



ETHICAL USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES IN CAREER SERVICES

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A review of literature examining the use of social networking technologies in career services and related helping professions.

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Introduction

Social networking technologies (SNTs) have established firm standing in both personal and professional circles, dramatically transforming the way that people communicate. Considering SNTs by the numbers can be quite staggering. Approximately 42% of the world's population (Internet World Stats, 2015), and 87% of American adults (Pew Research Center, 2014), use the Internet. Surveys demonstrate that, of those adults who use the Internet, 73% use SNTs, with 52% using more than one platform (Pew Research Center, 2015). Table 1 shows how pervasive three of the most commonly used platforms – Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter – have become in today's society.

Career professionals experience SNTs from a unique perspective due to the nature of their work, standing at the intersection of clients and employers. Clients may use SNTs with both personal and professional motivations, often without an appreciation of the potential conflicts between these two roles. For example, according to an annual survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2013), 95% of graduating college seniors who planned to enter the job market reported having an online SNT profiles. The most commonly used social networking sites included Facebook (90%), LinkedIn (62%) and Twitter (44%). Further, 53% of graduating college seniors stated that they actively used SNTs as a part of their job search for tasks such as researching employers (35%), networking (30%), and discussing job openings (23%). Finally, 74% of graduating college seniors expected that employers would search online profiles during the recruiting process, although less than half of respondents (43%) thought these sites should be used during recruiting and would welcome employers viewing their profiles.

Surveys of recruiters seem to indicate that job candidates underestimate employer activity on SNTs. Jobvite conducts an annual social recruiting survey of recruiting and human resources professionals. In 2013, 93% of recruiters indicated they were likely to view a candidate's profile, seeking indicators of "a candidate's professional and cultural fit" with their organization (p. 9). Just under half of recruiters (42%) reported reconsidering a candidate based on content viewed in a profile, leading to both positive and negative re-assessments. Finally, 78% of recruiters had hired through a social networking site, with LinkedIn (92%), Facebook (24%), Twitter (14%) being the most common platforms used. The percent of recruiters hiring through social networking sites was up 20% from just three years earlier.

TABLE 1. SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGY USAGE STATISTICS

| Platform | Number of Users | Number of Countries | Number of Languages |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Facebook | 1.2 billion monthly active users | 25+ | 70+ |
| LinkedIn | 364 million registered members | 200+ | 24 |
| Twitter | 302 million monthly active users | Offices in 16 countries; 77% of accounts outside the U.S. | 33 |

Sources: Facebook (2014), LinkedIn (2015), Twitter (2015)

With so many career-related connections being made via SNTs, career professionals are drawn into discussions of SNTs in ways that other helping professionals may not experience. For example, on the one hand, clients may use SNTs with both personal and professional motivations without an appreciation of the challenges of permeable boundaries of cyberspace and the potential conflicts between these two roles. On the other hand, employers are using SNTs to recruit and screen candidates despite unclear ethical and legal ramifications related to fair and equitable hiring practices (e.g., Lamoureux, 2012; Lory, 2010). Both clients and employers may turn to career professionals for advice regarding the use of SNTs when challenges or dilemmas arise. Career professionals are called to serve as educators regarding technology options and features; advisors on carefully monitoring and appropriately presenting online personas; and strategists for devising plans for clients and employers to engage each other through technological media in an ethical and professional manner. All-the-while, career professionals must make choices about if and how they will personally and professionally engage SNTs, seeking ways to enhance practice and to avoid ethical pitfalls.

Purpose

As SNTs become increasingly “commonplace” (DiLillo & Gale, 2011, p. 164) and “deeply integrated into users’ daily lives” (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009, p. 83), the need for career professionals to understand available technologies also grows. Career professionals need to think carefully about if and how to use SNTs in their practice, as well as to be prepared to support and educate clients, employers, and other related service providers who are interacting online. As eloquently stated by Maheu, Pulier, McMnamin, and Posen (2012), regardless of how deeply we choose to engage SNTs in our professional practice, career professionals and our professional associations have a responsibility to: “*recognize* the nature, advantages, and dangers inherent in [technology] changes, *anticipate* how technology will continue to transform practices, and *prepare* for the expected opportunities and challenges” [pp. 613, *italics in original*].

The purpose of this paper is to share with the National Career Development Association (NCDA) membership a comprehensive synthesis of current professional conversations in the written literature (journals, association newsletters, website postings) about the use of SNTs in practice by career professionals and those in related helping professions. Note that this current paper does not discuss the direct recommendations from the NCDA Ethics Committee to career professionals on the use of SNTs, as that is beyond the scope of this writing. Rather, this paper was written to encourage NCDA members to reflect on the benefits and challenges of using SNTs in career services practice, and to encourage conversations about strategies to enhance services and experiences for clients. Additionally, this paper served as a foundational resource to inform a new set of guidelines for the ethical use of SNTs in career services, which was released as a part of the 2015 NCDA Code of Ethics. Readers are directed to Section F of that document for specific guidelines provided NCDA. It is also important to note that, while this paper focuses on the ethics of using SNTs; it is not intended to, nor does it, provide legal advice on the matter. As stated by Lory (2010), “the legal waters regarding this subject are still cloudy” (p. 40). Those who are using SNT in their practice are encouraged to seek legal counsel for questions that may arise (see also, Hlavac & Easterly, 2009; Lamoureux, 2012).

Defining Social Networking Technologies and the Scope of this Work

SNTs are tools that provide a virtual medium for building connections between groups of people with common interests, characteristics, experiences, or backgrounds (Bateman, Pike, & Butler, 2010; Cann, Dimitriou, & Hooley, 2011; Osborn, Dikel, & Sampson, 2011). Relationship and community building are central to the design of SNTs, as they encourage two-way communications in which people share information about themselves, view information about others, and store information for future use. See Table 2 for examples of SNTs, including brief descriptions of their services and examples of how job seekers and employers might use those tools in order to make connections.

TABLE 2. EXAMPLE SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES

| Technology | Description | Example Uses in Career Development |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Facebook | A social networking service that allows users to create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages that include text, web links, audio files, and video files. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organized by workplace, school or college, or other characteristics. Facebook can be used for both social and professional networking. | <p>Job seekers may promote their experience, skills, and education. They may upload work samples as in a portfolio.</p> <p>Employers may post company information or advertise jobs.</p> |
| LinkedIn | A resource for professional networking. The site allows registered users to maintain contact data for people with whom they have some level of relationship, called connections. This list of connections can then be used to: (a) gain an introduction to someone through a mutual contact, (b) find jobs, people and business opportunities, (c) research companies, and (d) make professional recommendations. | <p>Job seekers may research employers, promote their experience and abilities, upload resumes, and request references from members of their networks.</p> <p>Employers may post company information and advertise jobs, as well as search for and screen job applicants.</p> |
| Twitter | A social networking and microblogging service, which enables users to send and read messages called tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the user's profile page. Users gain "followers" who view their tweets, and may build relationships by responding to or forwarding tweets from others. | <p>Job seekers use Twitter to make professional connections and to generate interest from potential employers by demonstrating expertise in a subject area.</p> <p>Employers use Twitter to bring attention to company information and job openings, often sending readers to their websites for more information.</p> |

TABLE 2 CONTINUED.

| Technology | Description | Example Uses in Career Development |
|------------------|--|---|
| Pinterest | A social networking service which allows users to collect and organize materials that represent an expression of their identity, interests, and messages for a particular audience. Users create “pins,” which rely on images to create a personal profile and brand. They may also follow others’ accounts and engage followers to share ideas and build communities. | Job seekers may create a Pinterest board which demonstrates their knowledge in particular area, highlights their interests and strengths, or showcases work samples like a portfolio. Employers in industries such as fashion, retail, media, entertainment, communications, design, architecture, and food services are active on Pinterest. Interested job seekers can interact with these employers in this environment to demonstrate their skills sets and interest, and to build relationships.* |
| Blogs | Web-based resources, maintained by an individual or organization, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Most blogs are interactive, allowing visitors to leave comments and send messages to each other. This dynamic interactivity distinguishes them from static websites. | Job seekers use blogs to create an online portfolio, demonstrating their experience and expertise. Employers can use blogs to encourage attention to their organization’s interests, products, and future directions. |

* Kelly (2013)

Please note that this paper distinguishes SNTs from social media. As is the case with SNTs, social media tools do offer users opportunities to connect and communicate with others in an online environment. However, social media tools are primarily designed to transmit information in one direction – from the creator to a broad audience. Social media is essentially a format for delivering messages, much like TV or radio. What makes social media different from TV and radio is the opportunity that it offers for any user to create and disseminate information (Cann et al., 2011). While we recognize that the lines between what can be labeled as social networking versus social media technologies can be blurry, we also find that the quality of relationship building and the give-and-take of information that is foundational in SNTs (and not necessarily a central component of all social media technologies) raises interesting ethical questions that we would like to highlight in this particular paper.

Literature Review Methods

Resources for this review of current literature and professional conversations on the use of SNTs were located in three primary ways. Keyword searches were first conducted using periodical and publication search databases such as *PsychInfo* and *Education Full Text*. Keywords included terms such as *social network*, *social networking technology(ies)*, *ethics*, *standards*, *career*, and *career development*. The same keywords were then used to search for discussions of SNTs in targeted career development-related journals and publications, including the *American Psychological Association (APA) Monitor*, *Career Development Quarterly*, *Journal of Career Assessment*, *Journal of Career Development*, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *NACE Spotlight*, *National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Journal*, and *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. Finally, when appropriate, articles were incorporated, from journals in fields related to career development counseling, psychology, education, communications, business, and technology journals. The purpose of broadening this search was to gain additional perspective and insights related to the integration of SNTs into helping professional environments.

Taking into account the changing nature of technology, and the relatively recent advent of many SNTs in the past decade, primary attention was given to articles and resources that were written between 2000 and 2014. References that were written before 2000 are included only when they add a unique context or perspective through which to consider current-day SNTs.

Benefits, Challenges, and Ethical Issues Related to Social Networking Technologies

As stated in the National Career Development Association's (2015) *Code of Ethics*, career professionals are called to "foster the interest and welfare of clients and promote formation of healthy relationships" (p. 3) as the central tenant of their work. Career professionals have a responsibility to ensure that their interactions with clients have the strongest potential to benefit those individuals, while avoiding harm. A key challenge in working with emerging technologies, such as SNTs, is that potential benefits and harms of using these tools in a career development context are simply not well known. Little testing has been done to examine the effects of these tools, and the rapidly evolving nature of social networking sites makes it difficult for career professionals to keep their social networking knowledge and skills up-to-date (Van Allen & Roberts, 2011). However, recent literature highlights some areas for career professionals to consider when making decisions regarding the use of SNTs. This section outlines benefits, challenges, and ethical issues that are most prominently represented across the literature.

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES

As with other technologies in the past, many career professionals find value in the opportunities that SNTs offer for their work and their clients (Hooley, Hutchinson, & Watts, 2010). Perceived benefits highlighted in the literature include improving efficiency in day-to-day activities, community building, enhancing career development, and providing new opportunities to explore important interpersonal issues.

Improving efficiency.

SNTs are viewed as offering fast, efficient, and inexpensive methods for expanding the reach of career programs and services (Van Allen & Roberts, 2011). They can be used to promote and deliver career programs, services, and resources, with the potential of scaling interventions to reach greater numbers of clients than ever before (Morris & Aguilera, 2012). Additionally, the possibility exists to connect with new and underserved client populations who may be well-integrated into social networks but may overlook more traditional modes of communication (Hooley et al., 2010; Wandel, 2008). The ease and anonymity of information sharing via social networking and the Internet can create an environment of convenience and accessibility that helps clients overcome barriers of time, distance, or social stigma that might inhibit them from seeking career assistance (Lehavot, Barnett, & Powers, 2010; Morris & Aguilera, 2012; Ragusea & Vandecreek, 2003; Shallcross, 2011).

Building communities.

SNTs have also been identified as tools for enhancing a sense of community and social support among groups with similar interests and needs (e.g., Hooley et al., 2010; Lehavot et al., 2010; Martin, 2010; Morris & Aguilera, 2012). These benefits are discussed as emerging on an individual level, but may also translate to enhanced interactions between clients and career professionals. Individuals who actively use SNTs are engaged in building an online representation of themselves (also referred to as an online persona). Through

the process of portraying an image of oneself to the outside world, SNT users engage in “identity exploration [and] building autonomy” (Tunick, Mednick, & Conroy, 2011, p. 446) as they consider what they would like to communicate to a public audience. Additionally, the process of “public self-disclosure can be rewarding, cathartic, and ego-boosting” (Bateman et al., 2010, p. 82), particularly when feedback and further connections are received from others. Even for those individuals who desire to mask their true identity, the possibility of anonymity online can be an attractive option for making interpersonal connections despite limiting personal disclosures (Ragusea & VandeCreek, 2003). Finally, the opportunity to form relationships and be a part of a community in a virtual space can enhance experiences within the physical walls of career services offices. Clients have an opportunity to build a sense of “emotional connectedness” (Hung & Yuen, 2010, p. 704) and to “feel socially accepted even before visiting” (Wandel, 2008, p. 45) a career services professional.

Enhancing the career development process.

Looking specifically at the process of career development and decision making, SNTs hold potential to serve as a “career enhancement tool” (Aluri, 2011, p. 3) – one of many resources in the toolbox for career exploration, career decision making, and career management. Suggested strategies for clients to use SNTs for career development include exploring career fields, researching specific employers, building professional networks, and marketing oneself and ideas by creating a professional brand (Srago & Makela, 2010). Hooley et al. (2010) argue that, because of the interactive, relational nature of SNTs, there are increased opportunities to blend what may have been seen as distinct career development tasks in the past. For example, clients may experience information gathering on a particular career field as blended with receiving individualized advice or guidance from professionals in their field of interest, simply because of the structured networking function of these online sites.

Providing new opportunities for exploration.

Finally, some argue that opportunities for beneficial client interactions exist even within the drawbacks of SNTs (as will be discussed in the next section). Career professionals who are well-informed about SNTs can turn challenges and struggles spurred by SNTs into educational or learning opportunities for clients. For example, discovering that a client has taken deliberate efforts to use SNTs to look beyond a career counselor’s professional online presence and to explore his/her personal life could open the door to a discussion of “issues related to trust, relationships, and boundaries” (Zur, Williams, Lehavot, & Knapp, 2009, p. 28) that may impact one’s career development (for those career counselors who have the training and expertise to pursue such topics).

CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL ISSUES PRESENTED BY SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES

Along with potential benefits, new technologies offer a number of ethical issues and challenges that have been explored in the literature. To understand the ethical issues raised by SNTs, it is helpful to begin by defining some of the core commitments that career professionals make to protect client safety and serve client needs. With this foundation, we can examine where SNTs introduce challenges related to these commitments made to clients, and understand the complex issues surrounding the adoption of these resources in practice. Such an understanding helps career professionals make informed decisions about

how to proceed, in order to help them anticipate, navigate, and, in many cases, avoid potential ethical dilemmas that may arise.

Commitments to protect client safety and serve client needs.

A primary reason for helping professionals to define and promote ethical guidelines and standards is to protect and promote the welfare of clients (Keith-Speigel & Koocher, 1985; Makela, 2009). Within ethical code and standards documents, members of professional associations express their best consensus regarding appropriate behaviors for members to exhibit (Makela, 2009; Remley & Herlihy, 2001). This section presents and defines seven ethical commitments that career professionals make to their clients, which are outlined in career professionals' codes of ethics and discussed in literature that addresses the use of SNTs with clients. The next section refers to these commitments and definitions as challenges are explored related to the use of SNTs.

Privacy and self-determination. The commitment to respect clients' privacy requires that career professionals "solicit private information from clients only when it is beneficial to the working relationship" (NCDA, 2015, p. 6). As described by DiLillo and Gale (2011), clients have a right to self-determination – to choose what information is shared with a helping professional and when that information is shared. An example potential challenge that arises in regards to the use of SNTs is when a career professionals encounters information about a client online, whether it was through an intentional search or inadvertent encounter. Should the discovery of that information be revealed to the client, and how might the decision of whether or not to share impact the helping relationship?

Confidentiality. Confidentiality refers to the protection of information shared by a client, such that information is shared with other parties only with expressed permission from the client, or in rare cases where "disclosure is required to protect clients or identified others from serious and foreseeable harm or when legal requirements demand that confidential information must be revealed" (NCDA, 2015, p. 7). One example ethical consideration regarding confidentiality is that the mere connection of a client to a career professional on a social technology site has the potential to disclose the client relationship. Have clients thought through the messages communicated by their connections and comfortable with what is being disclosed?

Informed consent and transparency. The commitment to informed consent and transparency in the work of career professionals follows the commitments to privacy, self-determination, and confidentiality. It sets an expectation that communication with clients will take place that is related to these commitments. According to the NCDA (2015) Code of Ethics, "career professionals have an obligation to review in writing and orally the rights and responsibilities of both the career professional and the recipient of services prior to the beginning of the working relationship" (p. 3). Furthermore, informed consent is interpreted as an ongoing process, with expectations and limitations discussed "throughout the working relationship" (p. 5). Engaging in informed consent creates an environment of transparency, where trust and professional rapport can be cultivated to enhance the relationship between client and career professional. Regarding SNTs, informed consent

may include topics such as: if and how social networking connections are made, how SNTs are used within the context of the career development relationship, and acknowledgement of the limitations on privacy and confidentiality inherent with the usage of SNTs.

Tested techniques, tools, and resources. Career professionals commit to using techniques, tools, and resources with their clients that “are generally considered to be established professional practice in the fields of counseling and career development” (NCDA, 2015, p. 11). For the integration of SNTs into career development practice, this would mean an established and tested understanding of how clients can successfully use and benefit from specific tools, while avoiding potential risks. When techniques, tools, or resources are used that are “unproven or developing,” career professionals are required to “take steps to protect clients from possible harm” through explanations of the risks and ethical considerations involved (NCDA, 2015, p. 11).

Data security. The commitment to data security is often associated with record keeping on client interactions with career professionals. Career professionals commit to maintaining data in a secure location and to destroying data files after a finite period of time (NCDA, 2015). Information published on the Internet is enduring and public, changing the nature of data security and storage from ways that career professionals have addressed these issues in the past.

Fair treatment and equitable access. Another common commitment that career professionals make to clients is fair treatment and equitable access to career services for all clients (NACE, 2010; Srago & Makela, 2010). By offering the same services to all clients, career professionals avoid the real, or perceived, situation of advantaging one client or another. An example of this situation in the context of SNTs is when career professionals make the decision whether or not to “friend” or connect with a particular client. Connecting with a client can give him or her access to a broader network than may be accessible to other clients who do not connect on SNTs, thereby bringing issues of fairness and equity into question.

Professional competence. Career professionals make a commitment to clients that they will work only within the “boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials, and appropriate professional experience” (NCDA, 2015, p. 9). This need for professional competence extends not only to the particular career services that are provided, but also to the technology that is used as a tool for communicating with and providing services to clients (Harris & Younggren, 2011). Professional competence within the realm of SNTs means that career professionals understand the way the technology works; are informed on technology terms of service to which clients agree; stay up-to-date on end user agreements which can be amended over time; communicate to clients the capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses of the technology; and are able to help trouble-shoot difficulties that clients may encounter.

TABLE 3. CORE ETHICAL COMMITMENTS RELATED TO CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES

| Challenges | Core Ethical Commitments | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| | Privacy | Confidentiality | Consent / Transparency | Tested Tools | Data Security | Fair and Equitable Treatment | Professional Competence | |
| Rapid development of technology | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Managing interactions | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| Changing nature of relationships | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| Digital exclusion | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| Protection of client information | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | |

Challenges related to social networking technologies.

Across related literature, we uncovered five main categories of challenges related to the use of SNTs in career development practice, including: (a) the rapid development of technology, (b) managing interactions in online environments, (c) the changing nature of client-career professional relationships, (d) concerns related to who is excluded when technology is used, and (e) protecting client information in SNT environments. Table 3 provides an overview of the primary areas in which these challenges may conflict with the ethical commitments that were previously defined. The discussions that follow clarify the potential conflicts that may arise.

Rapid Development of Technology. The “rapid and ubiquitous” (Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, & Chang, 2010, p. 158) pace of change in modern technologies creates a challenge for career professionals who seek to integrate technology into their practice. As new technologies emerge and old technologies adapt, career professionals need to evaluate how these new tools can be useful in career development work (Hooley et al., 2010). What career problems are they best suited to, and for which clients? It takes time to uncover both the benefits of a technology tool, as well as the risks associated with it. A lack of understanding the potential pitfalls of technology use can cause career professionals to stumble into unforeseen ethical dilemmas (Van Allen & Roberts, 2011).

Active practice environments do not often provide low-risk opportunities to test, explore, and receive training on new technologies (Van Allen & Roberts, 2011). Without sufficient training and

exploration time, career professionals can put their clients at risk for encountering difficulties and stressors that negatively impact client experiences and career progress. This difficulty is exacerbated when career professionals-in-training perceive their supervisors as having little experience with or knowledge of emerging technologies and avoid seeking guidance on related issues (Taylor et al., 2010).

The rapid pace of change in technologies have been cited as a primary reason that organizations and professional associations have not developed standards or guidelines for the use of social networking (and other) technologies in career services (e.g., Martin, 2010; Ragusea & Vandecreek, 2003; Taylor et al., 2010). For example, in 2010, Taylor et al. stated that “it seems unlikely that the American Psychological Association Ethics Committee will set any formal guidelines on the use of social networking websites in the near future, and this lack of action is likely the most reasonable response given the accelerating rate of technological change” (p. 158). Scholars argue that, as technologies change, so too may the issues that technologies raise and the solutions that they require (Ragusea & Vandecreek, 2003). Furthermore, the career development profession and related fields are “just defining the questions, issues, the risks of harm to the client and we’re going to have to let the process unfold” (Martin, 2010, para. 22). As a result of a lack of formal standards, career professionals who chose to use emerging SNTs are left “vulnerable to experience a host of ethical and professional dilemmas” (Tunick et al., 2011, p. 441) and “[exposing] themselves to a risk that others will question as ethical and/or legal” (Harris & Younggren, 2011, p. 412). As a result, helping professionals have been encouraged to “proceed with caution” (NACE, 2010, para. 9) and to “tread lightly and carefully” (Parish & Friedman, 2011, para. 18) when it comes to integrating SNTs into their practice.

Managing Interactions in Online Environments. Despite the ease of establishing communities and networks in online environments, career professionals may find the management of groups they establish and intervention if problems arise to be notably challenging (Hooley et al., 2010). Several characteristics of online environments contribute to complications. First, the boundaries of who is influenced by the content of a virtual social network are not clearly defined (Bateman et al., 2010), as individuals can move fluidly in and out of groups and groups may overlap or intermingle when “friends of friends” can view content. With so much movement in and out of the interaction space, at times, it can be difficult to determine who is a client (Osborn et al., 2011). Second, the accuracy or inaccuracy of information posted online is difficult to determine. People may find that they have little control over (or little knowledge of) what is posted about them online, and that even being able to verify the identity of the person posting information can be a challenge (Ragusea & Vandecreek, 2003; Zur, 2008). Third, “recognizing time and space” (Hooley et al., 2010, p. 14) is challenging in online environments. Materials posted often lack indications of how recently information was created, geographic locations, cultural context, missing visual and affective cues, and so on. Gaps such as these create opportunities for miscommunication and misunderstandings that are challenging to rectify in a virtual environment.

Changing Nature of Relationships. The Internet in general, and SNTs specifically, have drastically increased the amount of information that is readily available about individuals related to both their professional and personal lives. The available information can be easily accessed by both clients and career professionals alike, and “has the potential to lead to momentous changes” (Tunick et al., 2011, p. 440) in the professional working relationship. This has led many scholars to question how the professional relationship is affected by clients seeking information on career professionals, career professionals seeking information on clients, and the increasingly blurred boundary lines between career professionals’ personal and professional lives.

Clients seeking information on career professionals. Historically, the issue of clients discovering details about a helping professional’s life has been couched in discussions of self-disclosure (Zur et al., 2009). Practices related to self-disclosure are challenging because many different approaches exist regarding how much one might disclose to a client, however there is general agreement around key ideas such as: (a) keeping professional distance is beneficial to clients, (b) career professionals should be “thoughtful and intentional” regarding how they handle self-disclosures, and (c) self-disclosures should be engaged in only for the clients’ benefit, rather than to serve some need of the helping professional (Taylor et al., 2010). As the Internet expands client access to personal information about helping professionals, it becomes difficult to intentionally control or mold the disclosures that occur. In fact, when clients use search engines to uncover information, helping professionals may not be aware of the information (and misinformation) that has been disclosed or how that information impacts the clients’ perceptions or nature of the helping relationship (Gabbard, Kassaw, & Perez-Garcia, 2013). Ultimately, helping professionals will be faced, not with the question of whether to disclose personal information online, but “how to manage the Internet-driven self-disclosure that has become almost inevitable” (Zur et al., 2009, p. 26).

Career professionals seeking information on clients. The tables can also be turned in the other direction. The ease of access to information that is provided by the Internet and SNTs creates opportunities for career professionals to discover private details about clients, both in an intentional and an inadvertent manner. As Internet and SNTs become embedded into daily life, helping professionals can become lulled into a place of familiarity, employing technologies without thoughtful consideration of potential challenges simply because they are not in the habit of doing so or do not believe they will encounter negative consequences (Martin, 2010; Tunick et al., 2011, Van Allen & Roberts, 2011). Attitudes of complacency such as these may lead career professionals to conduct internet searches or to explore social networking sites to learn additional information about clients. While initial intentions for these searches may be honorable (e.g., considering how a potential employer may view a client’s online persona), many scholars warn about the ethical and professional challenges caused by client searches – particularly those conducted without the clients’ knowledge (e.g., Clinton, Silverman, & Brendel, 2010; DiLillo & Gale, 2011; Kaslow, Patterson, & Gottlieb, 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010; Tunick et al., 2011).

Internet searches without client consent lead to ethical and interpersonal challenges regarding what the helping professional can and should do with the information obtained, particularly when unexpected content is found. Does the helping professional share with the client what they have found? How would the client relationship be impacted if information were shared? There is ample reason to believe that some clients would see the search as an intrusion on their privacy that may do irreversible harm to that client's sense of trust and rapport with the helping professional. In fact the concern is so great that the general consensus provided in the literature is that undisclosed client searches "undermines a client's right to self-determination" (DiLillo & Gale, 2011, p. 160), "[does] not constitute sound practice in light of upholding trust within the context of a professional relationship" (Kaslow et al., 2011, p. 107), and violates the core ethical principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, and fidelity (Tunick et al., 2011).

Blurring the boundaries between professional and personal life. SNTs challenge traditional perspectives on what behaviors and information belong in career professionals' public versus private spheres (Nicholson, 2011). The understanding of a career professionals' personal lives being a "distinct or separate entities" (Lehavot et al., 2010, p. 161) from their professional lives no longer carries sharp boundaries. Professional and personal boundaries are becoming blurred by modern-day technologies (e.g., Bateman et al., 2010; Birky & Collins, 2011; Osborn et al., 2011; Shallcross, 2011; Tunick et al., 2011). This requires reconsideration of what can truly be considered private conduct and what is the impact of personal life on professional life (Benke, 2008; Gabbard et al., 2013).

This tension can become particularly acute when clients make requests to enter a career professionals' personal social networking spaces. Connecting or becoming "friends" with a client on a social networking account that a career professional uses for personal communications essentially establishes a dual (co-existing professional and nonprofessional) relationship (Gabbard et al., 2013). Dual relationships are generally discouraged as they can cause role confusions that can potentially harm the clients' progress on career development tasks (NCDA, 2015; Tunick et al., 2011). Clients may misinterpret information posted by career professionals as an indication of a social relationship, thereby changing the nature of the helping relationship and making it more difficult for the client to express needs or seek assistance. A similar situation can occur when connecting with past clients, who may find themselves reluctant to return for needed assistance due to information encountered on a social networking site. Furthermore, connections with clients on social networking sites can lead to inadvertent confidentiality breaches (Kaslow et al. 2011) when virtual connections or discussions provide clues to reveal a professional relationship.

Finally, within all interactions with clients, career professionals are expected to uphold a "standard of professionalism," whether that encounter takes place in a personal or professional sphere (Birky & Collins, 2011, p. 194). A challenge for career professionals is to recognize this responsibility and the potential limitations placed on their personal choices and freedoms in

engaging in social networking sites. As stated by Karl and Peluchette (2011), “it is not appropriate to let everyone into an individual’s backstage area” (p. 217). Career professionals may need to take extra steps to ensure the separation of their private lives from their professional work with clients, such as choosing high-level privacy settings or refraining from using certain SNTs (e.g., Barnett, 2008; Birky & Collins, 2011; Lehavot, 2009; Lehavot et al., 2010; Parish & Friedman, 2011; Tunick et al., 2011; Van Allen & Roberts, 2011).

Digital Exclusion. As important as it is to consider the experience of clients who interact with SNTs, it is equally important to consider who is not a part of those interactions. Hooley et al. (2010) refer to this concern as “digital exclusion” (p. 8) in which groups of people who are not connected or engaged in online interactions are ignored or left out of beneficial services. The reasons clients choose not to engage with SNTs are broader than a lack of access to computers or the Internet. They also related to digital literacy – the “combination of skills, attitudes, and knowledge” (p. 8) that provides a foundation for an individual to confidently interact with online content and services. Environmental influences and culture greatly influence digital literacy and the choice of technologies in which people engage. For example, the NACE (2010) cautions career professionals to recognize the limited representation of minority populations on social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook. If access to career networks, resources, and services is to be made accessible through social networking sites, career professionals need to think carefully about what client populations may be disadvantaged by this approach and consider how equitable services can be provided.

Protection of client information. Career professionals cannot guarantee the confidentiality, security, and privacy of data that clients share within interactions that occur through SNTs (Ragusea & VandeCreek, 2003; Van Allen & Roberts, 2011). This perhaps can be argued to be the case for any service environment, from traditional face-to-face to technology-enabled. However, some characteristics of social networking environments exacerbate these concerns.

For example, the very nature of SNTs makes the commitment of confidentiality difficult to uphold. On many social networking sites, communications between clients and career professionals can be “witnessed by a broad, invisible audience of third parties” (Humphreys, Winzelberg, & Klaw, 2000, p. 495). In fact, the mere connection with a career professional on a social networking site can identify an individual as a client, thereby raising confidentiality concerns. Numerous scholars discuss limitations of confidentiality on social networking sites and encourage helping professionals to be mindful of how their actions and choices impact client confidentiality (e.g., Harris & Younggren, 2011; Martin, 2010; Taylor et al., 2010; Tunick et al., 2011; Van Allen & Roberts, 2011).

Additionally, the collection and storage of online data by social networking sites happens on computers and servers over which the career professional has no control (Bateman et al., 2010; Kolmes & Taube, 2014). Once information is posted to the Internet, there is a sense of permanence; it can be archived, copied, forwarded, and shared outside of its original context. The sharing of that

information can quickly extend beyond the audiences intended by the author, thereby becoming a privacy concern. Furthermore, privacy policies and settings on social networking sites have been identified as “a continually moving target” (Tunick et al., 2011, p. 445), which both (a) demonstrates a lack of understanding of what privacy is expected to be in this environment, and (b) requires users to “manage their publicness through trial and error” (Bateman et al., 2010, p. 89). This may result in negative experiences that are harmful to a client’s wellbeing and career progress.

Strategies and Recommendations for Ethical Practice related to Social Networking Technologies

Thus far, this paper has defined SNTs, and then outlined the benefits, challenges, and ethical issues related to these resources as they have been discussed throughout the career development and related bodies of literature. After careful reflection, the members of the NCDA Ethics Committee determined that it was important to present a balanced message regarding the use of SNTs – we recognized both the potential benefits and the potential pitfalls of embracing these tools in practice with clients. We also recognized the role that SNTs have come to play within the broader culture in which we live and work, including the presence that SNTs have established within the career search process that clients engage. The use of SNTs in career development practice has shifted from an opportunity to enhance our work to a necessity to fully serve our clients. Career professionals have a responsibility to: (a) be aware of these tools, (b) to manage their own professional representations within them, and (c) to educate their clients to successfully consider and navigate SNTs in their career development process. Career professionals may find it advantageous to engage further, using SNTs within their practice with clients to market and expand career services, as well as a one of many tools for career exploration, job search, and career management (Kettunen, Sampson, & Osborn, 2014). At whatever level a career professional chooses to engage, it is important that (s)he develops a clear voice to advocate for and educate clients, offering a safe and trustworthy space for clients to seek information and support (similar to the concept of “Trust Agents” as presented by Brogan & Smith, 2010).

Yet, what steps can career professionals take to make informed decisions about how to proceed, while helping them anticipate, navigate, and in many cases, avoid potential ethical dilemmas that may arise? This final section of the paper summarizes strategies and recommendations for the use of SNTs discovered across relevant literature. It is important to reiterate that this is a review of suggestions provided by various sources across the literature – and not direct recommendations from the NCDA Ethics Committee. The NCDA Ethics Committee used this literature review – as well as additional resources – to create ethical guidelines, which were embedded in the 2015 NCDA Code of Ethics. Readers are directed to Section F of that document for specific guidelines provided by NCDA. The strategies discussed here fall into six general themes: (a) be mindful and thoughtful about the use of SNTs at all times; (b) keep the professional and personal separate; (c) educate staff and trainees; (d) educate clients; (e) seek equitable treatment; and (f) create a policy for SNT use across your career services office or team.

BE MINDFUL AND THOUGHTFUL ABOUT THE USE OF SNTs AT ALL TIMES

The first theme encourages career professionals to be sensitive to the benefits and challenges that SNTs present, and to reflect carefully on what this means for their professional practice before using new technologies. Career professionals are encouraged to “engage in thoughtful reflection regarding their own views, beliefs, and rationale underlying the choices they make around self-disclosure in general, and be certain that this stance is reflected in their online behavior” (Tunick et al., 2011, p. 444). This reflection should consider many aspects including: (a) what information is made available, (b) who will (and will not)

have access to that information, (c) what measures will be taken to protect privacy of information, and (d) how disclosure of information may impact their professional work (Benke, 2007; Nicholson, 2011). Some key considerations in these reflections follow.

Ensure benefits outweigh potential harms.

SNTs provide a virtual medium to facilitate interactions between clients and career professionals. At the core of these interactions remains the ethical obligation to “promote the welfare” of clients while “avoiding harm” (NCDA, 2015, pp. 3-4). For this reason, “the deciding factor [regarding use of SNTs] should be whether the interaction benefits or harms the client” (Shallcross, 2011, para. 23). Recognizing the complexities of this electronic media (as outlined in the previous sections), career professionals are encouraged to engage in risk-benefit analyses regarding their use of SNTs with clients, and to proceed with technologies when the anticipated benefits outweigh the anticipated harms (Harris & Younggren, 2011; Lannin & Scott, 2013; Tunick et al., 2011).

Build client trust first.

Also central to the decision-making process, career professionals are encouraged to recognize the importance of building trust and rapport with clients. Relationship development is central to being able to serve clients in the helping professions and “trust... should always be a paramount consideration” (Kaslow et al., 2011, p. 110). As such, career professionals are encouraged to treat others online as they would wish to be treated, and to avoid engaging in behaviors that, although accepted as legal (e.g., searching for information about clients using SNTs without their knowledge), have a high likelihood of creating a source of tension with clients.

Be transparent about uses and procedures.

One way to build client trust regarding the use of SNTs in practice is to clearly and consistently communicate with clients regarding the use of these tools as part of the career development process. Information about how technology tools will, and will not, be used can be a part of intake conversations and informed consent procedures. With time, such exchanges can foster trust and help prevent ethical dilemmas from arising (Lehavot, 2009; Tunick et al., 2011).

Engage in self-monitoring and peer-consultation.

Over time, career professionals are encouraged to continually self-monitor their online behaviors and interactions through personal reflection, documentation, and peer consultation (Kolmes & Taube, 2014; Lannin & Scott, 2013; Taylor et al., 2010). With the rapid change in technologies, the development of professional standards and guidelines will generally lag behind innovation. Engaging in self-monitoring and peer-consultation helps career professionals to hone their ethical sensitivities and hold firm to core ethical principles, even when adapting to new environments and applications. Further, discussing newly encountered ethical challenges with other career professionals is the first step to creating consensus regarding the most appropriate and ethical ways for career professionals to address SNTs in practice.

KEEP THE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SEPARATE

A second strategy observed consistently across the literature is the importance of career professionals keeping their personal and professional online identities separate (e.g., Humphreys et al., 2000; Lannin & Scott, 2013; NACE, 2009; Shallcross, 2011). Career professionals can then limit their connections with clients to their accounts with professional identities. This then decreases the likelihood of clients receiving messages intended for a personal audience, which could create dual relationship challenges and confusion. In addition to separating accounts, authors offer specific advice related to professional and private accounts as follows.

Do not list personal contact information.

Literature written for psychologists and counseling professionals discourages listing any personal contact information on social networking sites, whether the accounts are established for personal or professional use (Humphreys et al., 2000; Parish & Friedman, 2011; Van Allen & Roberts, 2011). Examples of information that is discouraged includes email address, physical address, phone number, and date of birth. Discretion is also encouraged when joining groups, fan clubs, or specialty pages, as doing so can open your personal information to other group members (Parish & Friedman, 2011).

Use privacy settings and consider a pseudonym.

Career professionals should recognize that “their self-representations on the internet are often researched and viewed by clients” (Birky & Collins, 2011, p. 202). This is a reality for many helping professionals. For this reason, it is important for career development professionals to take steps to make personal online accounts “less visible” and to be careful to maintain privacy settings and strategies over time (Van Allen & Roberts, 2011, p. 437). Career professionals are encouraged to carefully consider the privacy settings of any SNT used (e.g., Gabbard et al., 2013; Lannin & Scott, 2013; Lehavot, 2009; Martin, 2010). For example, many authors provide advice on the use of personal Facebook accounts by helping professionals (e.g., Birky & Collins, 2011; Gabbard et al., 2013; Parish & Friedman, 2011). One suggested strategy is to adjust Facebook privacy settings to provide profile access to only “friends,” rather than “friends of friends” who may include unknown individuals and could lead to potential ethical challenges (Parish & Friedman, 2011). Helping professionals are also encouraged to make their profiles unsearchable, not to accept friend requests from unknown persons, and to consider the use of a pseudonym as a way of masking their identity (Barnett, 2008; Parish & Friedman, 2011).

Even with privacy settings and pseudonyms in place, Tunick et al. (2011) warn that “unintentional disclosure is inevitable with the ease of access permitted with the Internet” (p. 442). These authors stress that privacy settings change over time, saying that “the maintenance of privacy settings is a continually moving target... [and that] users must remain vigilant” (p. 445) in order to manage their preferred level of self-disclosure. As such, career professionals should still remain cautious about the information that they post online, recognizing that information posted to social networking sites exists in a permanent record that is no longer fully in their control. Parish and Friedman (2011) offer the general advice to “tread lightly and carefully” (para. 18) in the creation of a digital footprint.

Conduct personal web searches to monitor online identity.

Career professionals are encouraged to periodically use search engines to search for their own name and information to be aware of what clients may come across (Gabbard et al., 2013; Lannin & Scott, 2013; Zur, 2008). Monitor for false information or items of concern. If any areas of concern are discovered, take steps to remove the information, either personally or by contacting a website administrators to request that the problematic content be discarded (Gabbard et al., 2013; Wall, 2011).

EDUCATE STAFF AND TRAINEES

Providing education and training opportunities to support effective and ethical integration of SNTs into professional practice, while keeping personal use of these technologies separate from client interactions, is also much needed. As SNTs become increasingly integrated into our daily lives, career professionals become more likely to use them in an automatic fashion, without critically considering the implications of that use (Zur et al., 2009). Proactive discussion of the ethical implications of the use of SNTs should be integrated into graduate training programs, as well as staff development programs for current career professionals, so they may “gain a respect for and understanding of” (Wandel, 2008, p. 46) the ways that SNTs impact practice. Within these education and training opportunities, opportunities should be provided for “open and thoughtful discussion” (Tunick et al., 2011, p. 445) regarding the use of SNTs, application of core ethical guidelines and codes, common ethical challenges, and strategies for consulting with knowledgeable colleagues when questions do arise (Birky & Collins, 2011; DiLillo & Gale, 2011). This section addresses some areas for additional education that are stressed in the related literature.

Develop technological competence.

Career professional have an ethical obligation to be technically competent with any tool that they plan to use with clients. SNTs are no different. To use a specific SNT with clients, career professionals must know: (a) how to navigate the computer and Internet, (b) how to operate and navigate the specific social networking site, (c) how to troubleshoot basic site errors and to answer basic questions, (d) how to educate clients on privacy settings, and (e) how to seek technical support. Career professionals much also understand and be able to explain to clients the risks and benefits of using a particular SNT.

For career professionals, the issue of developing technical competence becomes particularly challenging because of the role we often play as a link between job seekers and employers. Even if career professionals choose not to use a particular SNT personally or professionally, they are likely to receive questions from clients (or employers) about the use of that tool in career development and management settings. Questions arise such as inquiries about the appropriateness or legality of potential employers requesting access to Facebook accounts during the candidate screening or interviewing process (Hlavac & Easterly, 2009), or about ways to use blogs or Pinterest accounts to create a job search portfolio (Grubb, Kelly, & Wolleben, 2013; Kelly, 2013). Career professionals then find themselves in the position of having to help the client reflect on the use of these SNTs, which can be difficult without the foundational technical competence to understand the terminology and functionality of these sites.

Some authors stress job seekers should be using SNTs “because employers are increasingly using these tools to advertise job openings and source qualified applicants” (Sewell, Martin, Barnett, & Jenter, 2011, p. 4). They encourage career professionals to educate clients on the use of SNTs (Grubb, Kelly, & Wolleben, n.d.; Sewell et al., 2011). To do so, career professional must first explore, and preferably use, these resources themselves to become familiar with their features and to identify helpful communities and communication platforms. There is value in gaining a “deeper understanding of how clients use and experience social networking sites” (Kolmes, 2012, p. 610) in order to effectively assist clients as they construct and employ their virtual identities.

Recognize relationship dynamics.

Another important theme for career professionals’ education and training is to recognize the new dimensions that SNTs bring to the client-career professional relationship. While the many of the items for reflection below may seem obvious, they are worthy of discussion to heighten awareness of their importance and the influence that they can have on practice.

Assume clients will search you. Career professionals should assume that clients will search for information on them using SNTs (Kolmes & Taube, 2014). Private profiles should be separated from public profiles, and public profiles should be reviewed to ensure that all information shared is appropriate for public disclosure (Van Allen & Roberts, 2011).

Do not post information about clients. Regardless of whether they are posting on a private or personal social networking account, career professionals should “remain cognizant of the public nature of postings” (Birky & Collins, p. 202). Privacy settings are not foolproof, and material posted privately by one person can often be forwarded more publically by another person beyond the originator’s network by a click of a button. Zur (2008) encourages helping professionals to assume that everything posted online may be read by clients. Doing so encourages an extra level of caution with posting information. Avoid posting information about work-related matters or discussion case studies online, even if a pseudonym is used (Harris & Robinson Kurpius, 2014; Parish & Friedman, 2011; Zur, 2008). Clients may be able to identify themselves in the posting, which could greatly harm the working relationship. If a career professional wishes to present a client case study online, permission should be sought from the client before posting and the details of the case should be sufficiently changed to de-identify the client (Zur, 2008). Once information is posted online, it often cannot be taken back (Barnett, 2008). As such, decisions to post information should not be made lightly.

Avoid seeking information on clients without their permission. Except in the case of an emergency, career professionals should avoid seeking personal information about their clients through online searches without first obtaining clients’ permission to do so (Birky & Collins, 2011; Kaslow et al., 2011; Lannin & Scott, 2013; Lehavot et al., 2010). In particular, Kaslow et al. (2011) advise against using extensive, fee-based services to gather information on clients, stating that this practice “crosses a boundary of privacy” and is “an intrusive and deceptive practice” (p. 111). Accessing personal information without consent can have a negative impact on client trust.

Additionally, information gained can influence the ways that a career professional interacts with a client, even if the knowledge gained is not shared with a client. This is particularly troublesome because information available online may be inaccurate, leading career professionals to inappropriate assumptions and behaviors based on false data. [For an in-depth discussion of this issue, see Kolmes & Taube, 2014.]

In some situations a career professional may find value to the client and the therapeutic relationship in conducting a search of that client on SNTs. For example, a client may be having difficulty connecting with potential employers during a job search, and questions may arise about the messages communicated in the client's online presence. In this case, the career professional should first have an open discussion with the client about the possibility of searching his/her online presence, recognizing the potential impact that online disclosures may have on their professional relationship (Barnett, 2008). Such a search may be conducted with the career professional and client working together so that a dialog may occur about the information that is being disclosed. The client may then be able to signal if he/she becomes uncomfortable with the disclosures and would like to end the searches to maintain the privacy of some information. Conducting a search in this collaborative manner places the control of the flow of information in the hands of the client, demonstrating a respect for his/her experience, and creates learning opportunities that can be beneficial to the career development process (Lehavot et al., 2010).

EDUCATE CLIENTS

In addition to educating staff and trainees, career professionals have a responsibility to educate their clients about the use of SNTs. Related literature focuses calls for client education in two areas: (a) understanding the how SNT impact relationships between the client and career professional, and (b) understanding the benefits and risks of using SNTs within the job search and career management process.

Client and career professional relationships.

Policies and practices regarding how a career services office or team approaches the use of SNTs with clients should be clearly communicated to clients in multiple formats including, office policy statements, informed consent documents, disclosure statements visible on websites, and in verbal explanations to clients (Kaslow et al., 2011; Ragusea & VandeCreek, 2003). Documents describing informed consent regarding SNTs may include descriptions of the services used, recognition of the limitations of confidentiality and privacy, suggestions for increasing security, recognition of client and career professional roles, and acknowledgement of general boundaries and typical response time and expectations for postings (Humphreys et al., 2000; Ragusea & VandeCreek, 2003). It is important to recognize that clients vary in their level of comfort with and knowledge of technology. As such, descriptions of the pros, cons, risks, and benefits of engaging with career professionals via SNTs may need to be adapted to individual client's specific needs (Lehavot et al., 2010). In addition, the audience who interacts with career professionals in SNT environments is continually shifting, with new individuals continually moving in and out of the space. Career professionals must be careful to provide information about roles, responsibilities, and expectations in a consistent manner, perhaps assuming that every post made to a SNT site "will encounter at least one set

of eyes de novo” (Humphreys et al., 2000, p. 494). The benefit to career professionals of taking a vigilant approach to communicating with clients about ethical practice regarding the use of SNTs is that these conversations demonstrate transparency, which “fosters trust and honesty” (Lehavot, 2009, p. 138) within interpersonal relationships. Building an understanding of how SNT are integrated into the client-career professional relationship early in the relationship decreases the opportunities for ethical dilemmas to arise.

Job search and career management benefits and risks.

As SNTs become increasingly integrated into the workplace and hiring process, clients who are not effective and professional SNT users will find themselves at a considerable disadvantage in many fields. As aptly expressed by Osborn et al. (2011):

The question of ethics on the part of the employer is moot. This searching by employers is underway now, so the career practitioner’s role is to alert students and clients to be aware that it is happening and to pay close attention to what they post online. (p. 34)

On the one hand, career professionals can share cautionary tales with clients, stressing the importance of: (a) managing your online presence, (b) using appropriate privacy settings, (c) respecting the privacy and rights of others (“what you post can harm others”), (d) recognizing that nothing posted on the internet is confidential, (e) understanding that what is shared online may not be possible to retract, and (f) being aware that others may judge you based on the content of friends’ social networking sites (Karl & Peluchette, 2011; Kaslow et al., 2011; Lehavot et al., 2010; Lory, 2010; Osborn et al., 2011; Wandel, 2008). Yet, on the other hand, career professionals may also move beyond this role to educate clients on how to use SNTs “as one of many strategies that should be utilized by today’s job searcher” (Osborn et al., 2011, p. 33). A few of the strategies that are presented in the literature for career professionals to take an active role in educating clients include (Osborn et al., 2011; Sewell et al., 2011):

- Conduct workshops on how to use specific SNTs in the job search
- Share strategies for developing an online “brand”
- Provide strategies for how to research employers and careers via SNTs
- Establish or recommend groups for job seekers
- Provide information on how employers use SNTs to identify job candidates
- Share strategies for researching interviewers using SNTs
- Provide information on the strengths, weaknesses, and value of each SNT for the job search process

SEEK EQUITABLE TREATMENT

Career professionals are encouraged to take deliberate steps to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all clients in relation to the use of SNTs in practice. Two dynamics often emerge in the literature related to fair and equitable treatment of clients, including: (a) who to connect with on social networking sites, and (b) who initiates online relationships. Carefully considering these issues in a proactive manner allows career professionals to plan for interactions, monitor their behaviors, and to be transparent and consistent with clients regarding their choices.

Making connections.

Advice on whether or not helping professionals should link with clients via SNTs does vary across the literature, with variations loosely related to the specific helping professions that the articles target. Within literature written for psychologists, counselors, and social workers, it is common to find referrals to advocates of taking “a conservative approach” (Van Allen & Roberts, 2011, p. 436) or “a safe approach to risk management” (Kaslow et al., 2011, p. 108) by simply not accepting friend requests from clients, students, or others with whom you are engaged in a professional relationship other than colleagues (see also, Parish & Friedman, 2011; Shallcross, 2011). Kaslow et al. (2011) suggest that if it “is a psychologist’s responsibility to limit potential risks to clients that can be attributed to their own actions” (p. 437) and the potential risks of new technologies are still unclear, psychologists should be cautious about the adaptation of these technologies with clients. Lehavot et al. (2010), also writing from a psychologist perspective, present an approach to using SNTs with clients that requires careful reflection on a case-by-case basis “so that the risk of harm to clients can be minimized” (p. 164). They encourage considering online connections in the context of “standards on boundaries and multiple relationships” as provided in the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Code of Ethics, and that “engaging in a secondary online relationship should only occur when consistent with the primary clinical relationship and the client’s best interests” (p. 164). In this way, Lehavot et al. do not fully discourage the use of SNTs with clients. Likewise, Lannin and Scott (2013) state that “in most cases it is prudent to avoid forming multiple relationships with clients online... [yet] there may be necessary exceptions to this guideline” (p. 138). These authors offer a set of reflection questions to help psychologists consider situations that may fall into the exceptions category.

When reviewing literature written for counseling and career services on college campuses, the message about connecting with clients on SNT changes considerably. In these environments, SNTs are a primary mode of communication for many students and, in many cases, counseling and career centers have established professional sites to meet students where they are. However, in doing so, students may pursue additional linkages to helping professionals, both on the professional center sites and the personal sites of helping professionals. What guidance does the literature provide for helping professionals? In this literature, the primary themes focus on equity, fairness, inclusiveness, and transparency. The message is to have “a policy of friending all or none” (Birky & Collins, 2011, p. 197), and to friend on only professional accounts (rather than personal accounts). The policy should be clearly stated, so that all clients have the opportunity to understand why they may link to professional, but no personal accounts. Also, having a blanket policy for all clients ensures that all clients have equal access to and opportunity to benefit from all services, including those offered by SNTs. Sewell et al. (2011) take inclusivity a step further with a reminder that clients come from diverse backgrounds, with differential abilities to access information via SNTs. Even if helping professionals move in the direction of engaging with clients in this media, maintaining alternative formats of communication will be important. For example, a student with a hearing disability may not be able to listen to a podcast file posted to a Facebook page. In this case, providing a transcript may be necessary.

Initiating relationships.

In comparison to the lack of agreement on the appropriateness of connecting with clients in different SNT environments, greater agreement is found regarding advice on who should initiate relationships using SNTs.

This advice recognizes the “power differential” (Birky & Collins, 2011, p. 202) between those entering into online relationship. Examples provided in related literature are given in the case of supervisors and administrators, suggesting that they should not send invitations for online links (friends or connections) to supervisees (Birky & Collins, 2011). Karl and Peluchette (2011) mirror this advice with the case of faculty and students, saying that it is inappropriate for faculty to send invitations for online links to students, although students may initiate requests with faculty. The reason is that the individual who is in the lower power position may feel coerced into accepting the request, and may feel uncomfortable with the disclosure of the information contained on the social networking site. It may be argued that a power differential also exists in the client-career professional relationship, and that differential should be acknowledged and respected. Connections on SNT sites can identify individuals as clients, disclose additional personal information sometimes without the individuals’ knowledge, and, at times, present false or misleading information. Clients are best served when given the opportunity to freely choose when to invite a career professional into their social networking spaces, with an understanding of the benefits and risks of doing so.

CREATE A POLICY FOR SNT USE ACROSS YOUR OFFICE OR TEAM

A final strategy that is found fairly consistently across the literature is the advice that, if a helping professionals should create a policy regarding their use of SNTs in service delivery – “a clear purpose and rules of engagement” (Osborn et al., 2011, p. 77) to create a common understanding among clients and colleagues (Barnett, 2008; Kolmes & Taube, 2014; Lannin & Scott, 2013; Lehavot, 2009; Nicholson, 2011; Shallcross, 2011; Tunick et al., 2011; Van Allen & Roberts, 2011; Wandel, 2008). Policies should be written in clearly defined and understandable terms, and communicated in both written and verbal forms (Kaslow et al., 2011). They should be a part of the informed consent process, and easily accessible after initial meetings (DiLillo & Gale, 2011; Kaslow et al., 2011; Kolmes, 2012; Lannin & Scott, 2013). Also, remembering that the membership of online communities changes continuously, recognize that informed consents and social networking policies may need to be presented and repeated often.

Concluding Remarks

Current literature on the use of SNTs in helping professions demonstrates a clear need for guidance in this evolving area, and professional associations have been called upon to take a leadership role in providing ethical guidelines for best practice (e.g., Lannin & Scott, 2013; Maheu et al., 2012). The National Career Development Association recently released the third revision of the Code of Ethics (NCDA, 2015). The most significant changes in the 2015 NCDA Code of Ethics (from the previous 2007 version) occurred in the technology section, which is titled *Providing Career Services Online, Technology, and Social Media*. The social networking and social media sections of the NCDA Code of Ethics are embedded within the online and technology section of the Code of Ethics in order to acknowledge that considerable overlap exists with issues and experiences related to other forms of technology that have been available to career professionals for some time (e.g., distance counseling, email, electronic records systems, job posting and searching databases). However, a section dedicated to social networking and social media is also provided to recognize the unique issues and challenges that these resources present.

The social networking and social media section of the NCDA Code of Ethics is more extensive than comparable sections from related organizations (e.g., NCDA's parent organization, the American Counseling Association, 2014). The NCDA Ethics Committee felt it was important to provide a greater level of detail due to the way in which clients and other stakeholders are actively bringing SNTs into the environments in which career professionals work and interact. The 2015 NCDA Code of Ethics is intended to provide a resource to which career professionals can turn to understand the ethical implications of integrating SNTs into their work, as well as to help them navigate ethical questions and dilemmas that arise in practice. Topics covered include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) creating and maintaining a virtual professional presence, (b) keeping professional presence separate from personal presence; (c) identifying professional roles and expertise; (d) maintaining confidentiality; (e) respecting privacy; (f) ensuring informed consent; (g) seeking fair and equitable treatment; (h) acknowledging permanence of information, accuracy, and audience; (i) respecting copyright and original sources; and (j) educating clients. The NCDA Ethics Committee put forth these guidelines with the sincere hope that they would provide a solid foundation, yet would also continue to spur conversation among career professionals about the benefits and challenges of using SNTs in their work. Remember that Codes of Ethics are "living documents which evolve over time as professionals encounter new challenges" (Makela, 2009, p. 10). With that understanding, the NCDA Ethics Committee has put forward our best thinking on the topic to date. We welcome continued conversations and educational exchanges on the topic, with the goal of continuously seeking to enhance the service and experiences that we, as career professionals, can create for and with our clients.

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