**Ashley P post to week 3 discussion 1**

**Case 2**  
Dr. Washington is a counseling psychologist who specializes in trauma and self-harming behavior. Recently, he received a “friend request” from a former client who he provided individual therapy to six months ago. Dr. Washington opted not to accept the “friend request,” but considered sending a private message to the client with the social networking policy from his informed consent.  Dr. Washington is uncertain whether or not to send the private message to the client.

Dear colleague,

As you are well aware, social networking can create several ethical dilemmas. The one you have found yourself in is one related to privacy, confidentiality and informed consent. It is difficult in the online world because the APA Ethical Principles does not specifically address standards for social networking. It is up to us as psychologists to have an understanding of ethical concepts and boundaries in order to transfer this knowledge to maintain ethical guidelines and be mindful of our online behaviors (Taylor et al., 2010). However, established psychologists may lack experience to provide guidance in this area. It should be noted that psychologists who fail to maintain personal boundaries can emotionally harm clients. Only a strong therapeutic relationship should be established (Harris & Kurpius, 2014),

Even though the APA Ethical Principles (2010) does not specifically address standards for social networking sites, it does state that the “application of an Ethical Standard may vary depending on the context” and that “The fact that a given conduct is not specifically addressed by an Ethical Standard does not mean that it is necessarily either ethical or unethical” (APA, 2010).

Despite ethical guidelines, confidentiality creates some of the most challenging and confusing ethical dilemmas (Taylor et al., 2010).  In social networking, the public or private nature of information posted online is ambiguous. The [APA (2010) (Links to an external site.)](https://web-a-ebscohost-com.proxy-library.ashford.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=3f54d2d9-7877-4835-b748-8adcdc231d3a%40sdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBlPWlwLGNwaWQmY3VzdGlkPXM4ODU2ODk3JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#c1) Ethical Principles state “Psychologists have a primary obligation and take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information obtained through or stored in any medium”. It could be argued that social networking is a new medium through which mental health professionals can obtain information and that the standards for confidentiality still apply (Taylor et al, 2010). Using the above knowledge as a guideline, I would not accept a friend request from a client nor would I consider sending any form of private message. Please note that no communication online is guaranteed to privacy and may be intercepted. Therefore, confidentiality could be greatly compromised (Asay & Lal, 2014).

Studies reveal that psychologists experience online interactions regularity. There are ways to lessen these sort of interactions, however. Many graduates, for example, have changed the content of their social networking accounts and changed their privacy settings. Pictures used on social networking sites can also be modified with limited personal information (Asay & Lal, 2014). Another suggestion for you is to have a social media policy form in your practice. The form and ethical guidelines for online interactions should be discussed in your initial meeting with all clients. This will avoid hurting the clients’ feelings when you do not respond to online messages or if you decide to block your clients from your social networks. Proactively blocking clients from viewing your pages will not only protect their confidentiality but it will help to maintain professional boundaries.

References

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