Self-Disclosure and Social Support Exchange in Socially Stigmatized and Distressing Personal Contexts on Social Media

Prior research introduces the Disclosure Decision-Making (DDM) framework for understanding social media disclosure decisions in contexts often associated with social stigma (e.g., pregnancy loss -- a reproductive health complication). In this project, we will work to evaluate, extend, and refine the DDM framework through examining disclosure and support exchange on social media for other populations such as informal caregivers (ICs) who experience stigma and distress. In particular, many ICs (e.g., ICs of individuals who have developed a substance abuse disorder, ICs of individuals undergoing certain surgeries) face unique challenges in providing care to those who need them and also meeting their own needs. Such ICs typically experience stigma by association and affiliation, can feel isolated, and may face negative wellbeing effects as a result of this isolation.

We will work with individuals experiencing stigma and distress (e.g., ICs.) We will examine challenges, needs, barriers, and outcomes related to self-disclosure and social support exchange on and beyond social media platforms. We will address questions such as: What challenges or needs do people (e.g., ICs) have, including but not limited to access to social support? How might social technologies be designed to help them meet these needs? How do people navigate disclosure decisions and privacy tensions? These investigations will not only have theoretical implications, but will also inform social technology designs for beneficial sensitive disclosures for diverse populations facing stigma and adversities. The student will have an opportunity to contribute to this project in several ways including participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, conducting literature review, and writing an academic article.