

Internet Transparency

Dr. Pauline Wallin from The Practice Institute Interviews Ofer Zur, Ph.D.

- Pauline Wallin: Hi this is Dr. Pauline Wallin of The Practice Institute and we're doing a series of interviews with chapter authors of the book, Getting Better at Private Practice and it is by Chris Stout. Today we're talking with Dr. Ofer Zur about his chapter intriguingly titled, The Google Factor, Therapists Transparency in the Digital Age of Google and Facebook. We'll learn more about that in a few minutes but, just let me remind you that all royalties from this book are being donated to the Center for Global Initiatives, which will buy anti-malaria vaccines and since these cost less than a dollar, your purchase of the book can literally help save up to two lives.
- Ofer Zur: It could have saved, Pauline, my life when I got malaria twenty-thirty years ago in Tanzania, yeah.
- Pauline Wallin: Well it is in Tanzania Ofer and I'd like to introduce you now. Dr. Ofer Zur is a licensed psychologist, fellow of the American Psychological Association, instructor, author of several books, lecturer, ethics consultant and expert witness in private psychotherapy practice in Sonoma California. He's been in practice for over twenty years and is Director of the Zur Institute, at zurinstitute.com, which offers over one hundred and fifty innovative and challenging online continuing education courses for mental health practitioners. Welcome Dr. Ofer Zur.
- Ofer Zur: Thank you for having me Pauline.
- Pauline Wallin: I was reading your chapter and I didn't realize all the ways that people can be found online and all the stuff that's out there about us. I mean that's very different from what it was I guess when I started practice a million years ago, well not, maybe 20.
- Ofer Zur: You know so true that when we started practicing, you and I and the people of our generation, the whole notion of transparency and self disclosure were confined to what we were telling our clients about our fees, our degrees of course and license number, whether we are married or not, the picture in our consulting room, about our families and our travels. And now it's a whole new brave world that, with the click of a button, modern day consumers will find out tons of information about us from where we live and...
- Pauline Wallin: Yeah.
- Ofer Zur: Are we married or not and...
- Pauline Wallin: With Google Maps they can see a picture of my house.
- Ofer Zur: Absolutely and they can see where there's new construction and whether you have

dogs and all of the above, so it's a brave new world and modern day consumers automatically, or most of them routinely and automatically, will Google you. Even though they got the referral from another client, which is often how our practices grow and somebody recommend you, they will still go and Google you and see whether somebody recommended you or not, on Yelp or on other sites or directories. They'll Google you regardless of where, whether they found you online initially or if they got a referral from a physician or from your other clients.

Pauline Wallin: Right and in your chapter Ofer you mentioned some other ways that people can find out about us, if people are really obsessed with their therapists they could actually hire a detective who can get into these paid databases and learn much more than we care to share or that we realize we're sharing.

Ofer Zur: You know you're absolutely right. There are many levels of how people can find us. They can Google our name, Ofer Zur and you'll see what they can find out. You can do more searching, like using Ofer Zur PhD, Ofer PhD, Dr. Zur, they can do a little bit more search. They can go into LinkedIn and see whether we posted something about our clients or about our philosophy. They can go of course to our website. It depends on the level of curiosity and depends on the level of how techie they are. But then they can up the ante a little bit and perhaps even join our list serve, where we are also under a pseudonym. They maybe even ask to friend us on Facebook and some therapists, especially the young ones, may not hesitate and just accept anybody to have as a friend on Facebook - and we don't recognize them because they are under a pseudonym. They can go on list serves with APA under a pseudonym and find a way in and see whether we discuss clients.

There could be a high level of curiosity and even intrusion.

As you said Google, Google Earth will be kind of bearing on intrusion. Then finally, they can also do illegal searches, like online private eyes for forty or sixty dollars. Ten minutes after this consult Pauline I can find out all kinds of information about you, from your cell phone use, whether you're married or not, your mortgage, your former owning of houses, former marriages.

Pauline Wallin: Okay, so let's not give people anymore ideas about me please. But yes, and even, I've heard that even if we lock down our Facebook and we don't make it public, somebody can take a picture of us, put it on their Facebook and tag it and we can be seen drunk at a party on somebody else's Facebook account.

Ofer Zur: Absolutely and so, not only will consumers search us as modern day consumers of mental health, we don't call them patients or clients in some ways even. Privacy is something that doesn't really exist to the extent that we thought on the internet. Everything that we post online will be there forever, what we call, my daughter and I writing a book about it, The End of Forgetting. Every picture and every post that you and I have ever put online will be there forever, you may need to go to Way Back Machine to find it, it may be on other people's websites or Facebook profiles as a tag. There is so much information about us. I have on the refrigerator at home

for my boys to remember: everything you write or post online is like a tattoo on the forehead forever.

Pauline Wallin: Right, so what can therapists do about this? I mean what's the best way to protect yourself? I guess you can't protect yourself from people who want to find out this information but, how can you present yourself?

Ofer Zur: I think that first of all you need to surrender. The younger generation, unlike us, really does not have the sense of privacy that you and I grew up with and they're more comfortable with a high level transparency. As you and I, digital immigrants, are kind of enthusiastic adopters, the young ones, the digital natives, have grown up with computers, with a high sense of transparency. They are not concerned about privacy the way you and I and our generation, older generations are. We need to do the minimum, to get a Google alert, every therapist should have a Google alert, where you can find out what other people can find out about them. Go to Google alert and it will take 20 seconds to set up an alert with different combinations of your name, like Ofer Zur, Dr. Zur, Zur PhD, put in a few combinations so you get notices once a week, once a day, once a month, whatever you want, whatever is posted about you

Be careful about what you post, if you have tons of negatives, such as say a borderline patient left your office and posted 50 negative postings about you and even started a website with your name as a URL, get consultation. Don't respond right away. There's not a week or two that goes by without people consulting me on extensive negative toxic postings on them online by clients, ex-clients, et-cetera.

Pauline Wallin: Ofer, do you have stuff like this on your website at zurinstitute.com?

Ofer Zur: Absolutely, I have tons of information in the article section of my website, zurinstitute.com. I have tons of free articles on this topic where people can find out what to do with negative evaluations online or negative postings. What we tell people, monitor what's being posted on you online by a simple Google alert, surrender that transparency is high, privacy is low and the train left the station so you can't throw a tantrum about it. Even if you don't have a website, there will be information about you and a lot, have a website so you do get to present yourself the way you choose to. Make the website personal, put an audio/video there, reveal about yourself. Modern day consumer would like to know personal things about you.

Pauline Wallin: Even Freud had his little tchotchkes sitting on his desk. I've visited his studio and he had artifacts from Africa and all these other collections.

Ofer Zur: He did a lot of stuff. He walked around with his clients. He traveled with them. I mean this guy took a lot of fun in the early psycho-analytics, they were very transparent.

Pauline Wallin: Well, but transparency is not necessarily a bad thing but we do have to monitor it

and I do want to thank you Ofer for writing this chapter in this book, The Google Factor: Therapist Transparency in The Digital Era of Google and Facebook and your website, zurinstitute.com, where you have articles and videos and courses and urge all our listeners to go visit and thank you very much for your input on this book and if people want to buy it, you can save two lives.

Ofer Zur: Fantastic, you know Pauline thanks a lot for all you have been doing for our profession. You've been really a class act digital immigrant...

Pauline Wallin: Thank you.

Ofer Zur: ... doing fantastic work.