



A Comparison of Two APA Ethics Codes

Jill M. Jansen and Amy K. Thoftne

Psychology Department, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



Introduction

Codes of ethics are used to give credibility and integrity to an organization. The American Psychological Association established its first code of ethics in 1953 and has continued to publish revisions up to the year 2002. Throughout these revisions, several changes have been made for both format and content of the codes. Our purpose is to explore the differences between the original 1953 code and the most recent 2002 code. By examining these differences, we hope to infer some changes in social and professional conduct that have taken place throughout the years that is applicable not only to psychology but other professions as well.

Creation of Codes

❖ 1953 Code:

- Created through a mail-in survey
- Surveys asked members to report situations with ethical implications
- From the 1,000 responses collected, six categories were created – these were the context for the original ethical standards (Bersoff, 2008)

❖ 2002 Code:

- Created by an APA task force
- This is the same method of creation used in the preceding 1992 Code of Ethics (Bersoff, 2008)

1953 Code

• Multiple Relationships

- Only brief mention in Section 2
- Section 2b only makes suggestions against clinical/friend/family dual relationships
- No specifications about sexual relationships or dual relationships stemming from an originally clinical relationship

• Professional Relationships

- Addressed in Section 6
- Specific subsections 6a, 6b and 6d address how to interact with colleagues

• Research:

- Addressed in Section 4, ethicality of research measures is judged by the psychologist
- Deception and informed consent instructions are vague, debriefing is not mentioned
- No guidelines for animal research, refers readers to another document

2002 Code

• Multiple Relationships:

- Specifically addressed in Standard 3.05
- States that there are ethical and non-ethical multiple relationships (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2003)
- States criteria for ethical/non-ethical multiple relationships

• Professional Relationships

- All of Standard 3 addresses how to interact with colleagues and clients simultaneously
- Standard 3.09 discusses particular ways to cooperate with professionals

• Research:

- Addressed in Standard 8, ethicality not judged by psychologist
- Specific instructions for informed consent, debriefing, and deception are provided
- Instructions for human research as well as animal research are given in thorough detail

Language and Style

❖ 1953 Code:

- Introduction and Preamble is a second, separate document
- Standards have six categories written in essay format
- Guidelines are suggestive rather than authoritative
- Permits the psychologist to use own personal judgment for ethical standards
- Uses gendered writing, psychologists/scientists are referred to as “he” and “him”

❖ 2002 Code:

- Introduction and Preamble are included with the code
- Contains added five ethical principles (Beneficence/Nonmaleficence, Fidelity and Responsibility, Integrity, Justice, and Respect For People’s Rights and Dignity)
- Standards have ten categories; written in list style
- The psychologist is not permitted to use own judgment as ethical standard
- Gendered language is completely removed, no “him” or “he”

Implications

Multiple Relationships: There is an increased consideration for the potential harm caused by multiple relationships; psychologists are more aware today that multiple relationships can lead to conflict of interest, which in turn can lead to legal and social issues with clients and colleagues alike.

Professional Relationships: Professional and client relationships are no longer seen as entirely separate entities; professionals are considered to have the same rights to respect and dignity as clients, creating a more sensitive and politically correct work environment.

Research: There is an increased emphasis on the well being of participants (animal or human) in research; psychologists consider research participants to have greater importance in the process as a whole, and therefore keep them well informed throughout the process and take measures to minimize harm.

We Thank:

Dr. Blaine Peden, for helping us make this poster and guiding the direction of our research, and Dr. Holt for aesthetic advice

UWEC Differential Tuition for funding our research and the creation of this poster

UW-Eau Claire Center of Excellence for Faculty and Undergraduate Student Research Collaboration for additional funding of our research



Conclusion

Ethics are dynamic; they change with the social and professional conduct of the time. General procedures are increasingly emphasized and become more specific as new issues arise. The focus has shifted from protecting the psychologist to enhancing the well-being of the client. Though this research was focused on psychology, it is not limited to this discipline.