

Going Beyond the Principles: Ethical Theory is a Core Component of Psychological Literacy

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Introduction

Ethical conduct is a core component of psychological literacy and professional competency. Key ethical issues in undergraduate education include confidentiality, risk-benefit analysis, deception, and scientific integrity. These topics are essential in psychology curricula, ensuring students develop an understanding of professional integrity and responsible research practices. However, existing ethics codes may provide limited assistance in addressing the newly emerging ethical dilemmas such as those associated with the COVID 19 outbreak.

Methods

Ethics is integrated into psychology research courses through formal instruction and experiential learning. Completing institutional review board (IRB) applications helps students recognize ethical considerations in research. Additionally, undergraduate and graduate psychology programs expose students to professional ethical standards set by organizations such as the European Federation of Psychologists, the British Association of Counseling and Psychotherapy, and the American Psychological Association. However, these codes may be of limited value in addressing emerging morally complex dilemmas.

Results

Principles of moral reasoning are ideally included across the psychology curriculum rather than confined to (a) specialized course(s). Moral principles and diversity may be addressed together, ensuring ongoing discussions about communitarianism and the socio-cultural influences on moral reasoning in courses such as introductory psychology, clinical psychology, and research methods. Professional ethical principles guide both faculty and students, emphasizing adherence to ethical standards in academic and professional settings.

Discussion

Ethical decision-making in psychology is rooted in philosophical traditions. While professional ethical codes serve as essential guidelines, ethics instruction should also include broader moral theories such as principlism, virtue ethics, deontology and utilitarianism. The assumption that moral choices are separate from personal behavior is challenged by a more comprehensive ethical framework, integrating ethical reasoning into both professional and personal spheres. Expanding ethics instruction to include moral theory enhances students' understanding of ethical decision-making and strengthens connections between psychological ethics and broader philosophical principles.

Is the first author also the speaker?

Yes

If first author is not the speaker, please indicate speaker's name here:

Please indicate up to five keywords regarding the content of your contribution

ethics, psychological literacy, moral reasoning, professional development

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