

Media Policy for Clients¹

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Since earning my doctorate in 2006, my mission has been to use psychological information to help people. As you consider working with me, I want you to know that I work with and appear in various types of public media. ***This document outlines how I interact with the media, why, and my policies as they relate to current and former clients. If you are client of mine, please read this policy to understand what to expect from me and the steps I take to protect you and myself from undue harm that could come from media interaction.***

My Work in the Media

I'm actively work in the media. By *media*, I'm referring to internet-based or mass communication outlet that allows for interaction and dissemination of information. Specifically, I have a professional website (www.DrCortney.com); write a blog *Psychology Today* called *Naked Truth*; gave a TEDx talk titled *Honest Liars: The Psychology of Self-Deception*; and often appear as a guest commenter/expert for various general media outlets. I'm also active on various social media sites, including networking platforms of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn; media sharing networks like Instagram and YouTube; and discussion forums like Reddit. You also may see information about me on business review sites (e.g., RateMyProfessor.com, Yelp.com) or in mass media formats like radio and television programs, newspapers, magazines, films, and podcasts.

Why I Work with the Media

There are many important reasons I choose to engage with the media as a professional psychologist that benefit myself and others. These include:

- 1) **To educate and inform the public about mental health.** As people become increasingly regular consumers of media, I use it to provide high-quality psychological information to the public.
- 2) **To help the public understand current events.** When events occur in the world that are hard for people to understand—everything from war to political strife to mental health issues—I serve as an expert to help unpack and explain these realities from a mental health or psychological perspective.
- 3) **To advocate for mental health issues.** I use the media to advocate for mental health issues and cultural transformation.
- 4) **For fun, enjoyment, and entertainment.** Engaging with the media can be fun, engaging, and interesting for me and consumers.
- 5) **To enhance the reputation of the profession.** I strive to increase the reputation of psychology as a field and clarify to the public what we do and why it is so important.

¹ *Colleagues, students, and the public frequently ask me how I navigate professional ethics with current and former clients when I engage in the media. As I take ethics very seriously, I created a Digital Media Policy for Current and Former Clients that outlines my conceptual framework, rationale, and policies related to digital media. It is modeled, in part, after the Social Media Policy of Dr. Keely Kolmes (downloaded July 1, 2018 at <https://drkkolmes.com/social-media-picy/>). This policy incorporates information from the *Guidelines for the Optimal Use of Social Media in Professional Psychological Practice* from the American Psychological association (2021).*



- 6) **To clarify misconceptions of mental health and illness.** I strive to communicate accurate, honest information about mental health while dispelling myths that inaccurately portray our field or recent research.
- 7) **To promote my work.** I use the media to disseminate my research findings, clinical knowledge, and recent projects.
- 8) **To advertise my services.** I use the media to advertise my services and find work.
- 9) **To do research.** Sometimes, I use the media to do research on social behavior and mental health.

Ethical Risks of Media Interaction with You

Having a *professional clinical* relationship with me is unique. If you're my client, it means we have a *clinical doctor-patient relationship*. For me, this relationship typically is about providing psychotherapy with or conducting an assessment for you. In this role, it means:

- 1) We're in a professional relationship, meaning that you're requesting a psychological service from me;
- 2) We have a one-way fiduciary relationship, which means our relationship exists to serve your needs;
- 3) Our work is confidential, meaning that I cannot share identifying information about you unless I have written consent from you or an acceptable reason for doing so;
- 4) Our work requires informed consent, meaning that you and I agree to certain conditions about the nature of our working relationship and sign a legally-binding contract to reflect them;
- 5) You pay me for my services;
- 6) Our work is focused on a goal or outcome that you and I hope to achieve through our work together (e.g., overcoming a disorder, getting a diagnosis, working through early childhood trauma, understanding oneself at a deep level).

Given the nature of clinical relationships, media-based interaction with you can be problematic and ethically difficult to manage. Interacting with you in the media can lead to 1) breaches in confidentiality and privacy (e.g., someone finds out someone is my client because a post was not adequately secure); 2) changes to the nature of the relationship (e.g., the relationship can look like friendship instead of a professional relationship); 3) issues with expectations around media-based interaction (e.g., responding in a timely matter to posts); and, 4) general confusion about appropriate boundaries. *So, I handle media interactions with you and all of my current/former clients very carefully and deliberately.*

Media Expectations for Current and Former Clients

As my client, there are various steps that I take to maximize benefit and minimize harm to you, myself, and the field of Psychology.

1) Your information is confidential

I want you to know that if you may see me in the media, your information is confidential. I will never and have never appeared with a current or former client in the media. I will not discuss any identifying information about you in any public forum, including in the media.



2) I won't interact with you in the media

Given the many ethical conflicts inherent in a clinical role/relationship outlined in this document (e.g., privacy, confidentiality, informed consent), I won't interact with you in the media. I share a lot of my work with the general public. You're welcome to view these pages and read the content of my blog posts as you see fit. That said, I have no expectation that you will want to follow my blog or social media platforms. I also discourage you from posting anything publicly. If you choose to post something, I want you to be aware that you may be compromising your privacy and confidentiality. Other people may perceive you to be my client or be able to see what you post—I can't ensure your privacy will be maintained if you respond to something I write on social media.

In addition, you also may see information about me on business review sites like Yelp, Healthgrades.com, RateMyProfessor.com, or other places that list and evaluate businesses. Some of these sites include forums in which users rate their providers and add reviews. Of course, you have a right to express yourself on any site you wish. However, due to confidentiality, I cannot respond to any review on any of these sites, whether it is positive or negative. I urge you to take your own privacy as seriously as I take my commitment of confidentiality to you. You should be aware that if you are using these sites to communicate indirectly with me about your feelings about our work, there is a good possibility that I may never see it.

3) I won't "Friend" or "Like" anything you post

Some social media sites allow people to connect as "friends." I don't accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on my social networking site (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn). I believe that adding clients as friends or contacts on these sites can alter the expectations for our relationship and is outside of the scope of our work.

I won't "follow you" back on social media. This is because I believe casual viewing of online content can create challenges in our client-patient relationship and skew boundaries. In addition, viewing your online activities without your consent and without our explicit arrangement feels uncomfortable for me.

4) I won't communicate with you through social media sites

I do not use messaging on Social Networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn, for client interaction. These sites are not secure and I may not read these messages in a timely fashion. Also, please do not use Wall postings, @replies, or other means of engaging with me in public online if we have an already established client/therapist relationship. This is because engaging with me this way could compromise your confidentiality.

These exchanges can also become part of your legal, medical record that will need to be documented and archived in your chart. It is important to me to guard against this possibility by not engaging in any clinician correspondence or charting via personal email. If you need to get a message to me quickly, you may email me or text me to find a time to talk by writing "Timely Issue" in the subject line.



5) I strive to keep my personal media use separate from my professional use

In addition to my professional work in the media, I have a personal life that is sometimes visible in the media. Consequently, there are times when information about me personally appears in the media whether I want it to be there or not. If you google my name, you may find information about me that I'm not even aware of.

Whenever possible, I keep my private, personal information separate from my professional information. There are times when my professional and personal interests are intertwined. For example, my mother died of terminal illness, and I collaborated with her on writings/videos that promote end of life options. I also use self-disclosure when I speak about some topics. In situations like these, I am using something highly personally important and relevant to me to drive my psychological commentary on given phenomena. And I am choosing to share something about my personal life journey in the process because I believe it is beneficial to the public to do so. That said, I strive to maintain my personal digital information (e.g., interactions with friends, family) separate from my professional media presence.

6) I use email for non-clinically relevant issues only

I do use email for non-clinically related issues with current and former clients (e.g., scheduling, initial patient contact, general questions). That said, email is not a secure method of interaction. Consequently, I do not communicate about any meaningful, clinically-relevant information with current and former clients via email. If you are not comfortable with email for non-clinically related issues (e.g., scheduling, initial contact), you may call me or mail correspondence to my address at Choose Honesty, LLC.

7) I won't search for information about you online

It is not a regular part of my clinical practice to search for client information on Google, Facebook or other search engines. Extremely rare exceptions may be made during times of crisis, like if I have a reason to suspect that you are in danger and you have not been in touch with me via our usual means (coming to appointments, phone, or email). In those cases, I may use a search engine to find you to ensure your welfare. If I ever resort to such means, I will fully document it and discuss it with you in a clinical context.

8) How to address ethical concerns

If you feel I have done something unethical using media or any other topic, please contact me directly so that we can talk about it. If you aren't comfortable doing that, you can contact the Board of Psychology, which oversees licensing of clinical psychologists, and they will review your complaint and my work.

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CONCLUSION

Consistent with the APA ethics code, there are five general principles that I strive to uphold in all my work. These are to: 1) help those I work with and not harm them; 2) establish trust by upholding professional standards of conduct; 3) provide accurate, honest information that I'm competent to say; 4) be fair and trustworthy; and 5) respect the basic human rights of others. These general principles guide my work and this policy on my media use.

Thank you for taking the time to review this policy. If you have questions or concerns about any of these policies and procedures or concerns regarding our potential interactions on the Internet, I'm happy to talk to you about it.

Receipt of Policy:

I _____ (print name of client) understand and accept the terms of this policy.

SIGNATURE: _____

I, Dr. Cortney S. Warren, reviewed this policy with the client named above.

SIGNATURE: _____



REFERENCES

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