

ESW OPEN RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES

Dr Milena Heinsch

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Wednesday 23 October 2019 / 12.30-2pm
Room G31, Freeman Centre

Disclosure of Suicidal Thoughts during an E-mental Health Intervention: Relational ethics meets actor-network theory

Recent developments in information and communications technology have created enormous opportunities for the provision of affordable, accessible, and flexible mental healthcare. Yet the delivery of mental health services online also creates complexities and ethical challenges. While some of these challenges may be similar to those in face-to-face care, their nuance is quite different in the online milieu, where relationships, identities and boundaries are fluid, and there is an absence of physical presence.

Dr Heinsch's seminar will look at the ethical complexities involved in providing a social networking intervention for depression and alcohol misuse, involving providers and peers. She will present a case where researchers and clinicians encountered a participant who repeatedly expressed suicidal thoughts online.

Reflecting on how this was managed, she will draw on relational ethics and actor-network theory to explore the challenges and opportunities that emerged. These concern embodiment, choice and freedom, technology as a mediator, mutuality and engagement, and power and status within the online environment. She will argue for the need to move beyond human-centric approaches, to recognise the role of both human and non-human actors in shaping moral decisions and behaviour in e-mental healthcare.

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