Integrating New Science of Morality with Ethical Decision-Making

Values, Morality, Ethics, and Clinical Practice

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Primitive Brains v. Modern Problems
Why we think with emotions and heuristics, but not algorithms

Please pay attention to Just Ethics
Quick note on the Heuristic Patient

Learning Objectives
1. Explain the difference between ethics and morality
2. Describe two moral emotions in psychotherapy
3. Outline the 4 components of the Ethical Acculturation Model
4. List two cognitive distortions in ethical decision-making
5. Apply personal morals and professional ethics to a vignette

General Outline
• Morality and Moral Development in General
• The New Wave of Moral Psychology
• Acculturation Model
• Principle-based Ethics
• Cognitive Biases and ethical dilemmas

Participant Safety
• Creating a safe environment
• Avoid the word “unethical”
• We are all learning in this process
• Demonstrate courtesy and respect for others
• We are all fallible

Assumptions in this presentation
• We are all products of biological and cultural evolution
• We all have different tolerances, biases, and methods of making moral judgments
• We are all subject to biases, heuristics, and erroneous thought processes. We do not think in algorithms.
Personal Moral Development

1. Religion/Family of Origin
2. Education: College and CE
3. Personal Education: Reading and Experience
4. Honest self-reflection

Morality

- Typically, individuals think about morality as equivalent to religion or religious beliefs.
- At the most general level, morality is a person’s ability to determine right from wrong, or Good from Bad
- Please note the dichotomous thinking

Morality

- Common today for people to believe that morality is handed down from God.
- Pre-Christian philosophers thought and wrote a great deal about morality, without supernatural influence.

Moral Philosophers

- Hegel: Believed human ability to self-reflect and imagine helped with developing a strong moral compass.
- Nietzsche: Believed that ethics and morals were tied up language, which helped us navigate the world. However, language binds us to certain ways of thinking, including accepting our positions in life.

Morality and Evolution

- A more recent push to understand morality as a component of evolution
- Moral judgments are typically affective, rapid, instinctive and unconscious.
- In order for primates to cooperate, form relationships, and work as groups, reciprocity and empathy are the two essential “pillars of morality”
- Reciprocity and empathy are needed for human morality as well.

Evolutionary Differences

There are (at least) two ways to conceptualize moral decision-making

- Groupishness:
  - Better for the collective
  - Statistics on DNA
- Individualism:
  - Better for individual survival
Morality

- Personal moral compass—Believe it to be right
- Knowing the difference between right and wrong
- Emotional responses to dilemmas and actions
- Implicit/rapid/automatic/internal/affective
- Research shows people judge themselves and others based on moral characteristics—evolutionary and social reasons to judge “character”

Ethics

- Rules of Conduct—Profession/society
- More external—Community (of peers)
- Easier means to judge others’ actions
- Can constrain individual choices or create dilemmas
- Explicit/cognitive/external/measured

Morality, Emotions & Psychology

- In the early 2000s, moral psychology changed from the Kohlberg paradigm (more cognitive) and began to research moral emotions.
- Moral reasoning is not just a top-down process, but typically a bottom-up process starting with automatic, emotional, and intuitive experiences.
- Looking for the role of moral emotions like disgust, fear, elevation, and mirth.

The New Wave of Moral Psychology

Social Psychology
Experimental Philosophy
Behavioral Economics

Seven Moral Rules

- Family Values
- Loyalty
- Bravery
- Property Rights
- Reciprocity
- Respect
- Fairness

Moral Foundations Theory
Jon Haidt, PhD

- There are specific innate, universally available moral foundations
- These foundations are “intuitive” in that these are automatic, rapid, affective, and non-rational
- These foundations can be used to judge how moral or immoral an action or activity is.
Intentional, non-conscious processing

- The process that binds us blinds us.
- Price paid for the automatic process: **accuracy**
- A second limitation: **rigidity**
- The unconscious is swift, less flexible, and not always accurate. Should I trust my gut or not?

Quick note on the Role of Consciousness & Empathy

More deliberative
Slower
Possibly more accurate
Energy intensive

Recent research indicates that empathy is more emotionally taxing than other emotional responses, such as anger and moral outrage.

Moral Foundations & Intuitions

- Care - Harm
- Fairness - Cheating
- Loyalty - Betrayal
- Authority - Subversion
- Sanctity (Purity) - Degradation
- [Liberty - Oppression]

Some Disgusting Examples

- Moral Emotion of Disgust
- Moral Dumbfounding

Application of Moral Foundations

- Ethics – How do these develop?
- Politics – Partisanship
- Clinical Psychology - Countertransference
- Social Psychology – WEIRD research
Other Concepts in Moral psychology

- Bad is Stronger than Good
  ▫ Loss Aversion: Avoid loss v. Find Gain
  ▫ Sunk Cost Fallacy – When to terminate?
  ▫ The Knobe Effect
  ▫ Just World Belief (blame the victim)
- Priming
- Moral Licensing

What does this mean?

- The “self” is essentially moral
- Evidence supports we understand the self and others through morality (more so than memories)
- Morality has greater influence than memories and behaviors

Morality in Mental Health: Diagnoses

- PTSD as moral injury: Transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations
- Components of depressive disorders associated with guilt, worthlessness, and meaninglessness
- OCD as highly correlated with scrupulosity

Moral Interventions in Psychotherapy

- Forgiveness
- Grief/Loss/Death
- Meaningfulness/Purpose
- Values Clarification
- Prayer/Religion/Spirituality
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Accessing Sacred Writings

Psychotherapy is inherently a moral enterprise

- Of Good Moral Character
- Beneficence: The promise to do good
- Fidelity: Loyalty to your patients/family
- Follow your ethics codes, state law, federal laws, and court-based decisions
- Compassion
- Empathy
- Improve quality of life
- Respect patient values and beliefs
- Practice positive self-care in order to remain competent

The Acculturation Model

One way of remaining a life-long learner
Provides another way to discuss ethical behaviors and decisions
Acculturation

A process to change the cultural behavior of an individual through contact with another culture.

The process of acculturation occurs when there is an adaptation into an organization or society.

Ethics Acculturation Model

- An outgrowth of positive ethics that integrates personal ethics and professional obligations.
- Psychology has a system of shared and distinctive norms, beliefs, and traditions.
- This set of beliefs is reflected in our ethics code; especially the overarching ethical principles.

Acculturation as a Process

- Can be a complex process
- Some parts of a psychologist’s practice and lifestyle may be easily acculturated while others not
- Process that will likely continue throughout the education or career as a psychologist

Ethical Acculturation

Identification with personal value system (higher vs. lower)

Identification with value system of psychology (higher vs. lower)

Acculturation Model of ethical development

| Integration | Separation |
| Lower on Professional Ethics | Assimilation | Marginalization |
| Higher on Professional Ethics | |

Marginalized

Matrix: Lower on professional ethics
Lower on personal ethics

Risks:
* Greatest risk of harm
* Lack appreciation for ethics
* Motivated by self-interest
* Less concern for patients
Assimilation

Matrix: Higher on professional ethics
      Lower on personal ethics

Risks: Developing an overly legalistic stance
      Rigidly conforming to certain rules while missing broader issues

Separation

Matrix: Lower on professional ethics
       Higher on personal ethics

Risks: Compassion overrides good professional judgment
       Fail to recognize the unique role of psychologists

Assimilated and Separated Strategies

• Assimilated strategies are often “fear based” – where motive to avoid harming another or incurring punishment for oneself, causes the psychologist to adopt legalistic stances.

• Separated strategies are often “benefits-based” – where the motive for promoting the well-being of the patient causes the psychologist to be blind to ways that well-meaning people can cause harm

Assimilated and Separated Strategies

• Assimilated strategy attempts to be prevention focused

• Separated strategy attempts to be promotion focused

• But both fail to give adequate attention or weight to the overarching ethical principles that guide or should guide professional behavior

Integrated

Matrix: Higher on professional ethics
       Higher on personal ethics

Reward: Implement values in context of professional roles
        Reaching for the ethical ceiling
        Aspirational ethics

Principle-Based Ethics

Autonomy
Beneficence
Nonmaleficence
Fidelity to Relationship
Justice
Principle-Based Ethics and the Acculturation Model

Psychologists using integrated strategies are able to incorporate overarching ethical principles into their practices.

Respect for Autonomy

- Does not mean promoting autonomy (individuation or separation)
- Means respecting the autonomous decision making ability of the patient

Autonomy

- It encompasses freedom of thought and action.
- Individuals are at liberty to behave as they chose.
  - Determining goals in therapy
  - Making life decisions (e.g., marriage, divorce)
  - Scheduling appointments and terminating treatment

Beneficence

- The principle of benefiting others and accepting the responsibility to do good underlies the profession.
  - Providing the best treatment possible
  - Competency
  - Referring when needed

Nonmaleficence

The principle is doing no harm.
  - Demonstrating competence
  - Maintaining appropriate boundaries
  - Not using an experimental technique as the first line of treatment
  - Providing benefits, risks, and costs

Fidelity

This principle refers to being faithful to commitments. Fidelity includes promise keeping, trustworthiness, and loyalty.
  - Avoiding conflicts of interests that could compromise therapy
  - Keeping information confidential
  - Adhering to therapeutic contract (e.g., session length, time, phone contacts, etc.)
Justice

Justice primarily refers to treating people fairly and equally.

*In their work-related activities, psychologists do not engage in unfair discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law. (3.01)*

Ethical and Clinical Decision-making

We think like defense attorneys rather than court justices

Bottom up vs. Top Down

Important points to remember

- Identify the competing ethical principles
- Help to determine which principle has precedence and why
- The importance of emotion in ethical decision-making and moral judgments
- Cognitive biases are also important to consider

In certain situations, we need to construct or create a solution instead of looking up the answer in a sacred psychology text

Most ethics codes do not include a model of ethical decision-making

Other resources may aid with decision-making, but do not highlight how to work through dilemmas

Major Point to this Training

1. We have to train ourselves to think about larger ethical principles first
2. We need to have the ability to slow ourselves down prior to making good, ethical decisions

Why?
Decision-making skills

- Top down approach
- Start with ethical principles
- Work from those principles to make good decisions about our work

How people make moral, ethical and professional decisions

- Intuitive
- Automatic
- Emotional
- Rapid

There is an intuitive, non-rational process in ethical decision-making

Why do psychologists (still and continue to) have sex with their patients?

Emotional Components

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Disgust
- Disrespect
- Passion
- Calmness/Centered
- Empathy
- Respect/Sympathy
- Elevation

Cognitive biases

- The Fundamental Attribution Error
- Actor Observer Bias
- Availability Heuristic
- Trait Negativity Bias
- Confirmation Bias
- Competence Bias

How do you view your world?
Why is any of this important?

Why study ethics and ethical decision-making as a part of clinical practice?

What can I do?

**Independent Actions**
- Self Reflection
- Documentation
- Transparency
- Continuing Education
- Self-care

**Help from others**
- Consultation
- Supervision
- Psychotherapy
- Continuing Education

We got vignettes!!

www.ethicalpsychology.com

Questions and Answers

Complete course evaluations