Ethics and Social Media

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Fellowship Hall, Greensboro, NC
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ETHICS
Rules of behavior based on ideas about what is morally good and bad

Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2018
PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

What is the right thing to do in a given practice situation?

Where would we find this information?
# Codes Of Ethics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
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<tr>
<td>Addictions Professionals</td>
<td>National Association of Alcohol &amp; Drug Abuse Counselors (NAADAC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychologists</td>
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<td>Counselors</td>
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<td>Marriage and Family Therapists</td>
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Question...

What’s the problem?
What’s the problem?

Technology is advancing faster than our codes of ethics can keep up.
Technology is advancing faster than our codes of ethics can keep up.

- NAADAC 2016
- APA 2016
- NASW 2017
- ACA 2014
- AAMFT 2015
The Digital Age

We Are Surrounded By Technology That Has Changed The Way We Practice.
The Digital Age

Access To Personal Computers Changed EVERYTHING!
The Digital Age

They Have Become:

• Smaller
• More Affordable
• Faster
• More Versatile
What is Social Media
Social Media... 

What Constitutes Social Media?

Social media: Forms of electronic communication (such as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).

Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2018
Social Media Lends Itself To A *Multitude* Of Possible Ethical Issues:

- Conflict of Interest
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Inappropriate Self-Disclosure
- Dual Relationships
What Information Can Be Found Out About You On A Google Search?
Remember...

If It Is On The Internet, It’s Public Information!
Clinicians postings on social networking sites may constitute an inadvertent form of self-disclosure to clients and colleagues who explore these sites.
Responsibility falls on the clinician given the possibility of even private sites being hacked and exposed, or information being visible unintentionally via networks.
Social Media

How do you respond if a client tells you they “googled” you?
Social Media

Who else is searching your social media presence?
Potential Employers Are Searching Social Media

- Provocative or inappropriate photographs: 46 percent
- Information about candidate drinking or using drugs: 40 percent
- Candidate bad-mouthed previous company or fellow employee: 34 percent
- Discriminatory comments related to race, religion, gender, etc: 29 percent
- Poor communication skills: 30 percent

CareerBuilder Survey 2015
Question...

Do We Or Don’t We?
Do We Or Don’t We?

- Google Our Clients
- ‘Follow’ a Client’s Twitter Feed
- Have a Presence On Facebook
- Accept a Facebook Friend Request
- Blog
- Utilize Online Dating Sites
Question...

Have You Ever Considered Looking A Client Up On A Social Networking Site?
Consider
Looking Up A Client?

Stop Right There!

All clients have a right to their privacy, to their own lives, and to the content of their social networking sites.
One may argue that information posted on social networking sites is public information and anyone has a right to access what is posted.

This assumption is correct, however, clinicians must consider the intention behind any search for information.
Biggest Ethical Concerns...

• Boundaries
• Dual Relationships
• Conflicts Of Interest
• Confidentiality
Question...

How Could A Clinicians Membership On A Social Networking Site Affect Potential Or Current Clients?
Example:

Consider an anxious client who sees you as a reliable nurturer. Upon pursuing their favorite SNS, they search your name. You posted pictures from your recent vacation and what the client discovers is far different from the comforting support they seek weekly.
“Clients prefer to think of their therapists as existing only in the therapy space. Potential harm may occur, then, when the client feels impinged upon by finding a therapist’s information online.”

Scarton, 2010
Clinicians should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client.
Conflict Of Interest:

A situation may be created when a clinician must decide whether or not to accept a “friend” request, potentially having to reject the client.
What if you decided to allow a current or former client into your social network?

• Clearly, this could be a case in which a dual relationship could form.

• Clients who learn personal details about clinician’s lives may experience complex and counterproductive transference.

• Issues of privacy and confidentiality could also arise if you were to allow a client or former client into a social network that consisted of family and friends.

• You have your own privacy and boundary issues to consider.
Question...

Should You Accept A Friend Request From A Current Or Former Client?
What The Codes Say...

**ASWB-MRS**

4.05 Take reasonable steps to prevent client access to personal social networking sites; maintain separate personal and professional social media websites

4.10 Refrain from accepting “friend” requests

**ACA**

H.6.a. use separate personal and professional web pages and profiles for social media; clearly distinguish between the two kinds of media presence
Social Media

Additional Digital Dilemmas
Additional Digital Dilemmas

What About Other Digital Technology?

- Email
- Text
- Video Conferencing
- Online Counseling
- Smartphone Apps
Addiction Professionals who choose to engage in the use of technology for e-therapy, distance counseling, and e-supervision shall pursue specialized knowledge and competency regarding the technical, ethical, and legal considerations specific to technology, social media, and distance counseling. Competency shall be demonstrated through means such as specialized certifications and additional course work and/or trainings.
Delivering Services
In The Face Of New Challenges...

- Must be sure to use sophisticated encryption technology to preventing confidentiality breaches (hacking) by unauthorized parties and to comply with strict HIPAA guidelines.

- The ethical burden falls on the clinician to ensure trustworthy encryption by software vendors.
Delivering Services
In The Face Of New Challenges...

Other Considerations:

• Do you clearly explain, in writing, your guidelines for interacting with clients via other digital or electronic means at various times of day and night, weekends, and holidays?

• What protocols do you or your agency have in place to ensure that clinically relevant email, text, social networking, and telephone exchanges are documented properly in the case record?
Informed Consent

- A thorough e-therapy informed consent shall be executed at the start of services. A technology-based informed consent discussion shall include:
  - Distance counseling credentials, physical location of practice, and contact information;
  - Risks and benefits of engaging in the use of distance counseling, technology, and/or social media;
  - Possibility of technology failure and alternate methods of service delivery;
  - Anticipated response time;
  - Emergency procedures to follow;
  - When the counselor is not available;
  - Time zone differences;
  - Cultural and/or language differences that may affect delivery of services; and
  - Possible denial of insurance benefits; and social media policy.

NAADAC Code of Ethics 2016
Verification

- Addiction Professionals who engage in the use of electronic platforms for the delivery of services shall take reasonable steps to verify the client’s/supervisee’s identity prior to engaging in the e-therapy relationship and throughout the therapeutic relationship. Verification can include, but is not limited to, picture ids, code words, numbers, graphics, or other nondescript identifiers.
Addiction Professionals shall assess and document the client’s/supervisee’s ability to benefit from and engage in e-therapy services.
Distance Counseling

Providers shall consider:

- The client’s/supervisee’s cognitive capacity and maturity
- Past and current diagnoses
- Communications skills
- Level of competence using technology
- Access to the necessary technology
- Geographical distance to nearest emergency medical facility
- Efficacy of client’s support system
- Current medical and behavioral health status
- Current or past difficulties with substance abuse
- History of violence or self-injurious behavior.

NAADAC Code of Ethics 2016
Delivering Services
In The Face Of New Challenges...

Other Considerations:

• Giving at-risk clients your personal cell phone number for use in an emergency

• Engaging in clinically relevant email communications with a client who will be traveling abroad for an extended period of time
Did You Know…

Emails may be considered part of the clients’ record, so clinicians should be aware that electronic communications can be subpoenaed, accessed by auditors, requested by the client, or otherwise disclosed or used in a variety of legal or administrative proceedings.
Recommendations…

• Obtain Appropriate Supervision
• Review Relevant Ethical Standards
• Consult With Colleagues Who Have Specialized Knowledge or Expertise
• Review Relevant Literature
• Review Relevant Regulations, Laws, and Policies
• Develop a Social Media Policy For Clients and Employees
• Obtain Legal Consultation When Necessary
• Document Decision Making Steps

Reamer 2015
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
The substance abuse professionals code of ethics states:

“The addiction professional will inform the client of his/her confidentiality rights in writing as part of informing the client of areas likely to affect the client’s confidentiality.”
Social Media Policy
What Should Be Included?

- “Friending”
- Following
- Business Review Sites
- Interacting
- Use of Search Engines
- Location Based Services
- Email
- Contact information for licensing board
Question...

Wouldn’t It Just Be Easier To Avoid Social Media All Together?
Wouldn’t It Be Easier To Avoid Social Media All Together?

• As internet-age clinicians we are obligated to understand social media.

• To be culturally competent, we must understand that the most commonly encountered “foreign” culture is the digital universe.
Our Responsibilities

• Familiarize ourselves with new technologies
  • What they are
  • How they are used
  • How they are misused
  • The upside and the downside
Practice Tips

- Set Healthy Boundaries From The Outset
- Have a Written Social Media Policy
- Secure Informed Consent
- Review Code Of Ethics And Practice Standards Frequently
- When Using Social Media Have Professional And Personal Profiles
- Consider A Pseudonym
- Inform Clients How Records Are Maintained And Secured
- Google Yourself Regularly And Correct Inaccuracies
- Consider Cyber Liability Protection
- Stay Current On New Technology
As professionals, we are told to practice within areas of competence. We need to be competent in the areas we practice, and that extends to our use of technology. We need to remain alert to the ways in which our online presence compliments or conflicts with our professional self.

Kathryn Chernack
NY-NASW Chapter Ethics Committee
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For Watching...