

The Cambridge Handbook of Applied Psychological Ethics

The Cambridge Handbook of Applied Psychological Ethics is a valuable resource for psychologists and graduate students hoping to further develop their ethical decision-making beyond more introductory ethics texts. The book offers real-world ethical vignettes and considerations. Chapters cover a wide range of practice settings, populations, and topics, and are written by scholars in these settings. Chapters focus on the application of ethics to the ethical dilemmas in which mental health and other psychology professionals sometimes find themselves: each chapter introduces a setting and gives readers a brief understanding of some of the potential ethical issues at hand, before delving deeper into the multiple ethical issues that must be addressed and the ethical principles and standards involved. No other book on the market captures the breadth of ethical issues found in daily practice and focuses entirely on applied ethics in psychology.

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To Thomas Oakland, one of the most ethical and virtuous people I’ve ever known
M.M.L.

To Fred and Brandon, the joys of my life
E.R.W.

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Preface

Aim of the Handbook

We embarked on this project because we were surprised (and disappointed) by the dearth of ethics scholarship focused on specific settings and the lack of literature about the intersection between specific settings and culturally diverse populations. This gap appeared especially noticeable given the number of excellent books and journal articles published on the broader topic of professional ethics in psychology and mental health. Consequently, we decided to center the chapters in this handbook on those subjects not fully addressed in the existing literature and to give extensive attention to practice with diverse and underserved populations. Our aim was to highlight the variety and complexity of ethical issues confronting practitioners, even seasoned practitioners, in these settings. We sought out authors “in the trenches” who have lived the experience of grappling frequently with complex ethical questions and who can recommend strategies to resolve them that are in keeping with the profession’s values. We also strove to broaden the content beyond psychotherapy settings to include research, consultation, and organizational practice, as well as the fundamental activities of applied psychology. As the title of this volume indicates, we asked our authors to avoid abstract discussions of ethical principles and standards. Instead, we directed authors to apply ethical principles and standards to the messy ethical dilemmas practitioners confront, and to acknowledge the stress encountered in these situations. Good ethical decision-making often involves the acknowledgement of emotions and other nonrational processes that can lead to struggles. Plainly put, we sought the kinds of ethical issues that may keep clinicians up at night and that do not often get discussed in graduate ethics courses. In essence, this volume represents a call to mental health professions to expand and enrich the literature that focuses on ethical issues across multiple practice settings and to offer practitioners more guidance about the application of ethical standards and principles to diverse populations. It also represents a call to ethics educators to deepen and broaden ethics training beyond its current scope.

Organization of the Book

The book is delineated into four sections that cover clinical, research, supervision organizational, and legal components of professional work: (I) Ethical Issues in Specific Settings and Challenging Populations; (II) Ethical Issues in

Working with Diverse Populations; (III) Legal, Research, and Organizational Issues; and (IV) Emerging Ethical Issues in Professional Practice and Next Steps. While there may be some periodic overlap among the chapters, these sections were designated to highlight distinct areas of our work.

Within this broader structure, each chapter is organized around complex and realistic cases in order to offer the reader a window into the process of coming to a responsible resolution, including the process of managing the distress inherent in such cases. After all, no mental health professional ever deals with an ethical issue in the abstract. This organization also evolved from the research on the factors that increase the effectiveness of ethics teaching. This research shows that ethics education is more likely to be effective when case analysis and discussion form the basis of instruction than when ethical issues are discussed in the abstract (Welfel, 2012). In short, we hoped to debunk two myths with this structure: first, that resolving ethical questions is a dry, intellectual process; and second, that ethics training either in graduate school or in brief continuing education programs on general topics is sufficient to fully prepare practitioners for responsible practice. Clearly, comprehension of the values, principles, and standards of the profession is an essential foundation for application, but it is not automatically sufficient to ensure ethical action in complex cases in practice settings.

References

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Finally, we wish to acknowledge the huge contributions our students and colleagues have made to our understanding of professional ethics and its centrality to effective service with the populations we serve.