

## **Counseling 2.0 – The Future of Counseling**

**By Michelle E. Wade, Ed.D., L.C.P.C., L.P.C., N.C.C., A.C.S.**

The American Counseling Association (ACA) (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2013) defines counseling as “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals” (p. 2). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the way that professional relationship is established is no longer necessarily depicted as a client in the opposite chair from the counselor. Rather, counseling can now be conducted over vast distances and the counselor-client relationship can be developed and maintained outside of the therapy room.

Counselors are taught from the very beginning of training that the therapeutic relationship between counselor and client is paramount and as such the relationship needs to be developed and nurtured (Wampold, Duncan, & Miller, 2009). Lambert and Barley (2001) report that thirty percent (30%) of beneficial counseling outcomes can be attributed to the professional relationship. Fluckiger, Del Re, Wampold, Symonds, and Horvath (2011) explicate the alliance-outcome relationship has a greater correlational link greater than any other treatment variable studied. Therefore, if the relationship is paramount, one has to ask whether counseling should venture into this brave new frontier with clients.

Cook and Doyle (2002) found that a working alliance and an empathic relationship could be formed through the internet, with individuals who found online counseling appealing. Some of the appeal of online counseling can be attributed to unique beneficial characteristics such as reduced cost, reduced travel time/expenses, flexibility, and dis-inhibition (online clients feeling less inhibited when speaking with their counselors than if they would have been face-to-face) (Cook & Doyle). Dis-inhibition exists because of a decrease in the level of anxiety regarding

self-disclosure and an increase in a sense of emotional safety (Leibert, Archer, Munson, and York, 2006). There have been a number of recent studies with positive outcomes conducted using internet-based interventions with various diagnoses: eating disorders (Zabinski, Celio, Jacobs, Manwaring, and Wilfley, 2003); PTSD (Wood et al., 2009), Asperger's (Mangan, 2008); and the emotional aspects of physical disabilities (Chen, Jeng, Fung, Doong, & Chuang, 2009).

The shift in the profession towards accepting and utilizing technology is reflected in the *2014 ACA Code of Ethics*. A new section specifically addressing distance counseling, technology, and social media was added in the newest revision. In addition, one can see the influence of technology infused throughout the entirety of the *Code of Ethics*. However, with one in-depth review of Section H and the new technology based codes, one realizes that these “new concepts” are simply extensions of old ideas that have been packaged differently. For example, Section H.1. requires counselors be knowledgeable and competent in using technology with clients. Competency is required of all counselors in all areas, as reflected in C.2.a. of the *2014 ACA Code of Ethics*. Also, we are to respect the privacy of our clients (B.1.b.), therefore counselors are not allowed to violate the privacy of their clients through internet searches or perusing social media sites (H.6.c.). In addition, while counselors cover informed consent with their clients (A.2.a.) , there are extra considerations when engaging in the use of technology (H.2.a.).

Technology can be a great resource for counselors. Social media can allow a counselor to have examples of how clients are representing themselves to the outside world. Video-counseling sessions allow clients who have difficulty leaving their homes to access mental health care. Blogging and using Twitter to link clients to relevant materials grant clients access to their mental health tools even when the counselor is not available. Obviously there are considerations

regarding appropriateness that need to be made and precautions to protect private health information to be taken. But it is now possible to reach out and provide mental health services in an ethical manner to individuals who may not have readily accessed these services. The counseling profession has to evolve with the times and meet clients where they are at. In today's world, individuals are reachable by so many different avenues and desire quicker and more immediate responses. Technology allows counselors to meet those demands and desires while still remaining true to the core values of the profession. All it takes is thinking a bit outside the box, and we as a profession have always been the creative types. I encourage all counselors to begin to at least begin to explore how they will make this shift applicable to their own practices.

## REFERENCES

- American Counseling Association. (2014). *Code of ethics and standards of practice*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Barak, A., Hen, L., Boniel-Nissim, M., & Shapira, N. (2008). A comprehensive review and a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of internet-based psychotherapeutic interventions. *Journal of Technology in Human Services, 26*, 109-160. Retrieved from <http://jths.haworthpress.com>
- Chen, C., Jeng, M., Fung, C., Doong, J., & Chuang, T. (2009). Psychological benefits of virtual reality for patients in rehabilitation therapy. *Journal of Sport Rehabilitation, 18*, 258-268. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com>
- Cook, J. E., & Doyle, C. (2002). Working alliance in online therapy as compared to face-to-face therapy: Preliminary results. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 5*, 95-105.
- Fluckiger, C., Del Re, A. C., Wampold, B. E., Symonds, D., & Horvath, A. O. (2012). How central is the alliance in psychotherapy? A multilevel longitudinal meta-analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 59*(1), 10-17.
- Kaplan, D. M., Tarvydas, V. M., & Gladding, S. T. (2013). *20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling: The New Consensus Definition of Counseling*. Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/20-20-a-vision-for-the-future-of-counseling>
- Lambert, M. J., & Barley, D. E. (2001, Winter). Research summary on the therapeutic relationship and psychotherapy outcome. *Psychotherapy, 38*, 357-361. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>
- Leibert, T., Archer Jr., J., Munson, J., & York, G. (2006). An exploration study of client perceptions of internet counseling and the therapeutic alliance. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 28*, 69-83.
- Mangan, K. (2008, January 11). Virtual worlds turn therapeutic for autistic disorders. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 54*(18), A26. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>
- Wampold, B.E., Duncan, B.L., & Miller, S.D. (2009). *The Heart and Soul of Change: Delivering What Works in Therapy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. [Kindle edition]
- Wood, D. P., et al. (2009). Combat-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A case report using virtual reality graded exposure therapy with physiological monitoring with a female Seabee. *Military Medicine, 174*, 1215-1222.
- Zabinski, M. F., Celio, A. A., Jacobs, M. J., Manwaring, J., & Wilfley, D. E. (2003). Internet-based prevention of eating disorders. *European Eating Disorders Review, 11*, 183-197. doi: 10.1002/erv.525

Dr. Michelle E. Wade holds the position of Ethics Specialist with the American Counseling Association (ACA). She is also a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) in the state of Maryland and a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in Virginia. In addition, she also holds the National Certified Counselor (NCC) and Approved Clinical Supervisor (ACS) credentials. Since 2004, Dr. Wade provided home-based counseling to lower income families. She completed her Doctorate of Education in Counselor Education and Supervision from Argosy University – DC in September 2014. Her dissertation focused on the influence of social media on the counselor-client relationship. She received her Masters of Education in Community Counseling and Masters of Science in Psychology from the University of Louisiana at Monroe. She has presented at numerous conferences, participated in ACA leadership opportunities, and has co-authored an article on the subject of ethical and legal issues regarding the use of social media in counseling, and contributed a chapter on technology in Levitt and Moorhead's *Values and Ethics in Counseling: Real-Life Ethical Decision Making*.