

**ETHICS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE**  
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## **Overview of Ethics in Psychology**

Ethics is defined as “a set of principles for what constitutes right and wrong behavior” (Sternberg, 2012, p. 38). Because of the importance of ethics in the profession of psychology, the American Psychological Association (APA) has developed a document entitled *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct* (American Psychological Association, 2014). The ethical standards within this document consist of “enforceable rules” for psychologists, which means that the governing board of psychologists has a right to hold psychologists accountable to strictly obeying these rules. Thus, any breach of the ethical rules as put forth in this document can result in punishment.

Lack of awareness, ignorance, or misunderstanding of the ethical standards for psychologists does not justify breaking the ethical standards (American Psychological Association, 2014). To illustrate, a youth caught stealing a chicken by soldiers cannot claim that he did not realize that stealing chickens is wrong. Likewise, a psychologist who is caught breaking the ethical standards of the profession cannot claim they did not realize a particular act was wrong. Therefore, it is important that psychologists make an effort to study and understand the ethical principles that govern the profession.

The APA’s ethical principles and code of conduct document first explains five general principles that underlie psychological practice and research. Second, there are ten ethical standards that detail specific ethical and unethical practices by psychologists, ranging from keeping records and fees of patients to competence of psychologists to advertising and public statements made by psychologists. These ethical principles and standards apply to every psychologist, regardless of their sub-field. While it is obvious that these principles must apply to researchers, clinical psychologists, and counseling psychologists, they also apply to sports psychologists who work with athletes, industrial/organizational psychologists who work in industry, forensic psychologists who work with the judicial system, and other psychologists regardless of their professional role.

The purpose of the ethical principles and code is as follows (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 2).

Psychologists are committed to increasing scientific and professional knowledge of behavior and people’s understanding of themselves and others and to the use of such knowledge to improve the condition of individuals, organizations and society. Psychologists respect and protect civil and human rights and the central importance of freedom of inquiry and expression in research, teaching, and publication. They strive to help the public in developing informed judgments and choices concerning human behavior. In doing so, they perform many roles, such as researcher, educator, diagnostician, therapist, supervisor, consultant, administrator, social interventionist and expert witness.

## **Importance of Ethics**

Following the ethical principles and guidelines of psychologists is vital to protect human rights, to advance the science of psychology, and for your own professional welfare. Many of the ethical principles and guidelines relate to how psychologists can best respect the human rights of their clients. This is particularly important for psychologists who often treat clients who are very vulnerable either because of a psychological disorder or because the environment has presented serious challenges that have affected the thoughts and feelings of the client. When an ethical principle or standard has been broken by a psychologist, then an

individual has been mistreated by a psychologist, the very person who is supposed to provide healing, not harm

The Nazi party in World War II provides one example of research where the human rights of participants were grossly violated through research. More than 7000 prisoners of the Nazi party were forced to participate in cruel experiments. As a result of their participation, virtually all of the participants were either disfigured, received a permanent disability, or died. The experiments included bone, muscle, or nerve transplants with no anesthesia, forced head injuries, submersion into freezing water to determine how to prevent and treat hypothermia, exposure to chemical gas to learn how to treat it, and poisoning to determine the effects of various types of poison. Oftentimes, if the participants survived the actual experiment, they were killed so the researchers could examine their brains and bodies (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2014).

However, participants do not have to be killed or disfigured in order to have their human rights violated. Another example of psychological research that violated human rights was the famous Stanford prison experiment (Singleton & Straits, 2010). Researchers created a mock prison, and participants were randomly assigned to be either guards or prisoners. After six days, the experiment had to be canceled because the guards began physically and psychologically abusing the prisoners. Because of unforeseen consequences of the experiment, the participants suffered psychological distress both during and after the experiment. Therefore, both in treatment of clients and in research, psychologists must consider how their actions could harm the human rights of others.

Second, following the ethical principles and guidelines is important for advancing psychology as a science. Science seeks truth and knowledge in the physical world. If ethical principles are not followed, then any conclusions from a research study will be faulty. Thus, in order to stand amongst the sciences, psychologists must conduct research with the utmost regard for ethical standards to ensure that the findings of psychology are true.

Because psychological research impacts society, each psychologist is responsible to ensure that their research is reliable and trustworthy. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that data collection and analysis is both honest and proficient. Intellectual integrity is the foundational principle upon which any science stands. Psychologists must have an attitude that puts pursuit of knowledge above personal gain and be completely honest and forthright in their reporting and analysis of their research methods and findings.

Finally, following ethical principles is vital for your own professional welfare. Being exposed as a person who has broken ethical standards can result in professional embarrassment at best, and professional ruin at first. For example, Diedrik Stapel was a well-respected professor of social psychology in Europe (Bhattacharjee, 2013). When he was serving as Dean of the Faculty in 2011, he was suspended for fabricating and manipulating data in research publications. He started out by only breaking small ethical standards. First he conducted a study, but did not like how the results turned out. So, he started changing some of the numbers to get the results he wanted. After this malpractice, he started breaking larger ethical standards, and eventually he was making up data for studies never even conducted. Mr. Stapel was eventually exposed by two graduate assistants. Because of the scandal, he had to return his PhD to the university and lost his job.

### **General Principles of Psychological Practice and Research**

### **Beneficence and Nonmaleficence**

The first ethical principle for psychologists is that of beneficence and nonmaleficence. According to Oxford Dictionary Online (Oxford University Press, 2014), beneficence means generous or doing good. Maleficence means harm or destruction, and non means absence, so nonmaleficence means the absence of doing harm or destruction. Thus, “psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 3). The professional decisions and actions of psychologists affect the lives of others, so psychologists must consider how their influence can affect the personal, social, organizational, political, and financial lives of individuals and society.

For example, psychologists are oftentimes working with vulnerable people, such as helping a person grieve after they have lost a loved one or helping a person psychologically heal after experiencing a crisis. When people are vulnerable, they are easy to take advantage of. In these situations, psychologists must work for the good of the individual and take all efforts to avoid harm. Psychologists can also hold positions of power that influences government policy, or even the policy of organizations. In these situations, too, psychologists must work to do good for all of the people and not use their influence to just increase their own welfare.

### **Fidelity and Responsibility**

According to the American Psychological Association (2014), the second ethical principle is fidelity, which means faithfulness, and responsibility, which means being accountable, to the people with whom they work. In other words, there must be a relationship of trust between psychologists and their clients, and a relationship of trust between psychologists. The clients can include someone who comes for therapy or counseling to the organization that employs the psychologist.

To develop a relationship of trust, psychologists must first and foremost uphold professional standards of conduct. A psychologist who acts unprofessionally, either by breaking ethical principles or by not fulfilling his or her responsibilities, will break the trust that has been placed in them. Second, psychologists must clearly explain their roles and obligations to ensure that clients have appropriate expectations of their treatment. For example, oftentimes clients have the unrealistic expectation that one therapy session will cure a chronic psychological disorder. This is virtually impossible, so the psychologist should clearly explain the nature of the disorder, the goals of therapy, and what the psychologist will do throughout the course of the therapy.

To foster trust, psychologists also take responsibility for their behavior. They seek to manage conflicts of interest that could lead to exploitation or harm. For example, sometimes psychologists develop a treatment or an instrument that they can benefit from financially. It can be tempting to falsify research studies in order to make the treatment or instrument appear to be more beneficial than it actually is. To do so, though, is a clear violation of ethical standards.

Furthermore, psychologists consult and cooperate with other professionals, as well as refer clients to other psychologists when it is in the best interest of the client. All psychologists have their areas of expertise and areas of weakness. When a client seeks treatment that is outside of your area of expertise, you must consult with other psychologists for advice, and/or refer the client to a psychologist with a more relevant area of expertise. To proceed with psychological treatment that is outside your area of expertise is irresponsible, and a failed

course of therapy will break the trust the client has in you, as well as in the field of psychology as a whole.

Finally, “psychologists strive to contribute a portion of their professional time for little or no compensation or personal advantage” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 3). This means that psychologists should use their skills and expertise with individuals or communities that cannot provide financial compensation for their services. Occasionally donating time and expertise shows dedication to working for the good of the society.

### **Integrity**

The third ethical principle of integrity means being honest and having strong moral principles. “Psychologists seek to promote accuracy, honesty and truthfulness in the science, teaching and practice of psychology” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 3). In other words, in every professional responsibility, including research, teaching, and the practice of psychology, psychologists do not cheat, steal, engage in fraud (aka 419), lie, or misrepresent facts.

In research, the principle of integrity means that psychologists report their research methods exactly as they were done, even if the research methods were not ideal because of practical limitations. For example, a researcher cannot say that they used random sampling if they did not, in fact, use proper random sampling techniques. Researchers must also report the data and results exactly as they are, and not manipulate the data to try to make it appear better than it actually is, as the example of Mr. Stapel above illustrates.

In teaching, the principle of integrity means that psychologists are accurate and honest in the material they cover in class. This means that teachers of psychology must make an ongoing effort to keep up-to-date in their knowledge of psychology through ongoing professional development. Professional development can be both formal educational programs as well as informal professional development that occurs through reading and mentorships with other psychologists. Furthermore, teachers of psychology must avoid any pretense of cheating or engaging in fraud in all educational practices, including assigning grades. Students of psychology likewise have an ethical obligation to avoid cheating and fraud in their studies.

In practice, the principle of integrity means that psychologists use treatment that has been shown to be effective through empirical research. Furthermore, psychologists must uphold the highest standards of integrity in all aspects of their practice, ranging from collecting fees from clients to ensuring that their testimony before legal bodies is accurate.

### **Justice**

Oxford Dictionary online defines justice as a concern for justice, peace, and genuine respect for people; the quality of being fair and reasonable (Oxford University Press, 2014). One aspect of this ethical principle is that all individuals, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, or psychological disability, deserve access to high quality psychological treatment. A second aspect of this principle is that psychologists must exercise precautions to ensure that their own potential biases and the limitations of their competence and experience does not lead to or condone unjust practices. For example, if a psychologist provides Psychological First Aid after a crisis, the psychologist must take precautions to ensure that their own biases about the conflict does not influence who they treat and how they treat them.

### **Respect for People’s Rights and Dignity**

The final ethical principle is that “psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 3). One aspect of this principle is that of cultural awareness and sensitivity. Psychologists must be aware of and respect cultural and individual differences, including those based on age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, and socioeconomic status. When working with individuals of different groups, psychologists must be aware of their own biases and must not knowingly participate in or condone the activities that result from prejudices of others.

### **Ethical Standards for Psychologists**

There are ten ethical standards that psychologists must abide by. Each standard is broken down into more specific and detailed standards. All standards can be found on the APA website at <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx> Some of the standards will be discussed in detail, others will only be briefly mentioned for the purpose of brevity.

**Ethical Standard 1. Resolving ethical issues.** This standard describes what to do when you feel an ethical standard has been violated by another psychologist.

**Ethical Standard 2. Competence of psychologists.** Standard 2.01a reads, “Psychologists provide services, teach and conduct research with populations and in areas only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study or professional experience” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, after being certified as a psychologist, we also have an ethical responsibility to make ongoing efforts to continue to develop and maintain our competence (Standard 2.03). This is particularly important when treating a new population of individuals, using new psychological techniques, or using new technologies in the course of psychological treatment (Standard 2.01c).

Standard 2.04 describes the bases for scientific and professional judgments. “Psychologists’ work is based upon established scientific and professional knowledge of the discipline” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 5). This means that psychologists must use empirical research as the foundation for all decisions and courses of treatment, not their own beliefs or preconceived ideas.

**Ethical Standard 3. Human Relations.** This ethical standard relates to how psychologists interact with other individuals, particularly in the realm of psychological treatment. Human relations ethical standards range from informed consent in treatment (Standard 3.10) to avoiding discrimination (Standard 3.01). Standard 3.04 reads, “Psychologists take reasonable steps to avoid harming their clients/patients, students, supervisees, research participants, organizational clients and others with whom they work, and to minimize harm where it is foreseeable and unavoidable” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 6).

**Ethical Standard 4. Privacy and Confidentiality.** In order to ensure that clients feel safe, it is important that psychologists maintain the highest standards of privacy and confidentiality in everything that is shared throughout the course of treatment.

**Ethical Standard 5. Advertising and other Public Statements.** This standard relates to all public statements that psychologists make, including public awareness, soliciting clients, endorsing products, statements in legal proceedings, and a psychologist's curriculum vitae (CV). Public statements include both writings and oral statements such as radio talks.

“Psychologists do not knowingly make public statements that are false, deceptive or fraudulent concerning their research, practice or other work activities or those of persons or organizations with which they are affiliated” (Standard 5.01a, American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 8). This means that psychologists do not make false statements about their training, academic degrees, credentials, institutional affiliations. In terms of their practice, psychologists must not make false statements about the scientific bases of their services, their fees, or their publications or research findings (Standard 5.01b).

**Ethical Standard 6. Record Keeping and Fees.** It is important that psychologists keep proper documentation of records about psychological treatment, guidelines about fees for psychological services, and data that is used in scientific research in order to ensure accountability.

**Ethical Standard 7. Education and Training.** This standard primarily relates to those involved in the development and delivery of training programs for psychologists in order to ensure that the training is effective and provides the experiences that students need to become competent and professional psychologists.

**Ethical Standard 8: Research and Publication.** Whenever psychologists are involved in conducting empirical research, it is important to follow these ethical standards, ranging from informed consent of participants to plagiarism to accurate authorship in publications.

It is important to note Standard 8.10, which reads, “Psychologists do not fabricate data” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 11). This means that psychologists do not make up data, or alter the data in any way to create results that are not an accurate representation of the data they actually collected. Standard 8.11 related to plagiarism reads, “Psychologists do not present portions of another’s work or data as their own, even if the other work or data source is cited occasionally” (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 11). Plagiarism will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Standard 8.12 reads as follows:

Psychologists take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have substantially contributed... Mere possession of an institutional position, such as department chair, does not justify authorship credit. Minor contributions to the research or to the writing for publications are acknowledged appropriately, such as in footnotes or in an introductory statement. Except under exceptional circumstances, a student is listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is substantially based on the student’s doctoral dissertation (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 11).

A final point about research is that psychologists must not withhold data from their research to others who want to verify the findings of the study. In other words, to ensure that empirical findings are accurate, sometimes other psychologists will want to confirm the research findings of others by accessing and re-analysing their data. In these cases, the researcher must provide the original data so that the findings can be confirmed. This means that researchers must keep the original data on hand for a period of time after the results have been published.

**Ethical Standard 9. Assessment.** The Assessment standard relates to the use of assessments, or tests, in practice and research. “Psychologists base the opinions contained in their recommendations, reports and diagnostic or evaluative statements, including forensic

testimony, on information and techniques sufficient to substantiate their findings” (Standard 9.01, American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 12). In other words, psychologists must use proper assessments as the foundation for their recommendations and treatment. A judgment cannot be made merely on impressions. Instead, psychologists use proper assessment procedures, such as a general clinical interview and follow-up standardized tests, as a foundation for their recommendations and treatment procedures.

**Ethical Standard 10. Therapy.** This standard first describes the need for informed consent in therapy, as well as ethical principles to follow in various types of therapies, including couple therapy, family therapy, and group therapy.

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as presenting another person’s ideas and words as your own (What is Plagiarism?, n.d.). The word plagiarism is derived from the Latin word *plagiarius*, which means kidnapper, seducer, or plunderer (Kostenberger, 2011). In simple terms, this means that all written work by psychologists, which includes professional writing, academic writing, and writing for assignments in formal education, is expected to be original writing. Copying from other sources without proper citation and quoting is illegal, unethical, and unacceptable.

“The expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property and is protected by copyright laws” (What is Plagiarism?, n.d., para. 4). In other words, once a person writes something, it becomes his or her own intellectual property. Just as it is unethical to steal another person’s physical property such as a laptop or pair of trousers, it is also unethical to steal their intellectual property. Thus, if you take another person’s words, word for word, then you must properly quote their words. Likewise, if you record another person’s idea, you must properly cite their idea.

According to the What is Plagiarism website, there are six practices that constitute plagiarism. The first is turning in someone else’s work as your own. Finding a project that has been completed by someone else and submitting it as your own project is highly unethical and results in a severe sanction by the university.

The second practice that constitutes plagiarism is copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit. For example, writing, *Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development* is plagiarism because this is not my original idea. I read this statement in Woolfolk’s (2007) book. To give credit to the original owner of where I read this idea, write, *Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development (Woolfolk, 2007)*. Thus, I acknowledge that I read this statement in Woolfolk’s book. In addition to avoiding plagiarism, citing the source also adds authenticity to the writing because it shows that this point was made by another scholar.

A third act of plagiarism is giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation. For example, it would be incorrect to write, *Kephart believed that a child’s first encounter with the environment through their motor activities is the prerequisite for later learning (Kephart, 1964)*. This is plagiarism because I read this in Kirk’s (1972) book. To be correct, write, *Kephart believed that a child’s first encounter with the environment through their motor activities is the prerequisite for later learning (Kephart, 1964, as cited in Kirk, 1972)*. Then Kirk’s reference goes in the References at the end of the paper. This acknowledges that I did not read Kephart’s original work, but I read it in Kirk’s book. In addition to avoiding plagiarism, this also protects me in case Kirk incorrectly cited Kephart.

A fourth practice that is plagiarism is failing to put a quote in quotation marks. Simply writing *Education in any society tends to reflect the political philosophy of that society* (Kirk, 1972) is plagiarism because I copied the sentence word-for-word. Words are the intellectual property of their author, so any time words are copied directly from another source, they must be put in quotation marks. A correct way of writing the sentence is “*Education in any society tends to reflect the political philosophy of that society*” (Kirk, 1972, p. 3). Note that the page number is required when citing a quote.

The fifth way to plagiarize is to change words but copy the sentence structure of a source. For example, it is plagiarism to write, *Education in all societies often reflects the philosophy of the society* (Kirk, 1972). This is plagiarized off of this sentence from a book: *Education in any society tends to reflect the political philosophy of that society*. Notice how there were only a few words that were changed from the original sentence. This is still plagiarism, even though the original source is cited. Either quote the sentence exactly word-for-word and properly quote the sentence, or paraphrase the sentence such as the following: *The political philosophy of a society influences educational practices* (Kirk, 1972). Notice how the paraphrased sentence is entirely different from the original.

The final way to plagiarize is to copy so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not. For example, if three pages in a row of your paper comes entirely from one source, this reflects plagiarism because the majority of your ideas is coming from the same source. Furthermore, if a substantial portion of your paper is quotes from other sources, this does not reflect your understanding of a topic, but what others have written. All of your own papers must contain a majority of your own reflection and understanding of a topic. In order to avoid this way of plagiarizing, always first write an outline of your paper before finding sources and use multiple sources for each project.

#### *Ways to Avoid Plagiarism*

There are four primary ways to avoid plagiarism: write an outline, paraphrase, summarize, and quote.

**Write an Outline.** The first strategy to avoid plagiarism is to write an outline of a paper before you begin researching or writing. This ensures that the paper is your own original work. After you have written an outline, then you can consult other sources for information to fill in the details of your paper.

For example, consider a literature review for a paper on the relationship between altruism and happiness. An outline of the literature review is as follows.

- Concept of altruism
- Importance of altruism in society
- Benefit of altruism to an individual
- Concept of happiness
- Psychological research on factors that contribute to happiness

Now that the outline has been written, I can find resources that help me write more details about each point in my outline.

**Paraphrase.** Paraphrase means rephrasing a passage from a source into your own words. Paraphrases are usually shorter than the original writing because the information has been slightly condensed (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2014). According to the Purdue Online Writing Lab,

Paraphrasing involves putting a passage from source material into your own words. A paraphrase must also be attributed to the original source. Paraphrased material is usually shorter than the original passage, taking a somewhat broader segment of the source and condensing it slightly (2014, para. 4).

The previous two paragraphs gave an example of paraphrasing. Notice how the quote from the Purdue Online Writing Lab included a three sentence explanation of paraphrasing. In the first paragraph, I paraphrased this information into two sentences and completely restructured how the material was presented. I also cited the Purdue Online Writing Lab as the source of the idea.

Here is another example of paraphrasing. “Psychologists take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have contributed” (American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 395). One way to paraphrase this quote is to write: *A key ethical standard is that psychologists are only listed as an author of a paper if they have actually made a significant contribution to the work (American Psychological Association, 2001).*

It is important to remember that paraphrases must always be cited to the original source by writing the authors’ surnames and the year of publication in brackets.

**Summarize.** A summary of a paper includes only the main ideas of a paper written in your own words. Summaries are considerably shorter than the original work with only a broad overview of the source (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2014).

Summarizing involves putting the main idea(s) into your own words, including only the main point(s). Once again, it is necessary to attribute summarized ideas to the original source. Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the source material (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2014, para. 5).

Summarizing means that the overall conclusion or the key point of an article is stated. For example, a summary would be: *About 18 months after a major crisis in Jos, around 31% of students at the University of Jos meet the clinical requirements for post-traumatic stress disorder (Korb, 2013).* The article itself had considerably more writing than just that one statement. However, the entire article can be summarized by that one overall conclusion.

Again, summaries must always cite the original source in the same way as paraphrases with the authors’ surnames followed by a comma, and then the year of publication.

**Quote.** The last strategy to avoid plagiarism is to quote the source. A quote must be identical to the original source, exactly word-for-word (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2014). If the quote is less than 40 words, then it should be surrounded by quotation marks within the text. (In other words, do not indent a quote that uses quotation marks.) However, if the quote is more than 40 words, then it should be indented a half inch from the left margin with no quotes (American Psychological Association, 2001).

“Material directly quoted from another author’s work or from one’s own previously published work, material duplicated from a test item, and verbatim instructions to participants should be reproduced word for word” (American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 117). Because this quote has 31 words, which is less than 40 words, it is surrounded by quotation marks and included in the body of the text. The citation for quotes always includes the page number after the year of publication. If the source is online and does not have a page number, the paragraph number should be included, preceded by *para.* to symbolize paragraph (American Psychological Association, 2010).

There are several ways to integrate quotations into your text. Often, a short quotation works well when integrated into a sentence. Longer quotations can stand alone. Remember that quoting should be done only sparingly; be sure that you have a good reason to include a direct quotation when you decide to do so (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2014, para. 10).

Because this quote had 53 words, it was indented ½ inch from the left margin. This also came from an online source that did not have page numbers. Therefore, the paragraph number was included at the end of the citation.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, ethical standards of right and wrong are vital to the psychology profession. These standards have been put in place to protect human rights, to ensure the scientific foundation of psychology, and to establish the professional credibility of each psychologist. Psychologists must work for the good of individuals and society by pursuing justice with integrity and faithfulness. Overall, psychologists must respect each person's rights and dignity through fair and honorable practices.

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