

Teaching psychological ethics at the undergraduate level: Using case examples and ethical dilemmas to engage critical thinking

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Given the human connections and relationships within psychology, understanding ethics is a necessity within the field, both from an academic/research perspective and a clinical/applied setting. This interactive presentation will review the ethics associated with both psychological practice and psychological research and share strategies used to help teach about these concepts (including specific case examples and ethical dilemma scenarios). Unfortunately, the history of psychology is peppered with examples questionable ethics in research and practice, both of which redefined psychology's ethical code. To help students learn about the ethical implications and begin to define their own ethical code, we aim to infuse ethics throughout our curriculum from our introductory course to our upper-division courses. Our classroom pedagogy is designed to help students explore and understand the relationship between benefit, intention, and application. In lower level classes students consider many research case studies that have influenced our field and society profoundly. The Tuskegee study, Zimbardo prison experiment, and Milgram obedience study are included in these class discussions. Students learn about researchers' responsibility to protect research participants' rights and autonomy, which informs their own independent research in their capstone research experience. Students also learn about the significant ethical considerations related to clinical practice that arose from less well understood judicial determinations such as the Patient's Rights Movement, Duty to Warn, and Kendra's Law. Students wrestle with ethical dilemmas that often do not offer a clear cut "right" answer. For example, how does a clinician honor the confidentiality of therapy while also protecting the safety of a client who wants to harm himself? Or, how does a clinician navigate the boundaries of multiple relationships in a small rural town? As we encourage students to examine these dilemmas, we aim to help them learn how to make a strong, ethical decision when they are faced with conflict. Our strategic department plan is to provide students with sufficient background knowledge to understand the development and application of contemporary ethical practices. Our curriculum regularly reviews ethical dilemmas associated with cultural, sexual, gender, and other forms of diversity to help students learn to make their own ethical choices.