



Social Media Policy 1.0¹

This document is made for the benefit of my psychotherapy clients, but may also be of use to other psychotherapists or counsellors who are involved in social networking or have any other online or media presence. Though social networking is now rather mainstream, psychotherapists are still taking time to adjust to this new social paradigm. Though therapists are generally trained to keep their personal lives out of the consulting room for the benefit of their clients, the massive availability of information about us on the internet means that this, virtually at least, can no longer happen. Furthermore, psychotherapists need to make their own choices (as much as possible) about their involvement in social media, how publically available their online presence is, and to be cognisant about how their online presence can affect their clients.

This document is based on my own choices with regard to social media, and I am open to changing my positions on it. In the meantime, I ask all my clients to read through this document so they can be familiar with these positions.

My media activities:

It is important for you to be aware that in many ways I am a public clinician. In addition to my psychotherapy practice, training and education work, I am also involved in a number of public activities that promote psychology and psychoanalysis. I offer psychological insight and advice across a number of platforms including the radio, television, and the Internet. As part of this work, I utilise various online resources including a regular blog, my membership of Twitter, Linked-In, and various other online activities.

These online resources enable me to reach a broad swath of people to whom I can communicate the more publically consumable end of psychological theory, hopefully to be made useful in their lives. Furthermore, I am currently researching a book on the psychology of social networking, and for these reasons too, I am heavily involved in this world as an ethnographic researcher. I see both these aspects of my work as related to, but completely separate from my clinical work, which I hold to be sacrosanct.

My duty of care to my clients and my professional commitment to confidentiality means that I never talk about my clinical work in these public spheres. As my client you will have received a contract covering all the bounds of my confidentiality with you – a contract I take most seriously.

Keeping Boundaries:

The nature of an online presence can blur interpersonal boundaries, so it is important to be as clear as possible about how boundaries may be challenged in an online environment.

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**Twitter:**

I maintain a Twitter profile as a way of promoting psychological ideas, and to make people aware of events, conferences, or media events that I may be attending. I frequently send links that may be of interest to my followers and sometimes engage in public conversations on these topics. My profile is designed to promote my "persona" as a media psychotherapist, and most particularly for the radio work that I do.

I have no expectation that you as a client will follow my Twitter stream, and in fact, I would advise against it. Despite my online presence, I would prefer that our relationship remain as much as possible between us in the consultation room, therefore I will not knowingly follow any current or former clients on Twitter.

Facebook and Linked-In:

I, like many others, maintain a private Facebook account for personal reasons, and a Linked-In account for professional ones. I aim to keep my Facebook as private as possible and it would not be appropriate to be Facebook "friends" with former or current clients. I acknowledge that there can be some overlap across social networks, and that this sometimes comes to light on Facebook. If this were the case, it would be something we would need to discuss in session.

As the above, I have decided that it would not be appropriate to add current or former clients as "connections" on Linked-In.

Google:

It is likely that you will have Googled me before you contacted me. From this experience you will be aware that you can build up a picture of someone from a Google search that may be rather distorting. While I acknowledge that Googling others is now a generally accepted aspect of daily life, I wish to avoid this distortion as much as possible, and in general practice I do not Google my clients before I meet them. It is of course your right to Google me. However, if in your search some questions are raised, I would request that you raise them with me at the first opportunity.

Interacting with me:

Social networking and other online activities are more and more a part of our daily lives. It is likely that you will wish to share your stories and experiences with me, and may wish to show me or tell me about your experiences. You are welcome to do so. Importantly, should you encounter something about me that you find online and concerns you in some way, please do discuss it with me.

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Psychotherapy can be a profound interpersonal commitment between therapist and client, and for this reason, the vast majority of our communication should be face-to-face, or if we have made such arrangements, by phone or Skype.

For these reasons I ask that we use email and text only to rearrange sessions if necessary. Unless previously arranged (and this would be only under exceptional circumstances) please do not email me content about our therapy sessions – not only is this neither secure nor confidential, but it also prevents the kind of therapeutic engagement necessary for the work. For most communications, it is best to phone me.

The world is changing fast:

I have half-jokingly called this a Social Media Policy “1.0.” I put it this way because this world is changing so rapidly, and my own responses to it are still only developing. I will be amending this policy as I learn more, and would appreciate your honesty and input along the way. Should you have any questions or suggestions, please do let me know.

¹ I am grateful to Keely Kolmes, Psy. D. who provided the initial model for this policy <http://www.drkkolmes.com>