and she thought these interns could show professionals even more.

NASW emails and newsletters. Participants agreed that NASW has some responsibility to share information and advocate for more education and training on technology. They believe information should be shared via NASW's newsletter, emails, mailings, and social media sites. Participants shared that since NASW is responsible for the Code of Ethics, and they keep data on licensure issues of social workers, they should be doing more to address these issues. Participants expressed desire for NASW to state where they stand on the issues of ethics and the personal use of social networking sites.

Field Journal

The field journal for this study were also analyzed. Field journal notes were minimal since there were significant technical difficulties that diverted attention from field note taking. There were field notes from each group that were analyzed. A summary of field notes will be presented.

There were fewer field notes about the online group as there were more technical difficulties experienced in the online group and many of the field notes reflected the technical issues and other limitations of the online group. There were issues with logging into the online meeting room that was arranged for the groups and once everyone was logged into the meeting, there were issues with sound and with recording. There was also one person that joined over the phone and was not present in the video conferencing. That led to the phone participant not participating as much as the participants who were also present in the video conferencing part of the online group room. There were also some notes on pets, children, and other background distractions that occurred during the group. Participants often interrupted one another or talked over one another due to the time delay of the online room which led to a delay in and difficulty reading social cues

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that would normally guide communication. It also was noted that one participant attempted to discuss online dating sites and meet-up groups and that discussion was not continued by other participants and the conversation moved on to another topic. There were very few notes on the content of the focus group discussions other than what has already been reported.

The field notes from the in-person online group held information about technical issues and communication issues but also included notes that attempted to organize information into an outline format, since this was not accomplished by participants in the online group. This group focused more on the local licensing board. This group comprised participants that were all from the same local area. The local licensing board has been the focus of a congressional investigative hearing and has undergone major improvements, so it is not surprising that the licensing board would be discussed among a group of local professionals. Field notes included brief notes on some disagreement among participants and some changes of opinion that some participants expressed during the group. Notes also included some information about themes that began to emerge as the group engaged in discussion. Field notes on the content reflected the same information that was presented in the analysis of data from the transcriptions of recordings of the group. In this way, field journal notes confirmed and validated findings and emerging themes that were addressed in the transcripts.

Outline for Training

Designing an outline for a training was the original goal of this project. Ideally, the participants would have produced and agreed upon a product, which would have been an organized outline of a training. This did not happen. This was a limitation of the

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study and was due to the lack of time. Participants did produce all of the elements of what they believed should be included in the outline to design a training program. They ran out of time before organizing the data and writing the outline. In a future cycle of this research, there could be time allotted for organizing data and designing the outline.

Summary

There were two focus groups conducted for this study. A total of eleven social workers participated in the study. These eleven participants were able to identify a number of important issues associated with the personal use of social media among professional workers. Professional boundaries are relevant even when engaging in personal use of social networking; the intersection between professional life and personal life are heavily evident on social media sites. Unintended disclosures are likely, maybe even more so than before social media, since there was an increased ability to control what parts of a professional's life they kept private. Online dating was mentioned by a participant but only briefly.

Security and privacy settings are available but are not used consistently or correctly. Even if they are used correctly it is still impossible to control what others post and how clients view it. Many professionals are using social media sites for professional purposes, which further complicates their ability to maintain privacy and security on their personal social media sites.

There appears, based on this data, to be a dismayingly low number of sufficient policies or guidelines to help professionals navigate ethical challenges they face when engaging in personal use of social media sites. While it was not included in the analysis, the good intentions of social workers were mentioned a number of times by participants,

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particularly when examining how there is a reactive rather than proactive response from NASW, educators, and agency administrators. Social workers cannot have the foresight to predict every issue that can arise but with coordinated efforts, the collective foresight of the social work community could predict quite a few issues before they become a problem. In the meantime, social workers are coming up with their own personal policies and deciding on their own or with a consulting colleague how to design their own guidelines for connection.

There is an astounding lack of education and training on digital ethics. It is a significant finding that every social worker in this study knows someone who has gotten into trouble with social media, but not one of the participants has received any formal education or training on how to manage social media sites in an ethical manner that avoids trouble. Participants in this study wanted more information on how to utilize and navigate technology. There seems to be no shortage of older social workers who have experience applying the Code of Ethics in practice; however, they may not have applied them with technology. There seems to be plenty of younger social workers with little experience applying the Code of Ethics, but a lot of experience with social networking. These two groups could collaborate to help one another and to design a meaningful education and training program. Social media continues to grow in popularity. It is important that social workers and the social work profession proactively address issues before more people suffer the consequences. The importance of this cannot be understated. As the issues around social media continue to surface, research needs to continue to address the issues and provide guidance for those in the field to engage in the

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most recent ethical practices. In Chapter 5, the findings are discussed and

recommendations for future research are explored.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The data from the previous chapter are discussed in this chapter. This includes a summary of the themes and recommendations for further research and further action. The purpose of this study was to gather information that would be used to design an outline of a training program for social workers who engage in personal use of social networking. There were numerous limitations in this study, which are acknowledged and discussed in this chapter. This chapter also includes areas for further research and recommended actions.

Two focus groups were conducted to gather data for this participatory action research study. The focus groups were recorded and data were transcribed. Data was then categorized and coded by hand to find emerging themes. These categories of data and emerging themes were organized to provide information on what participants agreed should be included in a training program for social workers who engage in the personal use of social networking. The data gathered included a variety of issues that clearly need to be addressed in a training program. Recommendations for a training program are made based directly on the recommendations of participants in the naturalistic inquiry and supported by the literature.

Summary of the Results

The results of this study included six themes that emerged from 22 categories of data found in the focus group discussions conducted for this study. These themes were

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largely consistent with data from other studies on this topic, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The topic of professional boundaries was the first theme in this study. Participants discussed the importance of separation between personal life and professional life and how this separation is complicated by involvement in social networking. This separation was further complicated when professionals utilized social networking for both personal and professional purposes. Dual relationships and friend requests from patients were also discussed and there was some agreement that social workers should avoid engaging in dual relationships with clients online. Confidentiality remained an extremely important part of social work and participants agreed that social networking can lead to breaches of confidentiality. These confidentiality breaches damage patients and put social workers at risk for legal action. Another risk discussed was seeing inappropriate content posted online by colleagues. This can lead to reporting issues about impaired professionals or inappropriate behavior of colleagues.

The second theme was the potential for unintended disclosure. Participants agreed that pictures and opinions posted online by social workers have the potential to be seen by clients. Even if social workers use security settings, their friends or family members may post pictures of the professional that clients and others may be able to see. Participants expressed special concern about religious or political posts that may alienate or discriminate against certain groups of people. There was also discussion on unintended disclosure through participation in public online groups or through online dating profiles.

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A third theme included privacy and security concerns when social workers participated in social networking. Participants discussed security settings on social network sites and how to use those settings. Participants agreed that more information was likely needed for social workers to fully understand what security settings are available to them and how to navigate those settings. Participants also discussed other measures to safeguard security and privacy online. This included use of an alias, not using location check-in options, and not identifying a workplace in an online profile. Another discussion that led to this emerging theme was the viewing of client information online without the consent of the client. Participants agreed that this was a violation of patient privacy and was inappropriate ethically.

The fourth theme was the professional use of social media. There were a number of participants who have utilized social media as a way to reach out to patients or provide support. Participants identified two specific patient demographics that respond positively to contact via social networking. Homeless clients who do not have access to a phone and who visit the library to check online contacts are one of these groups. The other group is made up of younger clients who may espouse a culture where technology is the prime method of communication. Charting and reporting were discussed as important considerations when engaging in professional use of social media. Mandated reporting issues could arise on social media. Participants also agreed that it is important to properly chart contacts that occur online and to be transparent about the method of communication.

Policy that covers use of social networking emerged as the fifth theme in this study. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that ethical code and formal policy is lacking

regarding how professionals can ethically navigate their use of social media. They also indicated a lack of direction from agency guidelines. While some participants did believe that their agency provides support and guidance, other participants indicated that agency guidelines were either inadequate or nonexistent. Participants expressed frustration with the reactive rather than proactive approach to the issue of social media and professional ethics. Some participants, in the absence of policy or guidelines, have formulated their own personal social media policies and guidelines for connecting with clients online. Participants agreed that social media policy is something that they believed belongs in the initial informed consent documents.

The last theme from this study included training and education of the ethics as it applies to social media. Participants all agreed that social media ethics were not a core part of any of their education or training. There was also agreement that not only social workers, but also peers, support staff, and behavioral health technicians who work in social work agencies should be trained on how to navigate professional issues that arise while they are engaging in personal use of social media. It is important to include not only how to ethically navigate social media use but also why it is so important. Participants also stressed the importance of ongoing and updated education, just like technology evolves and changes, so should the education. There was also agreement that NASW and other professional associations have a responsibility to share updated information and advocate for increased training and education regarding technology, and particularly the use of social media.

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Discussion of the Results

Most results from this study paralleled results from similar studies. The similarities started with the results of the introduction question. Facebook was the most frequently mentioned social networking site in Mishna et al.'s study (2012). There were not as many differences between the age groups as was expected. There were some differences regarding how frequently and in what ways social media is used by participants, for example, one participant decided to no longer use Facebook and disabled her account, while another participant stated she very rarely gets online. This compares to Lehavot et al.'s (2010) study in which 81% of participants reported engaging in social networking and maintaining at least one personal profile account and Taylor et al.'s (2010) study which found 77% of participants reported maintaining an account on at least one social networking site. There were very little differences in the way they perceived ethical responsibilities on social media. There was also virtually no difference in their desires for increased training and policy. The lack of difference based on age contrasts with Taylor et al.'s (2010) findings of significant differences in perceptions and attitudes about ethical responsibilities and desire for increased policy and training. The results will be further discussed in this section.

Professional boundaries need to be considered when engaging in personal use of social media. Participants in this study agreed that professional ethics apply to personal use of social networking, just as they apply to other areas of a social worker's personal life. Mukherjee and Clark (2012) found that 81% of participants surveyed in their study did not believe that the NASW Code of Ethics was applicable to their activities on social media sites. This difference could be attributed to the four-year span between these

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studies and the growth in technology and understanding of the impact of technology. Participants in this study and in one study conducted by Duncan-Daston et al. (2013) discussed ways in which professional roles could by impacted by online behaviors. This impact could include the consideration of online content when educational institutions or agencies are making decisions about who is admitted into a program or hired for a position (Lehavot, 2009). This impact was also discussed in the focus groups for this study. Another finding in this study related to professional boundaries, including friend requests from clients or former clients. Participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that friend requests from clients or former clients should not be accepted. There was little agreement on how to decline friend requests that do appear from former clients. While Mukherjee and Clark (2012) agree that accepting friend requests from clients can lead to numerous ethical concerns, 83% of their MSW student participants indicated that they would accept a client's friend request. Since participants of the study conducted for this dissertation were all Master's level social workers with work experience, it may explain their more cautious approach to client friend requests. Confidentiality and viewing inappropriate posts from other professionals were also topics addressed as professional boundary issues in the data from the focus groups.

The theme of unintended disclosures is closely related to professional boundaries. The depth of the discussion around unintended disclosures, and the frequency by which participants believed unintended disclosures were occurring on social media, led to unintended disclosures being assigned as an independent theme. Participants had a lively discussion about online posting and the belief that anything posted is private and will only be viewed by friends and family. There was agreement that not all online content

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would be appropriate for clients to view. Lehavot et al. (2010) found that many participants in their study were not using privacy settings and admitted to posting online content that they would prefer not be viewed by their clients. In this study and in a similar study by Christofides et al. (2009) participants reported posting highly personal online content but also report that they utilize privacy settings to safeguard that information. Participants in this study did further explore the potential for family and friends to post online content that might be professionally inappropriate and may not be protected by privacy settings. Numerous participants shared ways in which they had encountered a client online and potentially disclosed unintended information, even when they had secure privacy settings. Some of these ways included public special interest groups and yard sale sites. In this study as well as Fang et al.'s (2014) it was made clear that, even after deleted, online content could still be accessible and can negatively impact the professional, any institution the professional is affiliated with, and the profession as a whole.

This leads into the next theme, which is security and privacy. While participants did agree about the importance of the use of security and privacy settings, not all participants were using those settings in the same way. These findings compare with the findings of Taylor et al. (2010) and Lehavot et al. (2010), in which each reported data that indicated the professionals did use security and privacy settings on social media accounts. However, participants in this study also agreed that they do not believe they have enough information on how to use the security and privacy settings. Findings reflect how the lack of understanding about the use of security and privacy settings has led to clients finding information about the professional that was not meant to be public.

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In the absence of sufficient information about how to use privacy settings, some participants in this study, similar to what was mentioned by O. Zur and A. Zur (2011b), opted to maintain two separate social media profiles. There are others who opted to use an alias or substitute their middle name for their last name to make it more difficult for professional contacts to find their personal social media page. Participants in this study also agreed that the online privacy of patients is just as important as that of professionals. There was consensus that patients also have the right to privacy and that the viewing of patients' social media pages without consent was not ethically sound.

Even though this study was focused on the personal use of social media, many participants explained how they were using social media professionally. The professional use of social media can lead to intersection with personal social media use. Many participants in this study and other studies are using social media to reach out to clients, to provide support, access alumni, and simply market the agency (Reardon, 2011; Taube & Kolmes, 2010). This can lead to ethical dilemmas, unintended disclosures and boundary crossing as indicated by Kolmes (2009a) and participants in this study. There was extensive agreement, shown through participant examples and through examples in other studies, that it is difficult to maintain clear boundaries and to avoid cross over, even when using caution when engaging in both professional and personal use of social media (Behnke, 2008; Childs & Martin, 2012; Reamer, 2013a, 2013b). Participants believed that electronic record keeping and charting were also essential, even with contacts that occur with clients online, and that transparency is required about online communications. Mandated reporting is another area of concern for participants. Voshel and Wesala (2015) point out that in many states, licensing laws include the social worker always

being on duty, particularly when it comes to mandated reporting laws. This supports the concerns expressed by participants about requirements to report what they view online, whether it is viewed during the process of personal use of professional use of social media.

The lack of policy to guide ethical use of social networking is a concern for those seeking help to ethically navigate their online activities. NASW and ASWB have published the *NASW & ASWB Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice* (NASW, 2005). However, this publication only covers the use of technology as it relates to direct practice and does not address issues that could arise in personal use of social media (Voshel & Wesala, 2015). Participants agreed that there was a gap in policy regarding how to manage ethical dilemmas they may encounter while engaging in personal use of social media. This lack of policy is not only from professional associations or regulating organizations; there is also a lack of sufficient policy in agencies.

Agency guidelines and policies do exist in some agencies but are often described as insufficient, not addressing the ways in which professionals are using social media and inconsistent from one agency to another (O. Zur, 2012; Mishna et al., 2012). Participants in this study described their agency guidelines and inconsistent and inadequate and often sending mixed messages. They expressed a desire to have more guidance from their agencies, citing the importance of agency policy that considers the client population they serve. A few participants indicated there was one person, a department, or a consultant to go to for risk management. They felt that person or department would be able to offer help that would include issues encountered on social media. However, most did not have

such a person or department. This leaves these social workers unsure of where to seek out guidance for any ethical dilemmas they encounter (Lehavot et al., 2010).

The reactive approach of professional associations and agencies has shown to be troubling to participants in this and in other studies. Gabbard et al. (2011) questioned the hesitancy of the profession to engage a proactive approach to addressing these ethical challenges. Participants in this study also expressed frustration over the lack of proactive response. Discussions in the focus group about people who had gotten into trouble for mistakes with social media were followed by discussions about missed opportunities for the profession to respond to these issues in a proactive manner. There was a call in this and other studies, for agencies and professions to develop policies and outline standards that can guide online activities and set consistent consequences for ethical errors made on social media sites (Fang et al., 2014; Gabbard et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010; Voshel & Wesala, 2015).

Many professionals, including participants in this study, reported they are seeking out their own ways to ethically manage social media activities (Mishna et al., 2012). In the absence of agency policy and ethical guidelines, social workers are finding creative ways to meet their own needs for structure with social media. Kolmes (2010) and many of the participants in this study agreed that formulation of a personal policy on social media is one option for professionals. There are many professionals who are already utilizing their own personal social media policy (Gabbard et al., 2011; Kolmes, 2009a, 2010; Young, 2009, O. Zur & A. Zur, 2011b). Some professionals even offered to share their policy with others as an example of a format for a social media policy. Other professionals used a consultant (Mishna et al., 2012). Participants in this study also

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talked about the use of a consultant, particularly to keep up to date with technology but struggled to identify with whom they would consult. While they agreed that social work educators would be a common sense place to seek assistance, many reported that their own professors did not discuss social media ethics and may not be able to provide such guidance.

Social work education is another area that is lacking, according to the participants in this and numerous other studies. This represents another area of frustration among participants. While every participant knew at least one person who had gotten into trouble with social media, not one participant received formal social work education on social media ethics. Educators seem aware of the problems social work students and professionals are encountering but are not always responding (Gabbard et al., 2011). There is widespread agreement that more education and training are needed.

Education and training could be provided in many different ways. Schools of social work have numerous opportunities to intervene and educate students and professionals on the ethical challenges of social media. Participants agreed that inclusion in ethics course curriculum and in ethics training curriculum is essential (Fang et al., 2014; Gabbard et al., 2011; Kays, 2011; Taylor et al., 2010). Field placement presents another opportunity for intervention, training, and education (Duncan-Daston et al, 2013; Reamer, 2012; Judd & Johnson, 2012;). NASW also has a responsibility, according to data from this study, to advocate for continuing education for social media ethics (Gabbard et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2010; Voshel & Wesala, 2015). Participants felt it was critically important that education and training address not only how to address issues but why it is important and what possible consequences could occur. Participants

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also agreed that it is vital that training be kept up to date. The ever changing nature of technology can lead to education and training that could be quickly outdated (O. Zur et al., 2009). Participants believed that proper education and training needs to begin early as a way to prevent further ethical problems with social media (Gabbard et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010). Participants and researchers in nearly every study, including this study, agreed that there is a clear need for inclusion of social media ethics in educational and training courses.

Discussion of the Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to gather information that would be used to design an outline of a training program for social workers who engage in personal use of social networking. Issues to be included in such a training program were highlighted in the emerging themes in this study. There were also findings that suggested possible means of intervention and how training programs could be incorporated into the profession. Most findings in this study were consistent with the expected findings that were expressed prior to conducting the study. This means that findings are similar to those found in studies that were examined in the literature review.

Guidance on how to ethically navigate social media is both needed and wanted by social workers. Educational and training programs are the first potential area for intervention and are currently an underutilized way to guide professionals on ethical use of social media. Policy is currently minimal and represents another way that social workers could find assistance when trying to ethically navigate social media. It is important that policies are relevant and that education and training are kept up-to-date. Education and training programs need to utilize examples in a way that illustrates not

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only how to ethically navigate social media, but why it is important and what consequences can occur. Professional boundary issues and unintended disclosures are essential elements of any training or education program on social media ethics. Privacy issues and use of online security settings need to be explored and instructional information on how to use security tools is a vital topic to be included in training and education. Professional use of social media cannot be ignored when addressing social workers personal use of social media. The overlap of personal and professional use had led to more challenges for social workers who use social media. Finally, it is important that efforts begin immediately, as there are so many professionals who have already suffered consequences from mistakes they have made while engaging in personal use of social media.

The research questions and subquestions for this study were answered. The questions were:

1) How do professionals perceive their ethical responsibilities as they relate to their personal use of social networking sites?

    a. How are social workers using social networking?

    b. How do social workers apply social work ethics to their personal use of social networking?

2) What ethical challenges do professionals need to anticipate facing and be prepared to navigate?

    a. What ethical challenges have social workers encountered while engaging in social networking?

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b. What ethical challenges can social workers predict encountering when thinking of their own personal use of social networking?

3) What can be done to help professionals to ethically navigate their person use of social networking?

a. What needs to be included in a training program to help professionals to learn to ethically navigate their personal use of social networking?

The first research question and two related sub-questions, related to how social workers use social media and how they perceive their ethical responsibilities when using social media were answered. Participants perceived their ethical responsibilities on social media in a similar way to the way they perceive their ethical responsibilities in every other area of their lives. Participants did not feel there was any difference. They described their application of ethics as similar to application in other areas of their lives, with the exception of the lack of guidance that they reported regarding social media and social work ethics. Participants also reported social media use that is consistent with what they perceived as average, with some differences based on age, as was predicted.

The second research question and two related sub-questions, regarding the type of ethical challenges they experienced or expected when using social media were also answered. Participants provided numerous examples of ethical challenges they knew of professionals experiencing. Participant brainstorming produced numerous ethical challenges that participants predicted could arise during a social workers use of social media. They also reported ethical issues that they were aware of or predicted could occur when a social worker engages in both personal and professional use of social networking.

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The third research question and sub-question, related to how professionals could receive assistance on ethical navigation of personal use of social networking was answered. Participants described policy that could be enacted to guide social workers' ethical use of personal social networking. Participants also provided many elements that they felt should be included in an outline for training on ethical use of personal social networking. This study did fall short of the goal to produce an organized and written outline of what could be included in an ethics training related to personal use of social media.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. There was little diversity in the focus groups; for example, there was only one male participant and 10 female participants. While this may be representative of the male to female ratio of the social work profession, the ratio in this study was viewed as a limitation. Participants were predominantly from two geographic locations with only one participant from a third area. This was due to the recruitment efforts and limits the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation was the two-hour time period of the groups. The two-hour commitment may have hindered some potential participants from joining the study. The two-hour time period was also a limitation in allowing participants to make a more organized plan or outline for what they agreed should be included in a training program for social media ethics. The lack of literature on this topic presented another limitation.

There were two groups conducted, one in-person and one online. There were technical limitations related specifically to the online group. The recording device in the online conference room cut off the first minute of the focus group. It was difficult to hear

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participants at times. There were login issues, even though there was a trial run of the software and participants were sent login instructions. There was one participant who joined the audio portion of the meeting but was unable to join via video. There was a slight time delay, which led to a lack of ability to read social cues immediately and led to people frequently talking at the same time. There were also background noise issues, which were distracting for participants and made it more complicated for the transcriptionist.

Recommendations for Future Research or Interventions

There are a few areas for future research and interventions that were identified as the result of this study. The relationships between professional and personal use of social media and challenges that arise when a social worker is using both is another area that could be further researched, particularly since the professional use of social media seems to be on the rise. An interesting area for further research that emerged in this study is the online dating community. One participant mentioned social or dating groups and how she attempted to navigate those sites. There seemed to be some discomfort among some of the other participants and the topic was changed. Due to potential discomfort, to promote openness, and to ensure a sense of anonymity, online dating and meet-up sites may be best researched using quantitative methods where participants could answer without personal interaction with the researcher or other participants.

There are further cycles of this action research project that could be accomplished. The next cycle would be to actually design a training program outline, plan and write the training curriculum, and after that a training program could be implemented and evaluated for effectiveness. The best way to accomplish this would be

through focus groups where professionals collaborated to come to conclusions about how the program would be written, designed, implemented, and evaluated.

While the action part of this study which included producing an outline was not accomplished, the elements of the outline that were gathered were rich with content and could easily be organized into an outline if there was enough time. It is recommended that action research cycles continue until a training is implemented and evaluated. Action research could also provide the methods by which any training is kept up-to-date with technology if continued cycles of evaluation occur.

The findings of this study seem to have clearly indicated the need for changes in practice. Implications for practice include the need for policy. Whether this is a personal policy designed by an individual social worker, whether it is agency policy, or policy at the association and regulating entity level, something is needed to guide social worker practice. Policy does not need to address how to approach social media but could address inclusion of social media in higher education or continuing education curriculum. Until that time, social workers need to carefully consider any action they take online and the impact that it may have on the clients they serve, on their professional reputation, and on the profession in general.

Conclusion

This participatory action research study addressed issues relating to ethical challenges presented by the engagement in the online community. Social networking presents social workers with another form of community where they will need to apply ethical principles and professional boundaries. The purpose of this study was to gather information that could be used to design an outline of a training program for social

workers who engage in personal use of social networking. Findings in this study

gathered information that led to six emerging themes; professional boundaries,

unintended disclosure, security and privacy, professional use of social media, policy and,

training and education. Findings in this study supported not only what should be

included but how this information could be disseminated. Future cycles of action

research could be conducted to design, implement, and evaluate the interventions support

by the suggested methods from this study.

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APPENDIX A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you (circle one, please.)   Male   Female

2. What is your age?   _____

3. Are you a (circle one, please.)   Licensed Social Worker   MSW student

4. Number of years of professional experience as a social worker?

   _____

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APPENDIX B. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE QUESTIONS

<u>Intro Question</u>

1. Would you please describe your current use of, or experience with social networking?

<u>Grand Tour Question</u>

2. What professional ethical responsibilities do you feel apply to social workers' personal use of social networking?

<u>Mini Tour Questions</u>

Please answer these questions without identifying yourself or any other social worker as the one struggling with online ethical challenges or dilemmas, this is to ensure confidentiality.

3. Have you heard of any professional ethical dilemmas experienced by social workers while engaging in personal use of social networking?

4. What are some examples of ethical challenges that you have heard of social workers encountering while engaging in personal use of social networking?

5. What are some issues that you can imagine that might occur that would lead to ethical challenges while social workers are engaging in personal use of social networking?

<u>Grand Tour Question</u>

6. How do you feel the social work code of ethics can be applied to help social workers to navigate any issues they encounter in their personal use of social networking?

<u>Mini Tour Question</u>

7. What direction, if any, have you received on how to address ethical issues that arise in your personal use of social networking (ex., has this topic been addressed in a course or in a training session, does your agency have a policy, have you received any guidance pertaining to this issue in supervision sessions)?

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<u>Grand Tour Question</u>

8. What are the major issues that you believe should be included in a training to help social workers to be prepared to ethically navigate issues that arise from personal use of social networking?

<u>Mini Tour Questions</u>

9. What else can be included in a training that will be designed to help professionals navigate their personal use of social networking while maintaining their professional ethics?

10. How can any training information be kept up to date with the ever changing nature of technology?

APPENDIX C. RESEARCHER'S FIELD JOURNAL NOTES

(Will include information such as nonverbal communication, tone of voice, and communication details that cannot be recorded in auditory recording. Will also include processing of participant responses.)

Intro Question

1. Would you please describe your current use of, or experience with social networking?

Grand Tour Question

2. What professional ethical responsibilities do you feel apply to social workers' personal use of social networking?

Mini Tour Questions

3. Have you heard of any professional ethical dilemmas experienced by social workers while engaging in personal use of social networking?

4. What are some examples of ethical challenges that you have heard of social workers encountering while engaging in personal use of social networking?

5. What are some issues that you can imagine that might occur that would lead to ethical challenges while social workers are engaging in personal use of social networking?

Grand Tour Question

6. How do you feel the social work code of ethics can be applied to help social workers to navigate any issues they encounter in their personal use of social networking?

Mini Tour Question

7. What direction, if any, have you received on how to address ethical issues that arise in your personal use of social networking (ex., has this topic been addressed in a course or in a training session, does your agency have a policy, have you received any guidance pertaining to this issue in supervision sessions)?

Grand Tour Question

8. What are the major issues that you believe should be included in a training to help social workers to be prepared to ethically navigate issues that arise from personal use of social networking?

Mini Tour Questions

9. What else can be included in a training that will be designed to help professionals navigate their personal use of social networking while maintaining their professional ethics?

10. How can any training information be kept up to date with the ever changing nature of technology?