

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND PSYCHOLOGY

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This paper explores the basis for promoting ethics within psychology. An ethical code is one of the characteristics of mature professions and the necessity for ethical practice applies to all psychologists whether researchers or practitioners; consequently ethical codes must address the full range of practice. There is also a potential benefit in commonality across countries and cultures but this raises the question: are ethical codes generalisable? This is explored through an examination of the European Federation of Psychologists Associations' Meta-code of ethics, devised by a group of psychologists from across Europe. Based on the four ethical principles of Respect, Competence, Responsibility, and Integrity the Meta-code was originally designed to guide associations in constructing or revising their codes. However, experience has shown that individual psychologists have also found the Meta-code useful for their own practice. Finally I consider the development of ethical issues to guide practice for the future

Key words: Ethics, Meta-code of ethics, Ethical principles

Este artículo explora las bases para el fomento de la ética dentro de la psicología. Un código ético es una característica de profesiones consolidadas y la necesidad de una práctica ética es aplicable a todos psicólogos, sean investigadores o clínicos; por consiguiente, los códigos éticos deben contemplar toda la extensión de la práctica profesional. Existe también un beneficio potencial si se adopta un criterio común (commonality) a través de países y culturas, pero esto nos lleva a preguntarnos: ¿son los códigos éticos generalizables? Este aspecto se explora a través del análisis del Meta-código de Ética de la Federación Europea de Asociaciones de Psicólogos (EFPA) elaborado por un grupo de psicólogos de distintos países de Europa. Basado en los cuatro principios éticos: Respeto, Competencia, Responsabilidad e Integridad, el Meta-código fue originalmente diseñado para guiar a las asociaciones profesionales de los países miembros en la elaboración o revisión de sus códigos. Sin embargo, la experiencia nos ha mostrado que los psicólogos también encuentran el Meta-código útil para su propia práctica profesional. Finalmente, considero el desarrollo de cuestiones éticas que guíen la práctica en el futuro.

Palabras clave: Ética, Meta-código de Ética, Principios éticos

The practice of psychology, whether as a scientific discipline or as a service to the public, is based upon two main foundations. The first foundation comprises a body of knowledge and skills which have been built up from research and from the practice of psychology. The second comprises the ethics of developing that knowledge and skills base, and of the actions taken when applying it to meet demands for services to be delivered to the public. Professions have these elements in common, but there are variations in each. For example, psychology is firmly grounded in scientific enquiry, with a strong basis in certain approaches such as experimentation, and in attempts to enhance objectivity and replicability of findings. At the same time meticulous observation, description and reflection of unique and naturally occurring events are important for scientific development in psychology.

In this paper I focus on the ethical basis of psychology. The paper is based on the introductory chapter of a book *Ethics for European Psychologists* (Lindsay, Koene, Ovreeide and Lang, 2008 published by Hogrefe). We intended this to be a practical book that will help individual psychologists, at different stages of their careers, from the undergraduate starting out on a scientific subject at university, to the trainee professional psychologist or new researcher, to the experienced psychologist. In short, I would argue that ethical practice is not something that is only learned at the start of a professional career. Rather, it develops as experience grows and new challenges arise.

Although this paper is primarily aimed at supporting individual psychologists, there is also a need to provide support those engaged in the development of the profession such as the Colegio in Spain. As psychology becomes a more popular and influential scientific discipline at universities across the world so new associations of psychologists are formed. Furthermore, as those countries develop their psychological science they

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also lay the foundation for professional practice. This development will require the further elaboration of thinking about ethics at the level of the national psychological association.

But what should be the basis or the organising principle for thinking about ethics for European psychologists? Is it not the case that the rich diversity of cultures across Europe (and indeed across the world) effectively renders any attempt for commonality an impossible dream? My answer is a resounding NO! I base this response not on prejudice or a 'feel good' factor of pro-Europeanism. Rather, my opinions and my commitment is born out of the practical experience of having worked together with colleagues in the European Federation of Psychologists Associations (EFPA), and especially my co-authors of the book mentioned above, over many years developing ethical guidelines for European psychologists and their professional associations. This work has been in the EFPA Standing Committee on Ethics, in conferences and through the delivery of invited workshops in various countries.

In this paper I 'set the scene' for a discussion of ethics in two ways. Firstly I examine the nature of psychology and the impact that has on the development of an ethical code. In particular I consider that psychologists may be primarily professional applied practitioners (e.g. clinical psychologists, educational psychologists, forensic psychologists) but many are also researchers *not* directly engaged in providing services to the public. However, each group comprises *psychologists*. Should an ethical code apply to both or only the applied practitioners?

Secondly I briefly describe the development of the EFPA Meta-code of Ethics. This has become very influential as all member psychological associations of EFPA are required to ensure that their ethical codes are compliant with and certainly not in conflict with the Meta-code.

In the next two sections the nature of psychology as both a science and as an applied profession will be discussed: are there common or different ethical issues for those who psychologists who practise the science (researchers) compared with applied practitioners?

PSYCHOLOGY AS A SCIENCE

Psychology has much in common with other sciences. Research in psychology may include either human or non-human participants. This raises questions about the generalisability of models of species and their location in an ethical hierarchy. Put simply, should our ethical

concerns for researching humans differ from those when researching earthworms or rats? If so, on what basis will this be justified; is there a scale from lower to higher animals (including humans)? If so, where does each species sit, and what is appropriate or inappropriate for each?

This issue has led to differing positions which highlight two aspects. First, ethics and hence the determination of appropriate behaviour by psychologist researchers' is grounded in values. Second, values are themselves linked to and determined by factors including religion, beliefs and culturally influenced expectations. This being so, it is necessary to undertake research within a framework which has acceptability within the host society. Such acceptability may change over time and differ between cultures.

As a discipline psychology cannot be viewed as 'value free' (Lindsay, 1995). While some research may raise relatively few and fairly minor ethical issues other research may concern substantial and contentious ethical questions. An example of the former might be conducting reading tests with 11 year old students, while the latter might comprise the investigation of religious beliefs, sexual behaviour or patterns of voting in elections: these are all essentially personal and private matters. With respect to research, the ethical issues concern the topic, the arrangements for conducting the research, publication and dissemination of results, and interaction effects.

The topic

Psychology as the study of behaviour and the mind covers a vast range. Consequently, the context of each particular research study will raise different ethical questions. It is not easy to categorise which topics are likely to pose fewer or more ethical problems, and these judgements might change over time. For example, research has been conducted which has examined basic cognitive processes, how these relate to each other and how they are applied in natural settings. While laboratory studies of reasoning may pose little ethical concern, the results of studies collectively may pose serious challenges. This is exemplified by findings which indicate mean differences between racial or ethnic groups in cognitive abilities. The scientific issues concern the rigour of the studies, and validity and usefulness of the findings (Phinney, 1996). In this example, the concept of race is now seen as contentious, affecting the scientific validity of findings. This in turn raises ethical questions



regarding dissemination of findings from such studies. But there is a further ethical concern: should such research be undertaken at all? The work of Jensen and Eysenck, for example, was attacked not so much for the pure science but for the implications that might be drawn and consequent impact on, in this case, relations between different groups (e.g. Eysenck, 1971). This raises the sensitive issue – are certain topics for research to be avoided *not* on scientific grounds but because they are socially sensitive?

Conduct of the research

Research methods in psychology cover a very broad field. At one end of the continuum there are invasive surgical procedures, e.g. planting electrodes in the brains of animals in order to examine the relationship between behaviour, thought or perception with brain activity. Here the technique is invasive and undertaken for the purpose of the experiment. This may be compared with research into brain activity in patients undergoing surgery for therapeutic purposes.

At the other end of the continuum may be placed interpersonal experimental techniques. One with a low degree of invasiveness is the completion of questionnaires, particularly in a large group. Compare this with a study by individual interview where the researcher asks probing and challenging questions about the participant's personal behaviour and views.

These examples imply at least two dimensions: physical–interpersonal and low–high intrusiveness (Lindsay, 2000). Hence, intrusion may be conceptualised as either physical, e.g. surgery, or by questioning. Each of these has implications for the well being of the participant, which may also be considered with respect to physical and psychological health. That is, not only does physical intrusion pose potential ethical questions, so also does questioning.

An example, which also suggests how attitudes to what is permissible in experiments change, concerns an experiment by Landis in 1924 in the US (described in Crafts et al, 1938). Twenty five 'subjects' mainly adults but including a 13 year old boy, and a hospital patient with high blood pressure, were exposed to various conditions to produce emotional responses, the purpose being to assess facial expression of emotions. The 17 situations included the playing of jazz, reading from the Bible – probably regarded as fairly benign depending on one's views of jazz or the Bible in a predominantly

Christian country. However, other conditions included deception, e.g. sniffing ammonia rather than the 'syrup of lemons' as indicated by the experimenter. Other tasks involved asking the person to cut off a rat's head; and requesting the participant to put their hand into a covered bucket, without looking, and feel around. The bucket contained several inches of water and live frogs, and a strong electric shock was delivered.

A third dimension implicit here is the vulnerability of the participant, with respect to their developmental status, both age and intellectual ability, and their physical and psychological health and resilience – in this case boy and a hospital patient.

Ethical consideration of the conduct of research therefore requires attention to several different dimensions concerning the participants, and indeed the experimenters. In addition there are ethical concerns regarding the practicability of research, including consent, verification of the participant and the validity and reliability of measures. While these may often be seen as technical matters, they have an ethical dimension: invalid data pose potential problems for the competence and integrity of the research findings and reputation of the researcher.

Publication and dissemination

Dissemination of research findings takes various forms; e.g. reports to sponsors, journal articles for other researchers or professionals, and presentations in the media. There are ethical considerations which apply to all of these, but there are also variations. In each case there is a requirement of *integrity*, characterised here by accurate, truthful and comprehensible presentation. At its most basic, data should not be fabricated or ignored if they confound the researcher's preferred outcomes. An example of where this was open to question concerned Sir Cyril Burt, an eminent British psychologist who was the country's first educational psychologist. After his death it was alleged that his influential work on IQ, using data from twins, was suspect: it was suggested that he had fabricated findings, and even made up at least one researcher worker, in order to bolster his views on the heritability of intelligence (Kamin, 1974). For a fuller discussion of this *cause celebre* see Mackintosh (1995)

While blatant fabrication may be unequivocally unethical, other examples may be less straightforward. Psychologists may legitimately report the findings of a study which lends support to their theories: however, not



to consider opposing findings, or not to conduct studies which might challenge the findings would not be ethical. Consequently, in reporting one study, not to contextualise its worth with reference to the findings of other studies would represent a lack of integrity.

The nature of the medium represents a further ethical challenge. Different expectations are required if the recipient is a researcher or member of the public. These relate both to the medium of publication, and also the style of representation. While journal articles are generally carefully written in measured prose, a television programme or tabloid newspaper may accentuate, possibly distort, meanings. The responsibility ultimately is always with the psychologist, even if the (mis)representation is by another person or agency. This applies not only to deliberately questionable representation, but also to ensuring the avoidance of misunderstanding by the audience. Hence, ethical consideration includes not only honesty but clarity. The issues raised here apply also to the other main method of dissemination: teaching. There is the dimension of audience, e.g. the expert postgraduate seminar through to the invited presentation to a community group. In each case there is an ethical requirement to seek to communicate effectively not only on grounds of good science but also on the ethical basis of seeking to avoid misinformation being acquired.

Interaction

Finally it is necessary to consider the interaction of these three elements and of these with psychologists' personal values. For example, it may be argued that some research is unethical in itself, but its effects are beneficial – the 'end justifies the means' argument. One example is the work of Milgram on conformity (e.g. Milgram, 1963). In a classic experiment he required people to give shocks to a 'subject', positioned out of sight, if wrong answers were given to questions. The intensity of shocks delivered increased. Hesitation or reluctance led to a white-coated supervisor insisting the person continued. Despite increasingly apparent signs of distress, it was found that the participants did deliver these increasingly severe shocks, a finding which was interpreted as conformity in the setting and in the presence of an authority figure giving commands. It is difficult to imagine such an experiment being allowed now, yet it could also be argued that this experiment was a significant contribution to our understanding of an important social psychological

phenomenon. A similar example is the famous Stanford Prison Experiment carried out by Zimbardo and now reported in detail for the first time in his book *The Lucifer Effect* (Zimbardo, 2007).

A different issue concerns the potential biases which may impact on any or all three of the elements above and consequently lead to a cumulative disposition to bias of the discipline. For example, it has been argued that psychology lacks socio-political diversity and that most psychologists are politically liberal, with conservatives being underrepresented in the discipline and profession. Research topics are chosen which, it is argued, are salient to the values of psychologists: these may be interpreted with a liberal bias; the findings may be reported within the values domains of the researcher. In such a case, there is a potential bias from start to end of the research process. This may not be intentional, but is rather a subtle manifestation of the psychologists' individual value systems. The problem is confounded if, as is argued for psychology, the members of the profession have a high level of homogeneity of values.

PSYCHOLOGY AS A PROFESSION

Need for Psychological Associations

Organised psychology has only been around for a hundred years or so. It was towards the end of the 19th Century that laboratories for the study of psychology were established, but these did not necessarily represent psychology as an independent discipline. For example, in the university in the UK where I took my Bachelors degree it was well after the 2nd World War before a department of psychology was established. Before then there were lecturers in psychology in the department of philosophy. Such developments occurred at different rates within as well as between countries. Indeed, even now it is of little if any interest to some psychologists whether or not they practise within an organisation which is 'psychological', whether a university department, a public service, industry, commerce or private practice. Others are most concerned to be recognised personally as psychologists, and to operate within organisations or sub-sections of psychology.

Of more relevance to the present discussion therefore, is the development of formal organisations of psychology. The oldest are the American Psychological Association (APA), and the British Psychological Society (BPS), both over 100 years old. These have always been organisations of *psychologists*. That is, membership is



open to those who meet certain requirements with respect to training in psychology.

These organisations have been central to the development of ethical codes as it is within these bodies that discussions have occurred, and ultimately where decisions have been made on the nature and substance of any codes which have been developed. Also, being typically democratic bodies, such organisations have needed the support of members to approve policies and regulatory procedures including ethical codes. Consequently, the development of ethical codes is dependent upon the existence, strength and organisation of psychological associations as well as universities and groupings of practitioners, on the procedures to inform and gain the support of members, and on the views of members on ethical matters. These factors will be influenced by various elements, not least the general societal context. For example, the development of psychological associations since the fall of the old communist regimes in Eastern Europe has allowed previously restricted associations to develop their practice, and to develop new ethical codes.

The importance for psychological associations of the development of ethical codes is probably most clear in those countries which have been later in instituting the professional bodies. However, their role can also be seen when tracing the development of ethical codes within well established associations. In doing this it is necessary to consider: what is a profession? And why have an ethical code?

What is a profession?

- ✓ Pryzwansky and Wendt (1999) argue that a profession may be characterised by the following:
- ✓ Existence of a formal professional member organisation
- ✓ Systematic training
- ✓ Body of knowledge 'to profess'
- ✓ Code of ethics
- ✓ Regulation of the members who provide a service

However, these are not simple issues. For example, in many countries psychologists have practised with limited organisation. Also, until relatively recently, psychologists had no specific code of ethics. That of the APA, generally argued to be the first, was not approved until 1953, well over half a century after the APA was set up, and when large numbers of psychologists had practised for many years. Within Europe, many countries have developed

their ethical codes following the initiative of EFPA which set up a task force to develop an ethical code in 1990 (after the Meta-code was approved in 1995 the Task Force became the Standing Committee on Ethics). Even now, there are psychological associations which do not have disciplinary procedures as one element of a regulatory system, a limitation recently addressed by the EFPA Standing Committee on Ethics.

The definition of professions, therefore, is complex. There are historical and cultural factors which challenge the generally agreed criteria. Furthermore, there are other factors to consider including.

- ✓ Specificity of knowledge and skills
- ✓ Level of skill application
- ✓ Self and societal interest

Psychology *par excellence* is a discipline which has contributed to a range of professions, including healthcare, teaching, social work, personnel and human relations and advertising, among others. Many, but not all, will have their own ethical code. For example, until recently there was no ethical code for school teachers in England and Wales, a limitation addressed by the newly instituted General Teaching Council.

The level of skill required may distinguish between or within professions. Again complexity is increased with overlapping sets of competencies. For example, a school teacher may train in educational measurement to a high level, but not have the breadth of experience of psycho-educational assessment of a school or educational psychologist. Hence *psychology* is applied by others as well as by *psychologists* – we must draw lines to define the *psychologist* in order to define who is competent and who is subject to an ethical code for psychologists.

The third issue concerns the nature of the work undertaken and the society in which it occurs. This is also problematic with the variation in private and state provided practice and this varies across countries. Some argue that a primary orientation to community interest rather than individual self-interest is a characteristic of professional behaviour, but this is difficult to unpick. Traditional commitment to society characterised by low wages and poor working conditions has been challenged by organised labour and changes in society's views of what is appropriate. Also, those in private practice essentially have a degree of self interest inherent in their practice – they need clients to survive. But more subtle pressures may be present for others, including those employed by the state or a voluntary agency. For



example, critiques of special education have argued that professionals may maintain the system out of self interest as their livelihoods are implicated. Interestingly, such critics tend not to apply the same allegation to themselves, whose professional careers may be based on promulgating such critiques.

In summary, the question of what is a profession is problematic and contentious. However, for present purposes the primary focus will be on the development of an ethical code, and the regulation of professionals' behaviour.

WHY HAVE AN ETHICAL CODE?

Ethical codes are characterised, implicitly or explicitly, by two elements: a set of ethical principles and statements of practice typically written as enforceable standards. Ethical codes, therefore, are means of translating beliefs regarding necessary behaviour into statements which specify how the professional may act appropriately. These principles are derived from general moral positions including values. But why have an ethical code at all?

This question may now seem absurd, but in the development of the first APA code there was an active debate in which the argument for not having a code was put forcefully by Hall (1952). This was not an argument against ethical behaviour, but Hall argued that there was no need to have a formal code. Rather, he argued, ethical behaviour should be assumed of psychologists and, he argued, the institution of a formal code was a retrograde step as "I think it plays into the hands of crooks on the one hand and because it makes those who are covered by the code feel smug and sanctimonious on the other hand" (p430).

This view did not prevail but the point made is important. Firstly, it distinguishes ethical behaviour from a formal ethical code, but implicitly it raises the issue of training. Hall's position was based upon a belief in the goodness of right thinking psychologists, but was silent on how they achieved their right thinking behaviour: 'decent mature people do not need to be told how to conduct themselves' (p430) – experience shows this view to be naïve. For example, each year both the BPS and APA publish statistics regarding complaints made about their members. Although in percentage terms these are not high rates, the numbers are not insignificant. In 2006 the BPS received 109 complaints appointed 20 Panels to investigate complaints and seven complaints went to a full Conduct Committee hearing, the APA reported that 82

complaints had been received and 29 new cases opened (see the British Psychological Society's Annual Report www.bps.org.uk and the special issue of the *American Psychologist* published each August).

A further issue concerns the range and *comprehensiveness* of any code, and its impact on the members of a profession. Ethical codes are typically designed to apply to *practitioners*. Psychology is unusual in its large number of psychologists who do not offer services to the public, namely researchers and educators. In typical professions the overwhelming majority of members will be practitioners, (e.g. medical practitioners, nurses). Ethical codes therefore are directed towards practice with clients. Psychology, however, has a substantial proportion of those who develop the discipline through research and disseminate through education.

One approach could be to limit ethical codes only to those members who offer services to the public. This was not the line taken by the major national societies in Europe or the APA. While there are practical factors, separating out members into distinct groups, there is also a tradition of bringing science and practice together. This can be exemplified by the situation in the APA at the end of the 1940s, early 1950s. At that time practitioners in psychology *developed from* researchers in that the doctorate was seen as the key qualification. This position was debated and challenged, and the Boulder conference of 1949 was an important event which firmed up the notion that clinical psychologists should be trained with a grounding in basic research and that clinical applications should follow from and be built upon this foundation. This approach often called the 'scientist-practitioner' model has been followed in other fields of applied psychology (Lindsay, 1998) but continues to be a matter of contention (Rice, 1997). These debates took place at the same time as those about the first APA code of ethics and researchers, some of whom would have been in practice with clients, were important contributors. This policy of inclusiveness by psychological associations may not be matched by licensing authorities which may typically not require researchers or teachers of psychology to have a license to practice. These psychologists will therefore fall outside the remit of licensing authorities, and hence the psychological association must provide the necessary investigatory and disciplinary procedures, as well as ethical guidance.

This issue of coverage is important as there are different implications for ethical codes. When considering practice



(e.g. as a clinical psychologist) an ethical code must address the behaviour of the psychologist with a client, an individual. On the other hand, research requires consideration of individuals who are not clients in the same sense (e.g. research participants) but also there is a need to address a more abstract concept, namely the body of knowledge of the science. This is not to argue for a simple dichotomy, the concept of client, for example, is complex (see Oveelde y Lindsay, 2008). Researchers may have clients in the form of organisations that provide finance, while those providing services may have multiple clients, or different orders of clients as with a child within a family, or workers within a company. Nevertheless, there is a legal position in many countries which acknowledges the particular relationship, and hence obligations, between a professional and identified client. This may be considered as a special duty of care for the welfare of one's clients or patients. However, such a duty of care may also be attributed to the researcher, with respect to research participants in particular. Hence, ethical behaviour should be expected of *all* psychologists, and systems to ensure this occurs must address this full range, including researchers and educators.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EFPA META-CODE

The European Federation of Psychologists Association (EFPA) was founded in 1981 as the European Federation of Professional Psychologists Associations (EFPPA), and changed its name in 2001. EFPA is a federation and hence has limited power over member associations which comprise a single body from each member country. It is the national associations that exercise direct power over individual members. The position of psychology in Europe is highly varied and this is matched by the nature of the associations. While some bodies are fundamentally scientific and/or professional associations, others are trades unions/syndicates. Also, while some countries (e.g. UK) have one predominant association for all psychologists, others (e.g. France) have many associations. Consequently, while the UK is represented by the British Psychological Society (BPS), France is represented by ANOP, a federation of associations.

These political realities are important when considering the development of a common ethical code. This was identified as a key aim in the very early stages of EFPA's existence. A Task Force on Ethics was set up in 1990 with the aim of producing a common ethical code for psychologists in Europe. Given freedom of movement

within the European Union (which covers much but not all of Europe) there are benefits in common procedures. There was concern that a psychologist disciplined in, say, Portugal could move to UK without this being known. This is not the case in the US and Canada where the Association of State Psychology Boards facilitates communication.

It was evident at the first meeting of the Task Force in Copenhagen 1990, however, that this aspiration was unrealistic. A number of associations had their own codes, but not all. These codes had much similarity (Lindsay, 1992) but there were also a number of significant differences, mainly with detail rather than principle (see Figure 1, since this analysis there have been developments of the ethical codes of these national associations). Nevertheless, each had been devised by the association in question to meet their specific requirements, and a common code might not ensure this occurred. Furthermore, in many cases (e.g. BPS) a vote of members was needed to change the code. Hence, it was decided that a common code was too difficult to achieve.

The alternative model was to devise a Meta-code. Rather than a code for psychologists, the Task Force devised a Meta-code for the national associations. This set out what the code of each member association should address, but left it to the associations to produce specific codes and elements within codes. This approach was successful and the Meta-code of Ethics was approved by the General Assembly of EFPPA in 1995. It is the EFPA Meta-code (as revised in 2005; see www.efpa.be and Appendix 1) that sets the framework for *Ethics for European Psychologists* (Lindsay et al, 2008).

The development of the Meta-code is of interest as it represents a specific inclusive strategy designed deliberately to attain maximum generalisability and acceptance. An early analysis, mentioned above, had indicated similarities but also differences between the codes of different national associations of psychologists. Furthermore across Europe at that time it was known that some associations had no code or were in the process of developing their code. Consequently there were variations in stage of development; in content, to varying degrees, when codes existed; in the size and status of different national associations; and differences in language with the possibility of conceptual and linguistic challenges in producing one Meta-code. Furthermore, it was also important to recognise the variations between

nations (at the socio-political rather than psychologist association level) including culture, history and politics as well as language(s).

The success of the Meta-code can be attested to by two main sources of evidence. Firstly, it was approved by the 1995 EFPA General Assembly. Secondly, associations without codes or developing their code used the Meta-code as their template, as intended. Thirdly, the 2005 revision was successfully achieved with few amendments.

The process that led to this success was straightforward. Member associations were invited to send one member each to the Task Force on Ethics. From its beginning, membership consistently comprised at least 10 countries from the full range of Europe from the Nordic north to the Latin south, and including post-Communist Eastern Europe. The Task Force considered different models that existed in their own countries as well as those from non-European associations, particularly the APA code and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) code. The latter was particularly attractive because of its strong

educative orientation with an accompanying extended manual with vignettes (Sinclair & Pettifor, 1991).

The Task Force drew on a range of material but from the start was committed not simply to replicate another code, however positively that was viewed. The structure of ethical principles followed by more specific standards was agreed to be appropriate but the Task Force decided, after much debate, to structure around four principles rather than, for example, the five that characterised the then current version of the APA code. That decision was partly influenced by a wish not simply to follow the APA – a determination that this should be European – but more importantly there was disagreement with the APA’s 5-principle structure (the current APA code has four principles).

The exact specification of the principles and of the different standards took place over several years, with the Task Force meeting twice a year. An early decision by the group was crucial in simplifying the process: the code should be written in English. By this decision the Task Force was able to focus on a single version. However,

FIGURE 1
CONTENTS OF ETHICAL CODES OF SIX EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE UNITED STATES

	Nordic	Germany	Spain	Hungary	Austria	UK	US
1. Responsibility, general principles	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Competence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Relationships with clients	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Confidentiality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Psychological methods, investigations and statements, including research reports	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Public statements, advertising	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
7. Professional relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7a. Relationships with employers					✓		
8. Research, teaching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
9. Professional designation, title, qualifications	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
10. Training		✓					
11. Fees and remuneration			✓				✓
12. Working conditions				✓	✓	✓	
13. Personal conduct						✓	✓
14. Obtaining consent						✓	✓

From Lindsay, G. (1992) Educational psychologists in Europe

this also allowed a relatively straightforward approach to deal with linguistic variations. At each point the English text would be considered by Task Force members to identify potential problems for the different national languages. The policy was for each association to translate the English version into their language(s) so a straightforward route that prevented ambiguity following translation was required. This process demanded much discussion but this was productive.

There were very few major concerns about the English text. The most important was a discussion of the English word *confidentiality*. In South European countries the common term would be translated into the English equivalent of *professional secret* and there was much discussion as to whether these terms were of equivalent power. Otherwise, the development of the Meta-code was challenging but ultimately successful with the Task Force's proposal being accepted by the 1995 General Assembly of EFPA.

Subsequently, the Task Force on Ethics was replaced by a Standing Committee on Ethics (SCE). The SCE spent the next few years developing other guidance including the evaluation of complaints. It was then decided that a 10th anniversary of the Meta-code in 2005 would be an appropriate time for the EFPA General Assembly to receive a revision. The basis for this decision was that revisions tend to be necessary over time. Certainly the APA code had undergone a series of revision over its 50 years of existence, some being substantial.

The SCE initiated the review as a committee but also sought comments from national associations. Two symposia were organised in Prague in 2004 and 2005 attended by representatives of national associations as well as the SCE. A rigorous review of the content of the Meta-code was supplemented by consideration of current ethical issues and dilemmas, such as the use of the internet (for which the SCE had also provided separate guidance). As a result of this work the revised Meta-code² was approved by the 2005 EFPA General Assembly. Interestingly, this intensive interrogation of its content led to very few changes being required, suggesting that the original structure and content was sound, fit for purpose, and likely to remain so for some time.

Other ethical guidance

In the period up to the 2005 revision the SCE developed other ethical guidance as well as the Meta-code. For example, the SCE developed guidance on how a national

association might deal with complaints of alleged unethical conduct by a psychologist (see Koene, 2008). Consequently, the revised Meta-code was able to make reference to the need for procedures to deal with such complaints. Note that the approach is not simply punitive. Complaints need to be evaluated but, there are various approaches. One – mediation – seeks to avoid the formal dealing with complaints, replacing what is essentially a quasi-legal or even legal process by a lower key approach to settling disagreements - where appropriate (see koene, 2008). In some cases disciplinary sanctions are necessary as the alleged unethical conduct is so serious but often – perhaps even always? – what is also of importance is to seek to ensure that the psychologist improves their behaviour in the future whether or not any disciplinary action for the past unethical behaviour is deemed appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have introduced the EFPA Meta-code of Ethics, contextualised within a discussion of the nature of psychology and the range of psychological practice. The Meta-code was designed to apply to *psychological associations* and is written as such – see Lindsay et al. (2008) Appendix 1. However, my experience over a number of years has been that many individual psychologists have found the Meta-code helpful also in guiding their own practice. In the accompanying papers my co-authors of *Ethics for European Psychologists* give a flavour of how the Meta-code can be used in this way.

The Meta-code also includes issues that cut across specific content. These include the definition of the client and the nature of the relationship between psychologist and client or others. Fundamental to the Meta-code is an explication of the four ethical principles that form its framework: Respect, Competence, Responsibility, and Integrity. Note that the framework comprises principles rather than areas of practice, for example testing and assessment, therapy, research. This is an important distinction between different codes and the Meta-code is deliberately principle-driven. The basis for this is that principles can be applied across a number of areas of practice but fundamentally it is these principles that should guide our work. The conceptualisation of the Meta-code follows from this. Each is explored with respect both to the principle itself and the specifications that provide exemplifications of the elements of practice to which each principle applies.



One danger of a code is that a psychologist uses it simply as a cook book and expects to find 'an answer' to every question simply by looking up the appropriate 'recipe'. That is not my view, and was not the basis of the Meta-code. Rather, the Meta-code provides a *framework*, a *stimulus* to thinking. More is needed than simply following slavishly a set of guidance as though this were set in tablets of stone. Ultimately, as psychologists, I invite you all to think about ethical practice, using codes and papers such as this to assist but certainly not to provide definitive 'rules'.

With this in mind it is worth looking into the future. Experience has shown that ethical codes are changed – the APA has produced a number of revisions to its code over the past 50 or more years. These are not typically chance or casual amendments, although sometimes changes are rather limited, but rather these reflect developments in thinking driven by new factors in our environment. At present these include the development of delivering psychological services at a distance, including assessment and therapy, and also the growing influence of the notion of 'national security'. Originating as an apparently benign development increasingly problematic and ethically challenging aspect have become evident. Probably the most well known are the issues arising for psychologists in the military and the nature of involvement in establishments such as Guantanamo Bay and places of detention of questionable legality under international law (Lindsay, 2008). The Meta-code has been very useful for European psychologists so far but will we need to consider new ethical challenges in the future? For example, does the internet pose particular challenges? Does the so-called 'War on Terror' and the focus on 'national security' in European countries lead to different expectations of ethical practice?

I end by asserting that the basis for ethical practice is firmly embedded in the four ethical principles in the EFPA Meta-code discussed briefly here but in a changing world we must all continue to reflect on and learn from the challenges posed by developments, whether within psychology as a science, psychology as an applied practice or society as a whole.

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