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Psychotherapy, Professional Relationships, and Ethical Considerations in the MySpace Generation

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The pervasive use of Internet technologies has created new ethical dilemmas for psychology trainees and professionals. In particular, Web sites that allow users to post personal information have sparked controversy regarding the amount of freedom psychologists should have in placing personal information online and how discovering such information may impact professional relationships, including the therapeutic relationship. Results from a graduate student survey ($N = 302$) address the prevalence of the use of online social networking sites, security measure efforts that limit public access, incidents of client access to psychotherapists' personal Web sites and Internet use by psychotherapists to obtain client information, and their subsequent effect on the therapeutic relationship. Using applicable ethical principles and standards, we provide recommendations for the field in an effort to decrease potential harm and maximize areas of opportunity for psychologists and constructive professional relationships.

Keywords: ethics, Internet, psychotherapy, professional relationships

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There is little doubt that Internet technologies have led to dramatic and pervasive changes in our culture, becoming a foundational part of establishing online identity and connectivity. According to Internet World Stats, 22% of the world's population and 73% of the U.S. population are Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2008). Indeed, for the first time in Presidential campaign history, a candidate sparked a passionate conversation with America by strategically relying on Internet technologies, using personal Web sites, and having an extensive presence in social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook (Miller, 2008). Across the world, Iranian protestors have recently used Facebook and Twitter to relay information in an attempt to outmaneuver a government that has largely shut down communication outlets (Fleishman, 2009).

For psychologists and psychologists-in-training, the Internet has created new ease with which to communicate with colleagues, network with others, and share information. Despite these numerous advantages, however, this online medium also increases and creates new ethical dilemmas. In particular, Web sites that allow users to post personal information and the ease of finding such personal information have ignited controversy regarding the amount of freedom psychologists should have in posting personal information online and how discovering such information may impact professional relationships (Barnett, 2008a).

Social networking sites allow for the possibility of unwanted personal information leaking into professional lives, which may impact psychologists' relationships with colleagues, faculty, students, and clients. For example, consider a psychologist who posts photos of her vacation to Maui, with limbo dancing contests and romps on the beach. How would these photos impact her relationship with colleagues should they discover them online, or her relationship with a tenure committee, students in her classroom, or clients? Suppose the individual in question is in fact a graduate student; how then might the photos impact her professional relationships with faculty, clients, and others?

The number of potential dilemmas is endless. One thing, perhaps, is for certain: the Internet has redefined the process of self-disclosure. On professional listservs lively discussions have centered on issues such as whether to include clients or former clients as "friends" on social Web sites, how much personal

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information to disclose on such Web sites (e.g., from religious preference to favorite television shows), and the ethical use of blogs (Barnett, 2008a). However, despite the prevalence of Internet use and ensuing dilemmas, with the exception of a handful of professional presentations and articles, little writing or research has been done on the topic (Barnett, 2008b; Lehavot, 2007, 2009a; Zur, 2008; Zur & Donnor, 2009). After providing data on the use of the Internet and its implications, ethical standards relevant to such dilemmas are examined. We also explore psychologists' behavior on social networking sites and its impact on professional relationships by psychologists and those in training.

Prevalence of Social Networking Site Use

It is reported that 85% of undergraduate and graduate students own a computer, 72% of them check their e-mail at least once every day, and 82% of undergraduate students participate in at least one online social networking site (Caruso & Salaway, 2007). While only 37% of individuals 30 years of age and older report social networking site participation, 95.1% of those 18–19 years of age report social networking site participation, with a 26% increase in daily use of these sites in just 2 years (Salaway, Caruso, Nelson, & Ellison, 2008). Thus, while there are clear cohort differences, use of the Internet in general, and of social networking sites in particular, continues to increase dramatically.

Numerous online social networking sites exist and more are being created on an ongoing basis. Such sites include MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, Friendster, Bebo, Twitter, Gather, Hi5, Digg, LiveJournal, Reunion, Second Life, Wee World, and others. Facebook is reported to have more than 175 million registered users worldwide, with users spending more than 3 billion minutes on Facebook each day and more than 18 million updating their page each day (Facebook, 2009). MySpace reports over 185 million users at present, with more than 350,000 new individuals signing up as users of MySpace each day and over 10 billion active friend relationships reported at present (Social Network Stats, 2008).

These data highlight the ever increasing use of social networking sites in the lives of numerous individuals in the U.S. and internationally. These media are becoming increasingly central in the lives of many individuals and for a large number, they are among the primary ways that they communicate, establish and maintain relationships, and express themselves. For the younger generation, these trends are especially true. Prensky (2001) has described this phenomenon by using the terms "Digital Native" and "Digital Immigrant." Digital Natives are those born into a world where the Internet and related technologies are omnipresent and are learned along with their primary language. In fact, many of these individuals may be considered bilingual: communicating fluently and naturally in both their native tongue and through computers, the Internet, text messaging, blogging, e-mailing, and the like. Digital Immigrants are those who were born in a different time and who have needed to learn this new language and culture so they can become fluent in it and converse effectively with the Digital Natives. As Prensky (2001) highlights, with each passing day the 'language' of the Digital Natives becomes more a part of our culture and how individuals communicate and relate to each other. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to study and understand how these media are being used by psychologists, those in training to become psychologists, and those to whom we provide clinical services.

Relevant Ethical Issues and Standards

The Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (American Psychological Association Ethics Code; APA, 2002) makes it clear in its Introduction and Applicability section that the standards therein apply only to psychologists' and students' "scientific, educational, or professional roles" and not to their "purely private conduct" (p. 1061). The Ethics Code also makes it clear that its standards apply "to these activities across a variety of contexts, such as in person, postal, telephone, Internet, and other electronic transmissions" (p. 1061). As will be highlighted, dilemmas arise regarding just what is to be considered within the professional realm or the personal realm. Further, the notion of "purely private conduct" on the part of psychologists and students when utilizing the Internet and social networking sites will be challenged. In fact, as a result of the far-ranging effects of the Internet, and consistent with the work of Pipes, Holstein, and Aguirre (2005), the profession's view of personal and professional as distinct or separate entities will need to be reconsidered.

Knowing when and how to apply the APA Ethics Code (APA, 2002) may now be less clear. This is a result of the potentially ambiguous nature of the types of interactions one may have over the Internet and the challenges present in deciding what constitutes professional services. For example, providing clinical services such as counseling and psychotherapy via the Internet falls within the realm of professional behavior, and all relevant standards of the APA Ethics Code therefore apply. These include Standards 10.01 Informed Consent to Therapy, 4.01 Maintaining Confidentiality, 3.05 Multiple Relationships, 2.01 Boundaries of Competence, and others. What may be less clear is how the Ethics Code applies to activities such as posting personal information online to which colleagues, clients, and potential clients may have access, searching online for information about clients, and interacting with clients and former clients online through social networking sites or other means. What is clear is that a greater understanding of the uses (and misuses) of the Internet and social networking sites is needed, and the profession's standards must keep pace with the changing world within which we function.

Online Study of Psychologists' Internet Use

There are very little data on how psychologists and psychologists in training use social networking sites, whether they post personal information online, and what steps they take to restrict such information. To examine these questions, we conducted an exploratory online survey with 302 psychology graduate students regarding their online activity. Graduate students' Internet use provides a good case example of behavior over the Internet for psychology's future, as this is a cohort who grew up with the Internet and may thus be considered Digital Natives, or "experts" in the area of online technologies.

To publicize the study, an e-mail advertisement was sent to student members of Divisions 29 (Psychotherapy) and 42 (Psychologists in Independent Practice) of the APA; these divisions were used because of their large student memberships in addition to incorporating a group of students likely interested in psycho-

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therapy and the clinical practice of psychology. In addition, the e-mail advertisement was sent to the Maryland, California, Texas, Kentucky, and Ohio Psychological Associations, and graduate students at the University of Washington. These state psychological associations were selected since they are those associations that have the largest and most active student organizations. Of the 302 graduate students who responded, the mean number of years in graduate school was 3.4 ($SD = 1.54$). Thirty-three percent were in a clinical Ph.D. program, 12% in a nonclinical Ph.D. program, 40% in a PsyD program, 8% in a masters program, and 7% in other types of psychology graduate programs. Eighty-two percent considered themselves student psychotherapists (i.e., currently or in the past having seen clients).

When asked about their online activity, 81% of students reported having a personal profile (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, Friendster, dating profile, etc.), Web site, or blog online. More specifically, 37% of students reported having a MySpace profile. Of these students, 22% reported using MySpace for less than a year, 49% between 1–2 years, and 29% between 2–4 years (at the time of the survey, MySpace was 4 years old). With regard to whether students restrict or protect their information in any way, 67% reported using their real name on their MySpace profile, with only 22% reporting using a pseudonym. Eighty-one percent reported providing access to their profile to "friends only," a list of people who must be approved by the user before access is provided. However, 15% reported that anyone could have access to their MySpace profile, and 5% were "not sure" who had access to their profile.

Facebook was used by 33% of students. Of these students, 22% reported using Facebook for less than a year, 32% between 1–2 years, and 46% between 2–3 years (at the time of the survey, Facebook was 3 years old). With regard to protecting their information, 60% reported giving access to "friends only," 34% reported providing access to some or all networks of people, and 6% were "not sure" who had access to their profile.

Twenty percent of students reported having a profile or account on other social Web sites (e.g., Friendster) or an online blog not including MySpace or Facebook. Of these students, 79% reported using measures to restrict access to their postings (e.g., pseudonym, private or 'friend' only access) on these Web sites, while 21% did not.

Taken together, these data indicate that a substantial proportion of psychology graduate students use social networking sites. Given that both MySpace and Facebook are only a few years old, most students began using such sites while in graduate school. Moreover, while the majority of students using these sites reported restricting access to their information, 15% of the MySpace users, 34% of the Facebook users, and 21% of other social Web site users reported not doing so.

Beyond examining the prevalence of graduate students' use of social networking sites, we asked users whether they posted any photos and/or personal information online that they would not want classmates, faculty, or clients to see. When it came to their peers, 3% reported that they posted photos and 6% posted personal information they did not want their classmates to see. These percentages were larger when it came to faculty, such that 13% reported that they posted photos and 11% posted personal information they did not want faculty members to see. These percentages were considerably larger still when it came to clients. Of those who were student psychotherapists, 29% reported that they posted photos and 37% posted personal information they did not want clients to see.

Clinical Implications

In the same survey, we examined how the Internet enters the therapeutic relationship for student psychotherapists. Indeed, nowhere might the risks of unwanted online disclosure be as great as in the context of psychotherapy, where the relationship is a key ingredient for client change and therapeutic outcomes (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Blatt et al., 1996; Marmarosh et al., 2009). To explore this issue, we asked student psychotherapists whether a client had ever informed them that he or she obtained information about the student online, whether they had ever sought out information about a client online, and if so, what impact this had on the therapeutic relationship. We identified themes by categorizing responses and present example responses for illustration (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Clients Obtaining Information Online

Seven percent of the student psychotherapists in the sample reported being informed by a client that he or she had obtained information about the student from the Internet. Reasons clients gave for seeking out information varied, with one theme surrounding curiosity:

> My client googled me and found a journal article I'd written. I was a little taken aback, but not entirely surprised, as I have friends who have googled their therapists. I think my client appreciated me normalizing his curiosity.

Indeed, in an era of consumer-led healthcare, it may not be surprising to find clients Googling their psychotherapist's name online. In one survey, for example, 8 in 10 Internet users reported looking online for health information, including information on particular doctors and health-care professionals (Fox, 2005). As another student noted:

> A client searched the state online listing of licensed psychologists and told me at our next meeting. I remarked that it is good to verify provider credentials and asked if they had any other questions about my education or credentials that I could answer. In hindsight I could have used the event to help that client explore issues of trust.

This statement highlights not only that clients may look up psychotherapists online to establish their credentials, but also that issues related to building relationships and trust may be related to such behavior.

> A client had requested that I 'friend' her (via the site). We discussed in session that I only keep the site for keeping up with people that I socialize with. I later realized that since I have a very common name, she had to actively sort through a lot of profiles to find me, even when restricting it by geographical area. We had already stopped treatment, but I might have discussed her motivations in more detail had I thought of it at the time.

In this way, recognizing clients' online behavior as part of a class of behaviors that may be relevant for treatment provides the psychotherapist an opportunity to examine its function (Lehavot, 2009b). In other words, when viewed as clinically relevant behav-

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ior, the client's online behavior may be used strategically in psychotherapy to help clients reach their therapeutic goals. When online behavior is not recognized as such, it is a missed opportunity.

At the same time, while clients' online behavior may be related to therapeutic issues such as trust, relationship, and boundaries, there are times when this behavior may step on the psychotherapist's rights or safety:

> A client found out my birth date, where I was born, my current address, my telephone number, and personal e-mail address. In addition the client talked about me with my neighbors. I found this very disturbing. Using an interpersonal therapeutic approach, I processed with the client what it means for her to have more information about me. This has been a difficult situation, since therapy with the client terminated six months ago, yet the client continues to 'follow' me on campus, drive by my house, etc.

In this scenario, basic online information about the psychotherapist allowed the client to inappropriately invade the psychotherapist's personal life. This emphasizes the critical need not only to be mindful of what we post online, but also to be aware of what information about us is available (Zur, 2008).

Psychotherapists Obtaining Information Online

Twenty-seven percent of student psychotherapists reported seeking out information about a client on the Internet. Similar to clients, some students appeared to seek this information out of curiosity:

> I used MySpace and Facebook to see how [clients] were doing and look at pictures of their friends that they talk about. I got a thrill from it.

The above statement underscores that psychologists-in-training may seek online information about clients automatically, in a manner that does not consider this activity through a critical lens with respect to relevant clinical and ethical issues. For graduate students who have grown up with the Internet as part of their worldview and everyday life, there may be lack of awareness regarding the potential impact of the behavior. Indeed, the motivation of personal entertainment as highlighted in the above comment may be just as much of a boundary violation as a client exploring psychotherapist information.

Beyond curiosity, a common theme student psychotherapists gave for seeking online information about clients was to "establish the truth":

> I've looked at clients' MySpace profiles. I've read what they did with their friends and if they were using drugs/alcohol. I think it allowed me to help determine if they were telling the truth in substance abuse counseling.
>
> I searched MySpace, just wanted to see if the client was telling the truth. made me have other thoughts about what was really going on, found out she was lying in therapy sessions. wouldn't do it again!
>
> I have googled clients who seem to be making some outlandish claims. I was doing this in order to gain a sense of what was 'true' and what wasn't. I found the searching to be unhelpful and inconclusive.

In such instances, the psychotherapist appears to be doubting the client's claims and actively seeking other sources of information, without open discussion of the issue with the client. Even if unintentional, such behavior does not allow the client the opportunity to provide informed consent and explore, with the psychotherapist, the potential impact of online disclosures on the therapeutic relationship. There are at least two ethical principles relevant to this behavior: Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence, taking care to do no harm to the client and the therapeutic process, and Principle B: Fidelity and Responsibility, creating and maintaining relationships of trust with clients (APA, 2002).

With regard to nonmaleficence, there is reason to suspect that clients withhold certain information from their psychotherapists intentionally. Some research suggests that such discretion is associated with positive psychotherapy process ratings and outcomes (Kelly, 1998, 2000). For example, in one study, 40% of clients reported keeping a relevant secret from their psychotherapist, and keeping secrets was a significant predictor of having fewer symptoms (Kelly, 1998). Such findings support a self-presentational perspective, wherein clients come to benefit from psychotherapy by perceiving that their psychotherapists have favorable views of them. Creating these favorable impressions can involve clients' hiding some undesirable aspects of themselves from their psychotherapists.

The self-presentational perspective is not without controversy, with some authors arguing that psychotherapist awareness of client concealment with psychotherapy process and outcome is not clear (Hill, Gelso, & Mohr, 2000) and that psychotherapists should actively pursue material that is difficult to disclose (Farber, Berano, & Capobianco, 2004).

Regardless of whether the actual pursuit of such material may be harmful, however, what is also at issue with seeking information about a client online is the way in which it is done: without the client's awareness or permission. Should the obtained information influence the psychotherapist's reactions to her or his client or the information seeking become known, there may be an adverse impact on the therapeutic relationship:

> I obtained information through a social Web site. It caused me to question the client's motivation for counseling and therapeutic goals.
>
> I started with Google. I ended up obtaining sex offender registration information for a client. He had volunteered that this information existed. Because he had shared the information with me willingly, it did not really affect my perception of him.

Indeed, one might wonder how discovering this information would have impacted psychotherapy and the therapeutic relationship if the information was not shared by the client.

While actively seeking online information about clients may thus hold certain dangers, it also provides an opportunity to further benefit the therapeutic process, especially when done collaboratively:

> Looked at MySpace profile of a client. I obtained more information about her state of mind and likes and dislikes. It was beneficial to the relationship because she had asked me to look at her profile.
>
> I looked up adolescent clients on MySpace if they spoke about it in session. Would confront client on inconsistencies between what they say and what their profile conveys. It might impact how I view the case because I could see if they were being honest and open in therapy.

> [Looked up on MySpace]. I felt really awkward about bringing it up for discussion, so I never did. Felt like spying. After that, I don't look at profiles anymore unless a client invites me to. One in particular wanted me to see stuff about a band that was a key component of her identity, so we visited it together.

In these instances, the students obtained information online with the knowledge and invitation of their clients. When done in this open manner, the psychotherapist was able to use the information to help clients reach their therapeutic goals; for example, by pointing out discrepancies between a client's values or goals and how they actually present themselves in relationships outside of session. In the last case, in particular, the psychotherapist used the medium collaboratively with his or her client in the room, allowing for a greater understanding of the client's experience and a potential deepening of the relationship.

Finally, some psychotherapists have distinguished between looking up information on current versus former clients:

> Through MySpace I looked up past clients to see how they were doing. I obtained info about their social lives and their personal thoughts through their blogs. I was happy to see how well they appeared to be doing, and it did not impact my view of my clients. I have only looked AFTER terminating therapy. Not while seeing a client.

Indeed, one might wonder when our obligation as a psychotherapist ends. Nonetheless, it is important to consider that a former client can come back to a psychotherapist as a client in the future. Information that was learned in the meantime, or decisions about what to share with the client on the Internet, may thus impact future therapeutic interactions (Barnett, 2008b).

Discussion

In summary, results from our exploratory survey with psychologists-in-training highlight the many ways in which Internet technologies may encroach upon professional relationships. Not surprisingly, a large majority of psychology graduate students (81%) reported using some social networking sites. While many used security measures to limit who has access to their information, a substantial percentage of students did not. Moreover, social network users did not want some of the material posted, whether in the form of photos or personal information, to be seen by those with whom they are engaged in professional relationships, especially clients.

Psychotherapists in the Internet Era: Crisis or Opportunity?

The Internet is widely used in both the professional and personal lives of psychotherapists. As professionals, the Internet allows for greater accessibility and ease of communication between psychotherapist and client. It also affords many individuals the opportunity to access clinical services that might not otherwise be available (Schopp, Demiris, & Glueckauf, 2006). In one's personal life, the Internet offers many individuals the means to form and maintain relationships, easily communicate across long distances, and share their lives with others through visual images and text. It is the intersection of these two realms, however, that brings with it the greatest risks and challenges.

We have called attention to two related clinical issues: clients accessing psychologists' online information and psychologists accessing clients' online information. In regard to the former, the issue of self-disclosure is an important one to consider. Depending on one's theoretical orientation, the carefully planned use of self-disclosure by the psychotherapist may be a valuable therapeutic tool. However, the ethical and clinically effective use of psychotherapist self-disclosure involves the sharing of information that is motivated by the client's clinical needs and treatment plan rather than the clinician's personal needs; is consistent with prevailing professional practice standards; is not unwelcomed by the client; and does not result in harm to the client (Barnett, 1998; Smith & Fitzpatrick, 1995). While numerous forms of self-disclosure exist (Zur, 2008), psychologists' use of intentional self-disclosure over the Internet must be viewed with caution even when it occurs in one's personal life.

As has been highlighted, many clients will have ready access to personal information shared over the Internet by their psychotherapists. We therefore recommend that psychologists carefully consider the use of privacy or security settings when using social networking sites. The highest level of settings limit access to one's site to specifically authorized visitors only. Even if materials posted online can at times be deleted, psychologists should carefully consider what they post knowing that at some point in time others may have access to it. While we each have the right to personal lives and to share what we choose with friends, family, and colleagues, some caution is recommended. Clients may use pseudonyms to gain access to a clinician's social networking site and some may have the technological sophistication to bypass security settings. Students and trainees should consider the same issues and precautions. Additionally, mental health professionals should remain cognizant of the fact that what may seem very appropriate to post online as a student sharing with friends may not appear so appropriate if viewed in the future by a client, graduate school admissions officer, or internship training director.

An additional challenge involves being asked by a client or former client to "friend" you on your social networking site. Such requests are common, since for many individuals this is a primary way of 'keeping in touch' and sharing about their life. However, as should be evident, this online sharing is bidirectional. Each psychologist should consider these 'friend' requests in the context of their role as a professional psychologist. Issues to consider with making these decisions include the potential impact on the client, the psychotherapy relationship, and the profession of psychology. Further, these decisions should be made in the context of the standards on boundaries and multiple relationships provided in the APA Ethics Code (APA, 2002). As it is stated in Standard 3.05 Multiple Relationships, "Multiple relationships that would not reasonably be expected to cause impairment or risk exploitation or harm are not unethical" (p. 1076). It is important to engage in careful forethought so that the risk of harm to clients can be minimized. Engaging in a secondary online relationship should only occur when consistent with the primary clinical relationship and the client's best interests.

Any time psychotherapists access personal client information without clients' permission, they are doing so in a professional role. In these situations psychotherapists must consider their obligations under the APA Ethics Code's (APA, 2002) principle of Fidelity and Responsibility, which advises that "psychologists establish relationships of trust with those with whom they work"

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(p. 1064). Further, in the ethical principle of Integrity, psychologists are advised to "promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness in science, teaching, and practice of psychology" (p. 1064). Thus, without first obtaining the client's permission through the process of informed consent, accessing a client's online information may be both inconsistent with these ethical ideals and a violation of the client's trust.

An alternative perspective could focus on the fact that the client posted this information in a public domain and that all individuals posting information online accept the risks involved. While many clients understand and utilize appropriate security settings that help limit unauthorized access to their online sites, not all clients possess this knowledge or level of technological sophistication. Failure to fully inform clients of the potential risks and benefits of certain decisions, actions, and behaviors that may impact their emotional functioning, well being, and the psychotherapy process seems inconsistent with our ethical obligations (see Standards 3.10 Informed Consent, 10.01 Informed Consent to Therapy, and 3.04 Avoiding Harm). In fact, Standard 3.04 Avoiding Harm explicitly states that psychologists must "(t)ake reasonable steps to avoid harming their clients/students, supervisees, research participants, organizational clients, and others with whom they work, and to minimize harm where it is foreseeable and unavoidable" (p. 1067). Accessing client information without their permission is a behavior that holds the potential to result in harm and an action that is clearly avoidable. Psychologists should be guided by their obligation to establish relationships of trust and take actions to minimize the potential for harm to clients when considering accessing clients' online information.

When accessing a client's Internet site is done collaboratively as an agreed upon part of the treatment plan, it can be very beneficial to the psychotherapeutic process. Similar to clients sharing their poetry, journal, or artwork during a session or bringing in photos to a session to share more about their life with the psychotherapist, accessing a client's Internet site collaboratively or on one's own with the client's permission and informed consent may add richness to the psychotherapy process that might not otherwise be available. Indeed, in such situations the Internet may prove to be a medium that facilitates, rather than hinders, therapeutic goals and the psychotherapy relationship.

Barnett (2008b) provides the following recommendations for ethical and clinically appropriate use of social networking sites in psychologists' professional roles:

- Make thoughtful decisions about who you accept on your friends list and thus grant access to your personal information.
- Consider using some form of restrictions to your online profile, such as utilizing private or friend-only access or using a pseudonym.
- Keep in mind that whatever you share online may be available to numerous individuals and once out there, it may not be possible to take it back.
- Consider online relationships as similar to in-person ones with clients and former clients. Do not overlook the potential impact of online relationships on the professional one.
- Never access clients' personal information without first obtaining their permission. Ensure they understand the potential impact of online disclosures on the psychotherapy relationship.
- Utilize the APA Ethics Code and consultation with colleagues to guide decision making.
- Create a policy for the use of social networking sites, share this with clients who ask, and follow it carefully.

Indeed, it may be helpful for psychotherapists to consider addressing this policy during the informed consent process to minimize potential future risks and ethical dilemmas. Additional guidance is provided by Lehavot (2007), who recommends asking the following questions before making online disclosures such as the posting of personal information on a social networking site:

- What are the costs and benefits of posting the information?
- Is there a high probability that clients will be significantly and negatively affected?
- How will the disclosure affect my relationship with my clients?
- Does the disclosure threaten my credibility or undermine the public's trust in the field of psychology?

Future Directions

As standards for online mental health services and social networking sites evolve, it is important that psychologists play an active role in their development. Psychologists, trainees, and students are in need of detailed guidance that assists them in navigating the ever-changing landscape of the Internet. Some professional organizations have developed standards for the provision of online services. Examples include *Ethical Guidelines for Psychologists Providing Psychological Services Via Electronic Media* (Canadian Psychological Association, 2008), *Ethical Standards for Internet Online Counseling* (American Counseling Association, 1999), and *Suggested Principles for the Online Provision of Mental Health Services* (International Society for Mental Health Online, 2000). The profession of psychology needs to participate in the development of standards and guidance for psychologists for the provision of online mental health services as well as for the posting and viewing of personal information online and interacting with clients and former clients online. Psychologists may also have an impact on social networking technologies themselves, urging them to provide more privacy protections. For example, Facebook has recently made changes to their privacy provisions in response to complaints by Jennifer Stoddart, the privacy commissioner of Canada (Schmidt, 2009).

Colleges, universities, and training centers should develop policies and standards regarding the posting of personal information online as well as for accessing others' online information without their explicit permission. For example, it may be prudent for colleges and training sites to post on their Web site and include in all application materials their policies regarding accessing applicants' personal information and then utilizing it during the admissions process (Lehavot, 2009a).

Clinical supervisors should be included in these discussions and be trained to address these issues with their supervisees. This is a domain in which the supervisees are likely to have more experience than their supervisors, so supervisors may need to educate themselves about social networking. Further, supervisors should consider all the same issues relevant to psychotherapists and their clients when considering sharing personal information online with supervisees, accessing supervisees' information online, or communicating through social networking sites with supervisees. As

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standards for the ethical and effective practice of supervision evolve, the role and impact of various technologies and media should thoughtfully be considered as well.

More research is clearly needed to better understand the evolving world of the Internet, how it impacts the lives of those we work with professionally, and how it impacts the professional therapeutic relationship. The present study should be considered exploratory, and its limitations include only surveying graduate students and not assessing demographic variables such as participants' age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Nonetheless, as a preliminary step, it suggests the need for further research with students, trainees, practicing psychotherapists, and psychologists working in a wide range of settings and roles. Future studies may further explore the impact of psychologists' theoretical perspectives on their use of social networking sites, and the full impact of involvement with social networking activities. Indeed, the potential impact of Internet use and social networking sites on the psychotherapy process, in supervision, and in educational and training settings has yet to be understood. Similarly, the potential risks and drawbacks to their use are not yet adequately understood. Finally, models of decision making are needed to assist professionals in making the complex and challenging decisions that have been highlighted about the intersection of the Internet and social networking with the practice and profession of psychology.

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