The use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn is ubiquitous in American culture. A recent survey found that 73 percent of online adults use social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2014). Sandra DeJong’s book *Blogs and Tweets, Texting and Friending: Social Media and Online Professionalism in Health Care* provides guidelines for health care professionals for how to manage their use of social media and the Internet. Topics of interest include liability and malpractice, confidentiality, privacy, conflicts of interest, and academic honesty. The book is concise and informative, and it provides many resources for professionals. This text would be an excellent reference for licensed treatment professionals in psychology and related fields as well as for graduate student trainees.

Although DeJong is a psychiatrist and much of the book is geared toward medical professionals, the text would without a doubt be useful for clinical and counseling psychologists. The issues discussed apply to anyone providing treatment. In addition, there are chapters that pertain to all health providers regardless of specialization. These include chapters on academic honesty (Chapter 8), “netiquette” (Chapter 10), and recommendations for professional use of social media, digital technology, and the Internet (Chapter 11).

DeJong includes many useful resources such as URLs for existing guidelines and sample policies of professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association and various other medical organizations. The chapters provide vignettes that can facilitate classroom discussions of the complicated and challenging ethical dilemmas that can arise from health care professionals’ use of social media. The vignettes address a number of different topics, and examples include issues
such as posting negative comments about patients on Facebook, physician blog posts that discuss patients, and boundary violations between patients and care providers via e-mail.

The text would be especially useful in the training of graduate students in clinical psychology and related fields. A number of recent studies addressing the use of social media by graduate students and licensed professionals suggest that dialogue on this issue is needed. Research by Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, and Chang (2010) indicated that graduate students are aware of and concerned about ethical issues surrounding the use of social media, and many also feel uncertain about how to handle ethical issues related to the use of social media (i.e., how to deal with clients searching for them on the Internet).

Other research with graduate students suggests that some of them may be engaging in ethically questionable behavior. In a recent study of counseling and psychology graduate students, Harris and Robinson Kurpius (2014) found that approximately one third of their respondents had used the Internet to search for information about their clients. Additionally, the majority of their respondents did not obtain consent for these searches. Harris and Robinson Kurpius suggested that these searches are most often done out of curiosity, but they represent potential ethical violations by graduate students. This study and others suggest that graduate students need training on how they use the Internet and social networking sites within the scope of professional practice. Discussion of these issues in graduate programs could be facilitated with a text such as DeJong’s.

The text would also help more experienced psychologists who may not have as much familiarity with online social networking. The text is informative in at least two ways: first, by illuminating the various issues regarding the use of online social networking; second, by facilitating conversations with graduate student trainees. Many trainees in graduate programs can be described as digital natives, individuals who have grown up with digital technology, whereas their supervisors are more likely to be digital immigrants, having adopted such technology later in life (Kolmes, 2012; Prensky, 2001). Due to differences in experience, there may be misunderstandings between trainees and supervisors related to online social networking.

Additionally, supervisors may overlook important ethical issues related to online social networking that are important to students. In a recent study of graduate students, Asay and Lal (2014) found that more than half of their respondents were concerned about making ethical decisions regarding contact with clients over their social network accounts, and less than half were comfortable making a decision about such matters. Although a majority of participants in Asay and Lal’s study reported discussing Internet issues in their graduate programs, far fewer indicated discussing such issues at their training sites.

In summary, I found DeJong’s book to be highly informative and necessary reading. Whether the issue is inappropriate online searching of clients, posting objectionable photos of oneself, or negotiating being the subject of an Internet search by a client, helping professionals need resources for dealing with the ethical issues surrounding the use of social media. DeJong’s book is an excellent choice. Given the results of recent research with graduate students, it seems that discussion of ethical issues surrounding the use of social media is needed in graduate training programs. DeJong’s book would be an excellent choice to use for facilitating this discussion.
References


