

Psychological Assessment and Online Presence

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Lecture Outline

01

Evaluate ethical issues related to the use of psychological assessment, online behaviour, and professional communication

02

Apply ethical reasoning to dilemmas involving online communication

03

Reflect on how personal and professional values influence digital identity



01

Ethical Practice in Psychometric and Psychological Assessment





Ethical Principles in Assessment

Psychometric assessments must be reliable, valid, and fair

Results should only be used for their intended purpose

Psychologists have a duty of competence

Power dynamics, data protection, and fairness to candidates must be considered

Informed consent and confidentiality are paramount

Ethical and legal implications if misuse occurs



Guidance on Psychometric Testing



BPS Test User Standards

Only accredited professionals (qualified in Occupational Ability / Personality testing) must administer and score psychometric assessments



HCPC Standards of Conduct and Ethics

Work within limits of competence, communicate results appropriately, protect confidential candidate information



**What ethical issues
are likely to be
present when
assessing
candidates?**

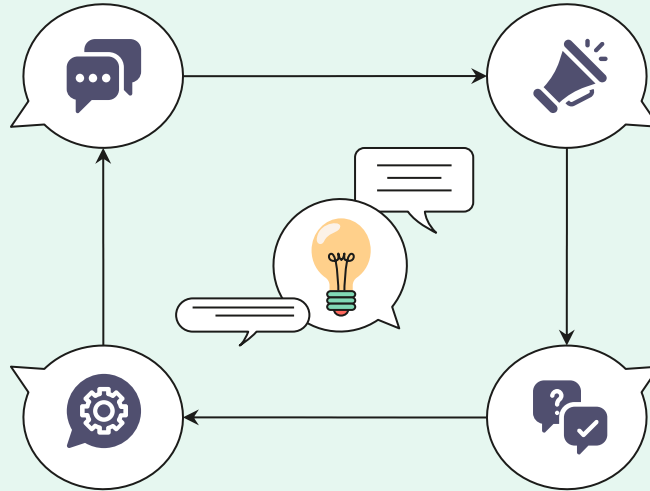
Potential Ethical Dilemmas in Assessment

Inappropriate measures

Use of culturally biased or outdated measures

Misuse of results

Using results for purposes beyond consent (e.g., promotion, redundancy)



Employer pressure

Pressure to disclose confidential data

Coercion

Lack of informed consent or coercion



Debate:

Should organisations have the right to access an employee's full psychometric profile if the testing was conducted in a work context?

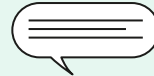




Debate – examples for and against



For	vs.	Against
Employer funds assessment, so feel entitled to results for staffing decision		Confidentiality and psychological safety. GDPR = sensitive data
Outcomes may be directly relevant to organisational effectiveness		Implicit coercion in workplace settings – employees feel obligated to complete assessment
Full access = transparency or a justification for fair decision making		Misinterpretation or misunderstanding of psychometric results





ACTION?

What are your ethical responsibilities regarding data sharing?

How do you balance confidentiality with organisational needs?

What does informed consent cover in this situation?

02

Online Presence and Communication





What is an “Online Presence?”



Online Presence



**Social
Media**



**Professional
Networking**



**Academic
Identity**



**Digital
Footprint**

Why does our online presence matter?

- Management of professional reputation
- Professional trust and integrity
- Management of boundaries
- Employability options





**Imagine you are
applying for a role in
psychology.**

Google yourself.

*What impression do you give? What
might an employer think?*



**How does psychology
fit into this?**

Psychological Theories in Context

Impression Management

Goffman (1959)

Social Identity Theory

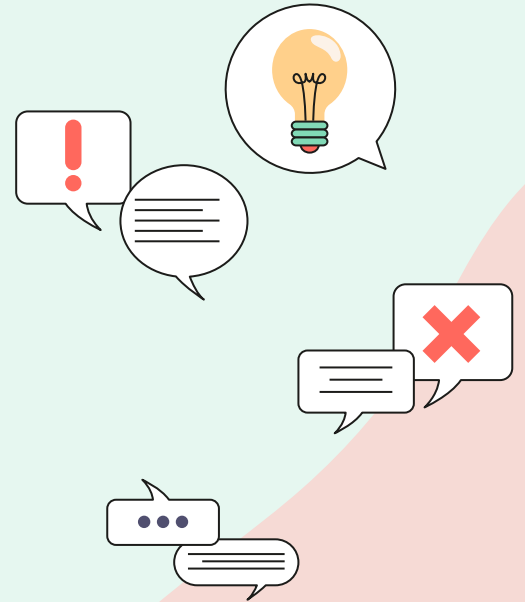
Tajfel and Turner (1979)

Digital Disinhibition Effect

Suler (2004)

Parasocial Relationships

Horton and Wohl (1956)





Impression Management

Goffman (1959)



Social interactions = theatrical performance

We manage the impressions we give to others and perform roles depending on audience and context

Front Stage (Public Self) versus (Back Stage (Private Self)



Impression Management

Goffman (1959)



Application:

1. Digital front stage – curating professional identities
2. Audience segregation is more difficult online; social media collapses boundaries
3. Self-branding / professional identity to comply with occupational norms
4. Constant self-monitoring can be problematic – ‘performative professionalism’
5. Ethics? Presentation to be consistent with professional codes?



Digital Disinhibition Effect

Suler (2004)



We behave differently because of reduced constraints online.

Online communication can amplify openness or aggression

Six factors that interact with each other in creating this online disinhibition effect: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, a-synchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimisation of authority.

Benign Disinhibition

Toxic Disinhibition



Digital Disinhibition Effect

Suler (2004)



Application:

1. Toxic disinhibition — e.g., venting about work online, criticising others, or sharing identifiable information.
2. Perception of anonymity can lead to violations of boundaries
3. Benign disinhibition can be harnessed ethically (encouraging reflection, etc)
4. Online conflicts can escalate quickly - reduction in ability to read non-verbal cues or empathy



Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner (1979)



A person's sense of self is derived from memberships in social groups.

We are driven by a need for positive self-regard that comes from belonging to groups and differentiating ourselves from others

We categorise ourselves and other people into groups (in-groups and out-groups) – favour in-groups which can lead to bias or prejudice against out-groups to maintain **self-esteem**



Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner (1979)



Application:

1. Digital symbols allow us to display group affiliation
2. Professional norms and values can shape our online identity
3. In-group bias can occur online – favouring posts from a specific community or dismissing others
4. Intergroup conflict can occur in professional debates



Parasocial Relationships

Horton and Wohl (1956)



Occur when a person forms a one-sided, emotional attachment to a media figure who doesn't reciprocate interaction.

Perceived as genuine relationships – even if no contact has ever occurred.



Parasocial Relationships

Horton and Wohl (1956)



Application:

1. Social media can blur the line between personal and professional accessibility
2. Can lead to boundary challenges
3. Online visibility can lead to parasocial expectations - e.g., pressure to be constantly available or emotionally responsive
4. Psychology influencers??



	Core idea	Online application	Ethical relevance
Goffman – Impression Management	Managing self-presentation to influence others	Curating online profiles; blurred audience boundaries	Need for authentic, ethical self-representation
Suler – Digital Disinhibition Effect	Reduced inhibitions due to anonymity and distance	Openness or hostility in online exchanges	Maintaining professionalism; avoiding impulsive posting
Tajfel and Turner – Social Identity Theory	Group-based self-concept	Expressing professional affiliation online	Respecting diversity; avoiding group bias
Horton and Wohl – Parasocial relationships	One-sided emotional attachments	Followers forming perceived closeness to professionals	Managing boundaries; limiting self-disclosure



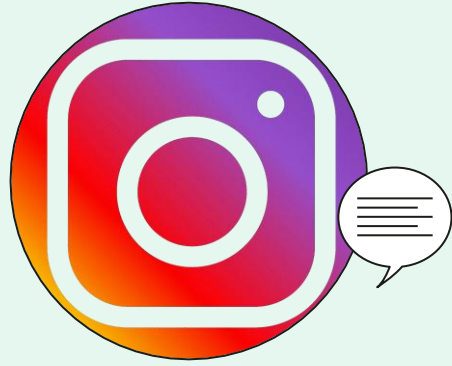
**Why are ethical lapses
more likely to occur in
digital spaces?**

**Are there any
examples you can
share of disinhibited
communication that
you've witnessed?**



Ethical Scenarios / Case Studies





**Professional
Instagram**



LinkedIn Rant



Group Chat

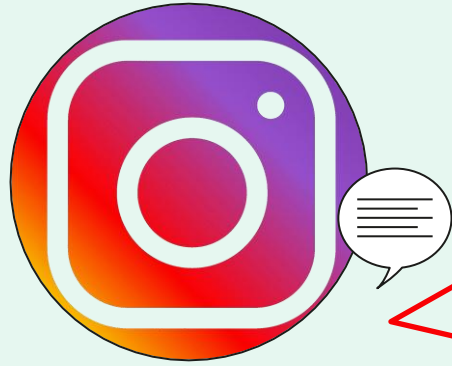


**Friend
Requests**



Reflective Blog





Professional Instagram

You're a trainee psychologist sharing wellbeing tips on Instagram.

A former client comments asking for advice.

Respond publicly, privately, or not at all?

BACK





LinkedIn Rant

A psychologist posts criticism of their former employer.

The post goes viral.

Ethical or whistleblowing?

BACK



Colleagues share a meme about a client in a private group.

Details could make the person identifiable.

Does intent or audience affect ethical responsibility?



Group Chat

BACK





Friend Requests

A client sends you a Facebook request.

Declining feels awkward due to mutual contacts.

Are there any strategies that you could put in place to set digital boundaries early on?

BACK



You blog about occupational stress and anonymise cases.

A client recognises themselves in a story.

What are the ethical issues present here?



Reflective Blog

BACK

