



B83 Criminalists' Ethics in the Era of Social Media

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the impact and additional pitfalls the expanding everyday use of social media has on the ethical behavior of criminalists.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a forum for the discussion on how social media can inadvertently draw an ethical criminalist to participate in actions that are counter to professional ethical codes of conduct.

Social media such as Facebook®, Twitter®, LinkedIn®, YouTube®, and Instagram™ have revolutionized the distribution and “life span” of information. The ability to instantly share our lives and activities with potentially millions of people by providing truncated bits of data without taking the time for thoughtful editing has changed the way society interacts. Social media is a valuable tool but can also be dangerous.

All professions have some form of code of conduct to provide guidance for ethical behavior. Forensic science is no different; there are codes such as the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) Code of Ethics and Conduct and the American Board of Criminalistics (ABC) Rules of Professional Conduct. Forensic science codes of ethical or professional conduct can be found in many professional associations. As forensic science professionals, we strive to adhere to these codes and perform our work ethically, with honor and integrity. Unbeknownst to us, many of us have used social media without first evaluating the link between our ethics and social media outlets. Without recognizing and understanding the pitfalls, social media has made it more difficult to adhere to the codes of conduct. Actions that used to be a personal communication between two individuals have become public knowledge and available on line, forever.

Other professions, such as attorneys and health care professionals, are actively studying the impact of social media and providing their practitioners with additional ethical guidance. The federal government has prepared a guidance document for federal employees. Forensic scientists need to enter the conversation soon as too much time has already passed and damage may have already happened. Examples of social media damage in the criminal justice system include cases resulting in mistrials due to witnesses, jurors, and judges inappropriately commenting on cases through their social media accounts.

Ethics Code sections will be examined and discussed to help identify pitfalls. In addition, other concerns such as *Brady*, reputation management, and employment impacts will be considered. Can postings on Facebook®, YouTube®, or Instagram™ keep you from being hired by a government agency? Can defense attorneys or prosecutors use postings to show *Brady* violations? What impact can your on-line life have on your professional life?

Social Media, Ethics, Conduct