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Practical Wisdom: A Review of Foundations of Ethical Practice, Research, and Teaching in Psychology and Counseling

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Abstract

In Karen Strohm Kitchener and Sharon K. Anderson's *Foundations of Ethical Practice, Research, and Teaching in Psychology and Counseling* (2011) they use the term practical wisdom or prudence as a way to make right decisions in real life situation. The authors lay the foundation for conceptually dealing with ethical problems for psychologists, counselors, students, and trainees. The book is in two parts. In the first six chapters, the authors focus on the foundations of ethical reasoning. The next part focuses on the ethical issues psychologists and counselors are confronted with in their roles.

Keywords

Ethics, Psychology, Principles, Integrity, Qualitative Research

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Practical Wisdom: A Review of Foundations of Ethical Practice, Research, and Teaching in Psychology and Counseling

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In Karen Strohm Kitchener and Sharon K. Anderson's Foundations of Ethical Practice, Research, and Teaching in Psychology and Counseling (2011) they use the term practical wisdom or prudence as a way to make right decisions in real life situation. The authors lay the foundation for conceptually dealing with ethical problems for psychologists, counselors, students, and trainees. The book is in two parts. In the first six chapters, the authors focus on the foundations of ethical reasoning. The next part focuses on the ethical issues psychologists and counselors are confronted with in their roles. Key Words: Ethics, Psychology, Principles, Integrity, Qualitative Research.

In this second edition of *Foundations of Ethical Practice, Research, and Teaching in Psychology and Counseling*, Kitchener and Anderson (2011) discuss ethical decision-making and provide additional information for a wider audience, as well as psychologists and counselors. The intended audience is for psychologists, counselors, researchers, and teachers. While the first edition was predominately about ethical reasoning and decision-making, this second edition goes more in depth into ethical decision-making and the principles of psychology. The authors address issues pertaining to child abuse, HIV disclosures, and what competent treatment means for professionals.

Both editions use James Rest's model of moral behavior. Kitchener and Anderson (2011) use Rest's four components of his model to assist practitioners. The first is moral behavior, second is ethical and moral sensitivity, next is ethical and moral decision making, and last is the ego strength to carry out the decisions.

I think this book is an accessible read for anyone doing research or interested in learning about ethics and the issues involved in making informed decisions in their research or practice. Kitchener and Anderson (2011) begin by defining ethics, what it is and what it is not. The cases are examples of challenges a psychologist, researcher and teacher would have to deal with. There are two distinctions that are explained between ethics and the law and ethics and values. While ethics and the law are concerned with what is "just" the law may differ from state to state to determine what is exactly considered to be "just" (p. 6). Ethics and values are based on doing the "right thing or be good" (p. 9). In the next chapter "Thinking Well About Doing Good" (p. 12) the authors use a diagram to show the levels of moral reasoning. There were considerations made in multicultural settings, and consideration of the social issues today.

Each individual has a different value system according to his or her culture, life experiences, and gender and will make moral decisions based on their beliefs. The authors provide help for students to understand the ethics codes based on the Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association (APA), which is only one model that provides a professional code of ethics.

Kitchener and Anderson (2011) suggest a model that presents five foundational principles for researchers, psychologists, and counselors. The principles are: autonomy (freedom of action and choice), beneficence (doing good), nonmaleficence (avoiding harm), justice (fairness), and fidelity (keep promises, be faithful). These principles are one model they propose would be paramount for psychologists and counselors in their work (p. 17). These models would fare well as templates for practitioners and researchers, as long as they understand the differences in the people they are working with. The focus should be on doing no harm to the individual or the people involved in the study.

In chapter five “Beyond Ethical Decision Making,” Kitchener and Anderson (2011) move onto virtue ethics. In certain situations, therapists may decide to disregard one principle to follow another or if they are unable to find a workable solution. By doing this, they may have doubts on their abilities to make ethical decisions. One example is the case of the HIV gay man. He disclosed his HIV status to his psychologist and because he was depressed about his illness he participated in unprotected sex with other gay men in bars. His live-in partner was not aware of his activities. His psychologist concerned with doing what he believed was right and not disclosing his client’s confidence found a solution that worked for him. He went to the health department nearby and left information on risky sexual behavior and asked the local bookstores if he could leave safe sex behavior literature. In addition he met with his client to continue counseling.

Learning how to become knowledgeable in ethical decision-making may require using other options if needed. Sometimes people know what the right decision is, but choose to do the opposite. In virtue ethics, the person would have the knowledge and motivation to do the right thing and do it because of their moral character. I think this section adds to the knowledge for researchers, psychologists, counselors, teachers, and trainees. Not all of the virtues will be the same in each group, but as the authors describe “there will be a strong commonality” (p. 61).

If psychologists and therapists already have a virtuous character and have a clear set of rules to follow, when confronted with issues, then the decision-making will be easier. Kitchener and Anderson (2011) refer to the term practical wisdom or prudence from Greek philosophers roughly translated means to have the ability to know “how to reason and to apply that knowledge to real life situations” (p. 63). The authors rely on Fowers (2005, as cited in pp. 60-64) work to explain what virtue ethics means and why practical wisdom is necessary. This concept of practical wisdom varies with cultures. If the person has moral character, they are more likely to understand the experiences and have patience with other’s issues.

This book succeeds by establishing why Kitchener and Anderson present a decision-making model by providing guidance. What make this book important and different are the author’s goals to teach psychologists and counselor to be competent ethical professionals. They provide real case studies to show practitioners how to recognize and find real solutions to their ethical issues. The authors present a model of moral principles that benefit psychologists and counselors, but also are recognized by the APA.

The Calvin and Hobbes cartoons bring another perspective into understanding how ethics is used in different areas. In addition, the case studies and questions at the end help to bring more understanding of the concepts.

After laying the foundation for ethical decision-making, the authors' share, if psychologists are competent in their field of specialization clients will have a level of comfort in their expertise. Competence would eliminate lawsuits in situations, such as psychologist and inappropriate client relationships would be less likely to happen. In another chapter, Kitchener and Anderson (2011) use professional boundaries as a means for psychologists to respect the rights of their clients.

The authors gave a comprehensive account on not only how those teaching ethics in psychology can give students the skills they need to learn about ethics, but also how to develop and maintain a high level of professionalism in their lives. While this text does not focus on a specific group of psychologists or researchers, I believe the models presented can be tailored to fit specific cases. The authors also provide resources as PDF downloads for additional knowledge from the publisher's website: <http://www.routledge.com/foundations-of-ethical-practice-research-and-teaching-in-psychology-9780415965415>

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Author Note

Fatima A. Cotton is a Ph.D. student in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University. Fatima's research interests include gender roles connection to water conflicts, gender equality, qualitative methodology (meta-analysis), ethical research, and the impact of water politics on women's lives. She can be contacted at fcotton@nova.edu

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