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Friending Your Clients on Facebook: How Social Media Influences Child Welfare Practice

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA

FRIENDING YOUR CLIENTS ON FACEBOOK: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

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What is Social Media?

☐ Any online platform or channel for publishing and disseminating user-generated content.[1]

☐ Social media allows us to engage with and empower our communities.

▪ Connection

▪ Access to information

1. http://heidicohen.com/social-media-definition/

Take it seriously!

- Social media is widespread.
  - In the U.S., social networks and blogs reach nearly 80% of Internet users and represents the majority of Americans' time online. [1]
- Half of all American adults are using social networking sites. [2]

- 95% of all teens ages 12-17 are online and

1. http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/social/
2. http://www.pewinternet.org/Media-Mentions/2011/Half-of-A social-networks
3. http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Teens-and-social-media

It's About Relationships

- Connections with family and friends is the primary reason.
  - 2/3 say staying in touch is a major reason they use these sites.[1]
- Most online adults describe their experiences using social media in positive terms.[2]

1. http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Why-Americans-Use-Social-Media
2. http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Social-Networking-Sites

Positive Benefits

- The average user has more close ties and is ½ as likely to be socially isolated.[1]

- 65% of teens have had an experience that made them feel good about themselves. 58% have felt closer to another person.[3]

- Young adults who spend more time on Facebook are better at showing "virtual empathy."[2]

- Youth who use blogs, websites and email to discuss politics and current events become more socially engaged over time.[4]

1. http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks
2. http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/10/facebook
3. http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Teens-and-social-media/Summary/Majority-of-teens
4. http://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/02/friends.aspx

Youth in Care & Social Media

- Connection
  - Siblings
  - Bio parents
  - Foster siblings
  - Friends from previous placements
- Ability to tell their story
- Support from peers
- Health information

Panic

"Moral panic is a common reaction to new forms of communication."[1]

1. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01474.x/full

Barriers

- Liability
- Lack of knowledge and skills
- State social media policies and regulations
- Lack of time and staff support

Guidelines & Policies

- Develop user guidelines/policies for youth.
  - Developed in partnership with youth
  - Focus on empowerment
- Develop an internal social media policy for staff.
- Crisis plan.

http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies

Idealware – Nonprofit Social Media Policy Workbook

Social Media Trainings

- ☐ Train staff on why youth use social media and how they're using it.

- ☐ Train youth on the risks of benefits of social media – make it fun!
  - ☐ Ask youth what they want to know.

Ending Thoughts

- Learn about social media by using it yourself.
  - Facebook
- Remember, the point is to connect.
- Read through the data use policies.
- Do a privacy audit once a month.
- When in doubt, ask for help.

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Overview

- This presentation will discuss the scope of social media use among youth; including the risks youth face, along with the opportunities they may experience.

- It will introduce a framework for developing privacy guidelines based in Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH), and will conclude by discussing how concerned parties in a youth's life, including youth themselves, may work together to bridge the gap between the unfettered use of social media and doing so safely by jointly developing policies to ensure the safe use of social media

A 2010 Pew research report indicates that 93% of American teens, ages 13 to 18, have internet access, and of this number, 73% use a social networking site, a figure which has increased significantly compared to a 65% rate in 2008 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010).

- The degree to which State child welfare agencies have specific policies governing the use of social media for youth in foster care is relatively unknown.

- On the other hand, there are extensive policies, procedures, and protocols detailing what information in a youth's foster record can be shared

- Most of us, including youth not in foster care, do not live our lives with others controlling the information about our lives.

- We can choose to tell our own stories in whatever manner we desire.

- We might be embarrassed on occasion, but we fundamentally live and tell our life stories knowing that it is one of our fundamental rights.

- Therefore, it is no wonder that our youth in foster care turn to the Internet, and social media in particular, to regain their voice, reconnect with society, and begin to control the story of their lives.

- However, they do so with peril due to risks of cyberbullying, unwanted secondary information disclosure, and even the potential for personal harm if their use of social media is not conducted in a safe manner.

What is Privacy?

- Privacy is fundamentally about how we control our information.

- Privacy is not about hiddenness or concealment, although it has oftentimes been framed as such.

- It is about sharing what we want to share, with whom, and how.

(Boyd, 2010a; Donath & Boyd, 2004; Noam, 1997; Hasebrink, Livingstone, & Haddon, 2008; Livingstone et al., 2011)

- Youth in foster care are faced with the predicament that most of what is known about them is controlled by others.

- No wonder youth in foster care turn to the Internet to tell their stories

- They want to have privacy; they want to control their own story and express their own identity

- But doing so in the realm of social media is more complex for our youth due to the numerous agencies involved in their lives. Developing a framework to manage the interdependent complexities of these agencies requires a methodology designed for that very task, especially when the parties involved have various levels of power

Critical Systems Heuristics

- Ulrich developed CSH as a tool to enable systems thinking for reflective practice.
- CSH has been used in a wide variety of settings for a diverse array of situations.

(Ulrich, 1983, 1987, 1995)

- "Critical" assumes there is no single right or correct way to view a situation or issue.
- Issues are based upon values and perspectives and should be subject to debate.
- Those "involved" define the issues and the decisions they may make "affect" everyone else.
- A critical perspective allows for those affected becoming involved in discussing what issues and values are to be considered.

- "Systems" acknowledges that there are multiples participants or stakeholders in any given situation each representing different perspectives, values, and assumptions.
- The inclusion or exclusion of any particular group of people essentially sets the boundary for the discussion of the issue.
- Changing who is involved fundamentally changes the boundary of the system
  — in our case, whose opinions need to be considered
    — when developing policy on the use of social media by youth in foster care.

- "Heuristics" are specific procedures, typically in the form of questions, which allow a group of people to determine all the relevant aspects of a given situation
- Heuristics are especially helpful in defining ill-defined issues by prompting us to question who is or is not involved in deliberating the matter at hand, for example, the use of social media by youth in foster care

The Risks and Benefits of Social Media

- The risks in unguarded sharing of personal information are patently obvious:

  - A perpetrator can locate a youth and continue their abuse.
  - A predator can find new victims and begin grooming them.
  - Youths may find themselves the victims of cyberbullying with potentially fatal consequences.

- Some risks may not be obvious:

  - The geographic location feature unveiled in Facebook in 2010, "Places," allows you to see where your Friends are and also displays where you are.
  - Unwittingly, a family living in fear of domestic violence has just made their location known.

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1912 – 2012

In the face of these risks, what are the benefits?

- Can the "Places" feature ward off feelings of anomie among youth who already feel disenfranchised by society due to their status?
  - Indeed, while our online "friends" are usually no more than acquaintances otherwise, they do represent real connections to others in the physical world
- Social media may provide a mechanism for connectiveness not otherwise available (Heer & Boyd, 2005).
  - Music is a visceral experience and represents an aspect of our taste and values that may be difficult to convey in words
  - Now, a youth who uses Napster can find his or her Facebook friends who share similar musical tastes
  - This can happen IF the youth gives permission, that is, controls, for the two applications to communicate with each other
- In sum, a youth controls his or her online experience, thus gaining knowledge about a peer who may share similar taste.

CSH Components
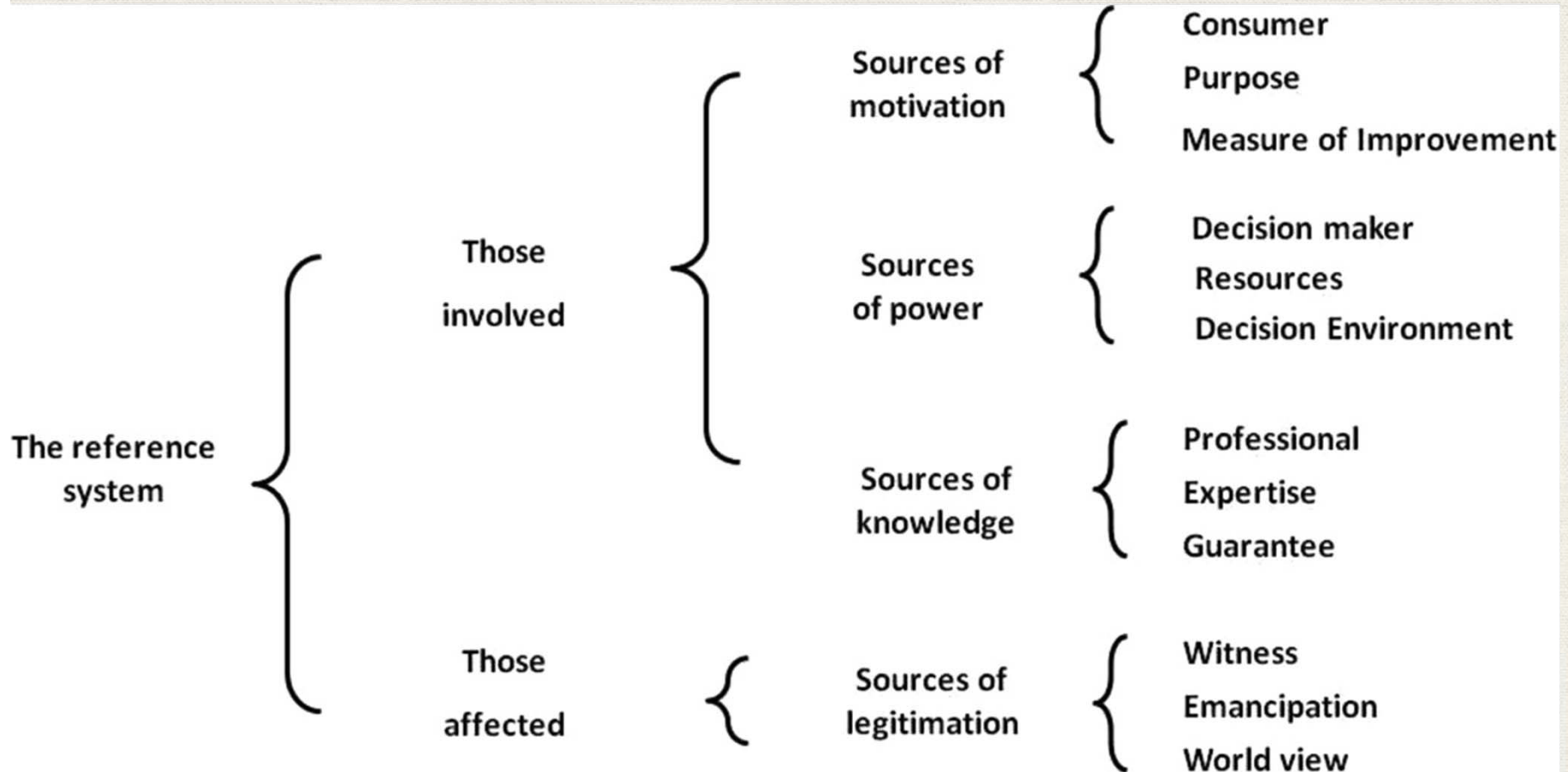
CSH Exemplar

- First, this application will be applied to older youth in foster care, that is, youth ages 13–21.

- Second, a centerpiece of Ulrich's CSH approach is his provision for exploring situations both from an "empirical" and "normative" perspective.

- As such, the *Is Mode* will be from the empirical perspective resulting in the reference system being the approach taken by a child welfare agency with a social media use policy for youth in foster care that primarily serves the agency's needs.

- Then, in the *Ought Mode*, the twelve questions will be revisited from a normative perspective in which the reference system will shift to a focus on the use of social media by youth in foster care where issues of information control and self-expression are centered.

Who is the client or beneficiary?

- *Is Mode*: A policy that essentially prohibits the use of social media primarily serves the needs of caseworkers and foster parents as beneficiaries in that it removes the issue from discussion

- *Ought Mode*: A policy to guide youth in foster care who use social media as a form of self-expression in identity formation
  - Note that this beneficiary fundamentally differs from the *Is Mode* in which the client was a policy that benefited case workers and foster parents.

What is the purpose?

- *Is Mode*: This type of prohibitive stance is ostensibly taken to protect the confidentiality, health, and safety of youth in foster care and their family members from harm and unwarranted privacy intrusions.

- *Ought Mode*: To provide youth in foster care a voice for telling and controlling their own stories.

What is the measure of success?

- *Is Mode*: Youth in foster care do not experience any invasion of privacy, are not exposed to cyberbullying, or any other form of technological exploitation.

- *Ought Mode*: The degree to which youth in foster care can explore and use social media the same way that other youth use social media with its incumbent benefits and risks.

Who is the decision maker?

- *Is Mode*: Child welfare administrative personnel who assume exclusive authority when formulating policy over youth in foster care

- *Ought Mode*: Policy developed in a collaborative manner involving the youth themselves and everyone else involved in their lives, ideally including their child welfare worker, foster parent, guardian ad litem, and so forth, but still essentially a collaborative process in which youth in foster care play a key role

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What resources are to be controlled by the decision maker?

- *Is Mode*: Permissioned access to social media websites, i.e., youth in foster care are not given the acquiescence to access social media websites.

- *Ought Mode*: Also permissioned access, but the difference is that youth in foster care are involved in the policy creation process that controls the access.

What conditions are not controlled by the decision makers?

- *Is Mode*: The tacit acknowledgement that even without permission, youth in foster care will most likely continue to access social media sites for the means of self-expression.

- *Ought Mode*: How other youth, former perpetrators, or potential perpetrators may adversely exploit the manner in which youth in foster care use social media:
  - This distinction is extremely important compared to the Is Mode.
  - In the former it was assumed that some youth in foster care would continue to do as they wish regardless of what the policy was.
  - In the latter the acknowledgement is made that youth will use social media so the discussion on the environment now shifts to a discussion of the very real threats that youths face.

Who is to be considered an expert in this situation?

- *Is Mode*: Technology professionals who focus on computer security measures; child welfare personnel; foster parents

- *Ought Mode*: In addition, other experts in areas of youth development, social development, and other subjects
  - Discussions on the role of social media in the lives of youth will take place which may shed further light on additional issues that need to be considered

What counts as relevant knowledge?

- *Is Mode*: Citing studies that show the danger of cyber-crime and cyber-bullying.

- *Ought Mode*: In addition would be studies showing that youth will most likely continue to use social media sites despite prohibitions and studies showing that social media sites can be a healthy and helpful way for youth in foster care to connect with other youth.

How do we know that this end will be achieved?

- *Is Mode*: By foster parents who will have to provide careful monitoring of social media use by youth in foster care, reporting behavior, providing consequences, and limiting access to technology.

- *Ought Mode*: Monitoring will still play a role; however, the focus would shift to a more collaborative relationship between the various stakeholders as they explore the use of social media together.

Who argues the case of those affected but not involved?

- *Is Mode*: Youth in foster care, themselves, are primarily affected by this type of policy approach and to some degree they may argue their case directly or indirectly through their actions; that is, by continuing to use social media sites.

- *Ought Mode*: In this regard we would want to include the extended family members of the youth in foster care who may unwittingly have control of their personal information taken from them.

  - Interestingly, to the extent a child welfare agency chooses not to become involved in working with youth as a collaborator, then they have by default made themselves an outsider to the process.

What secures the legitimacy of those affected from the premises and promises of those involved?

- Is Mode: Not only do guardians ad litem serve this purpose, but child welfare agencies are also overseen by various legislative bodies and accreditation bodies to ensure they are acting in the best interests of youth in foster care; a judge may question whether or not outright prohibitive policies are in the best interests of a youth in foster care.

- Ought Mode: This category becomes more difficult to operationalize and would ultimately include anyone who could be adversely affected:
  - A youth's extended family.
  - Youth in foster care who perhaps live in a different jurisdiction and who may not benefit from having a more collaborative support environment in which to navigate the risks and benefits of social media.

- In sum, identifying all possible affected groups in a cyber environment is inherently more difficult.

What worldviews or different visions of improvement are considered?

- Is Mode: The child welfare agency holds considerable sway and the general public sentiment that social media in general places youth in foster care at risk exerts sizeable influence.

- Ought Mode: Social media is viewed as a tool that holds more promise than peril:
  - To the extent that it is a collaborative venture with youth in foster care controlling their own voice, then they ultimately may be viewed as simply "youth'.'
  - It shifts the discourse from viewing youth as always be at-risk toward youth who might gain skills in order to be "risk resilient" (Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009).

- Coming up with a policy that simply prohibits Facebook or MySpace use does little to deter youth who can quickly turn to other sites, for example, Friendster, Tagworld, Bebo, Piczo, Faceparty, Mixi, or MiGente, illustrating the point that prohibitions will not protect our youth.

- Youth need guidance and support in how to use these sites in such a way that preserves their health and safety.

- Furthermore, prohibiting the use of online social media avoids dealing with the underlying issues (Boyd, Marwick, Aftab, & Koeltl, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

- If anything, the online postings of our youth may be revealing problems or shortcomings in our existing systems of care that deserve our attention.

Safety Strategies

- Although social media sites have guidelines for protecting privacy, understanding how to use all the settings can be daunting:
  - Facebook at one point had over 170 different customizable privacy settings and those settings were prone to change.
  - Not all social network sites use the same default settings, so what may be protected information in one site might be easily displayed or accessed on a different site.

- Boyd found that youth employ many measures, such as pseudonyms, to thwart the prying eyes of parents:
  - Others use multiple identities depending upon the intended audience: the straight-laced profile for their public audience and their "real" profile known only to select peers.
  - Many youth already employ the "would I want my mom to read this" strategy.
  - Some information ends up on Facebook, some in Myspace, with a balance of information showing up on Twitter and other venues.

- Although a good comprehensive resource for youth online safety is ConnectSafely, (http://www.connectsafely.org/), the important point is that safety strategies should not and cannot be left up to chance outside of any specific policy provisions.

- If youth involved with child welfare need assistance in using online social media, to whom should we ask they turn?

- Leave them on their own knowing that they will most likely place themselves at risk?

- Have them rely on peers who may be adept at the technology, but who may lack an understanding of the ramifications of making a youth's private life public?

- Or should the assistance come from child welfare workers, juvenile officers, guardians ad litem, foster parents, and judges, all who recognize the youth's right and need for privacy balanced with the opportunity for self-determination?

- Who is going to help our youth in foster care "control their story?"

Conclusion

- Our youth are creating an online persona that may or may not align with their offline world.

- What does that discrepancy tell us about the services goals we have identified for our youth?

- What can we then, in turn, learn about ourselves?

- Finally, studies need to be conducted that examine the use of social media by youth in foster care, perhaps having various types of access or control as independent variables, to see to what extent and how it places our youths in harm's way.

Thank-You!

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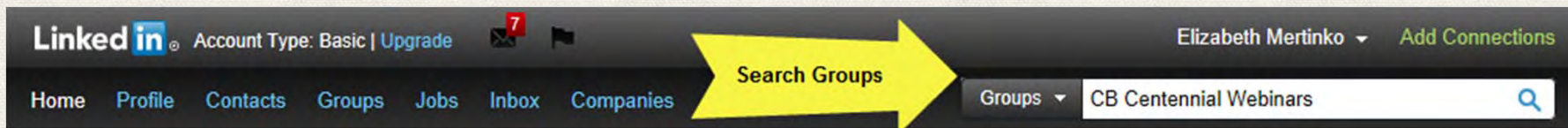703 Clark Hall

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