

Professional Ethics Across National Boundaries

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The International Union of Psychological Science is searching for ethical principles that are universal for the discipline of psychology. Codes of ethics adopted by other international organizations are reviewed, as well as recent comparisons of psychology codes across national boundaries. Distinctions are made between declarations of human rights and professional codes of ethics, between ethical principles as overarching values and as rules of conduct, and between Euro-North American and non-

Western cultural values. Organizations such as the United Nations and Amnesty International work for the elimination of abuses of human rights. Professional associations establish guidelines to promote the ethical behavior of their members. The hope for articulating universal ethical principles for psychologists is based on respect for our common humanity while still respecting the diversity of beliefs in different cultures.

Keywords: psychology, ethics, international

In 2002, the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) mandated a Working Group to prepare a Draft Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists. Gauthier (2002, 2003) had previously presented a paper comparing the ethical principles in the codes of ethics of the Canadian Psychological Association, the American Psychological Association, and the European Federation of Psychologists Association with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The ethical principles and values seemed similar. Gauthier identified what he considered to be the common moral principles in the three documents as (1) Respect for the Dignity and Rights of Persons, (2) Caring for Others and Concerns for their Welfare, (3) Competence, (4) Integrity, and (5) Professional, Scientific, and Social Responsibility. This article reviews some issues and initiatives in recent times in the search for universal ethical principles. It will not address the large body of literature on multicultural competencies for practice.

Objectives of Codes of Ethics

Two major purposes for codes of ethics are described in the literature, namely, (1) to promote optimal behavior

by providing aspirational principles that encourage reflection and decision making within a moral framework, and (2) to regulate professional behavior through monitoring and through disciplinary action against those who violate prescriptive and enforceable standards of conduct (Sinclair et al., 1987; Jordan & Meara, 1990; Lindsay, 1996; Pettifor, 1996; Fisher, 2003; Pack-Brown & Williams, 2003).

Sinclair et al. (1987) summarized the purposes of ethics codes as described in the interdisciplinary and international literature as (1) to help establish a group as a profession, (2) to act as a support and guide to individual professionals, (3) to help meet the responsibilities of being a profession, and (4) to provide a statement of moral principle that helps individual professionals to resolve ethical dilemmas. These objectives are de-

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scribed, as well, by more recent authors. The purposes of codes of ethics include establishing the identity of the profession, socializing members on expectations of the profession, and maintaining the trust of the public in the credibility of the profession (Fisher, 2002). Professions are communities of shared values and assumptions (Frankel, 1994). The goal of ethics is to encourage ethical thinking rather than rule following (Pack-Brown, 2003, p. 4). Ethics is the study of good and bad, and of the general nature of morals in different societies (Sartorius, 2002, p. 3).

The Importance of a Moral Framework

Authors on cross-cultural counseling, such as Paul Pedersen (1995), are critical of professional codes of ethics for not articulating a moral philosophical base for defining standards, for being unintentionally racist, and for trivializing cultural differences. Pedersen proposes that we reject relativism as lacking in moral beliefs, and absolutism as oppressive when "my way is the only way." Instead he proposes *universalism*, that we have universal values based on our common humanity, and that at the same time we respect the diversity of beliefs and standards based on differences in culture, religion, and political systems. Pedersen (2001) believes that psychology and counseling are in the process of a major paradigm shift that focuses on multicultural perspectives. This view is supported by Knapp and Vandecreek (2003) and the American Psychological Association (2003). Pettifor (1996) reported a common core of ethical principles in the world's major religions. Fisher (2003, p. 5) states "At its heart, an ethics code should reflect the moral principles underlying the values of the profession."

Janel Gauthier (2003) maintains that all psychologists have the right to useful ethical guidance for their professional behavior, and that all individuals and all nations have the right to effective protection from the misuse of psychology. Objectives of a Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists might include: (1) to establish the identity of psychology world-wide and as a community with shared values, (2) to provide a statement of moral principles to help professionals world-wide to recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas, and 3) to help local jurisdictions to define or raise standards of conduct appropriate to their own cultures, beliefs, and customs. A Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles would articulate aspirational values

and would not attempt to establish specific rules and enforcement mechanisms. Cross-cultural consensus on specific behaviors is unlikely to be achieved, and even if there were consensus, there is no international body with the authority to regulate. The focus on moral principles is based on the belief that there are common values regarding human life and that the specific standards of behavior that follow will vary with different religious, social, and political beliefs, and conditions.

A diametrically opposite position, that we are rejecting, is that one would start with identifying the behaviors that are harmful or evil in order to establish rules that prohibit such behaviors. The prescriptive rules often define bottom-line behavior for avoiding disciplinary action. They also do not provide an explicit moral framework against which to evaluate standards and behaviors.

International Organizations and Ethical Principles

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted post World War II, partly in response to the discovery of state-supported atrocities in Nazi Germany. The Declaration commits nations and governments to eliminate abuse and inhumane treatment of its citizens. It maintains the rights of all people to be treated with dignity, equality, and fairness. Psychologists are expected to respect human rights.

Are International Association-Approved Codes of Ethics Universal?

Several international associations have adopted codes of ethics to guide the practice of their members world-wide (World Medical Association, 1994; International School Psychology Association [Oakland, Goldman, & Bischoff, 1997]; International Council of Nurses, 2000; International Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, 2001; International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance, 2001; World Psychiatric Association, 2002; International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, 2002; and International Federation of Social Workers, 2003). These guidelines all address issues found in European and North American professional codes, e.g., respect for individuals, informed consent,

privacy, confidentiality, competence, client well-being, and conflict of interest.

Some international ethical guidelines emphasize multicultural competency. For example, the *Ethical Standards* of the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (2002) state that members do not impose personal values on families, that they become multiculturally competent, and that they use indigenous healing practices when appropriate. The International School Psychology Association expects its members to respect the cultural environments within which they work and to provide appropriate ways to serve diverse populations. However, while international codes of ethics support nondiscrimination and respect for diversity, few provide guidance when the cultural beliefs of clients, families, and communities are in conflict with the requirements of professional codes of ethics. For example, the value of serving the collective good may conflict with the western value of respect for the autonomy and self-determination of individuals.

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)

The IFSW Second Draft Document, *Ethics in Social Work Statement of Principles* (International Federation of Social Workers, 2003), proposes two overarching ethical principles for social workers: first, Human Rights and Human Dignity, and second, Social Justice. The purpose of the Statement is to promote ethical debate and reflection in member associations and among the providers of social work in member countries. These ethical principles may guide the development of local culture-specific standards of ethical behavior. The document will be presented for approval to the General Meeting in Adelaide in 2004.

The World Psychiatric Association

The General Assembly of the World Psychiatric Association adopted ethical guidelines for the practice of psychiatry in the *Declaration of Hawaii*, 1977, the *Declaration of Vienna*, 1983, and the *Declaration of Madrid*, 1996 (World Psychiatric Association, 2002). In addition to the usual ethical issues covered in codes of ethics, the Declaration includes prohibitions against potential abuses of psychiatry, such as being used to support Euthanasia, Torture, the Death Penalty, and Selection of Sex. Additional guidelines were added in 1999 on Ethnic Discrimination, Genetic Counseling, and the Use of Mass Media. Some of the impetus for developing world-wide ethical guidelines were the political abuses of psychiatry in the 1970s (Sartorius, 1999). The *Declaration of Madrid* ap-

pears to address political and societal issues and to be closely aligned with the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Sartorius, 1999).

Okasha et al. (2000) discuss the cultural barriers for psychiatrists attempting to practice according to the standards of the *Declaration of Madrid*. Challenges exist in different cultures around the themes of individualism vs. collectivism (of family, tribe, state), democratic vs. authoritarian systems, secular vs. theocratic societies, science vs. folklore. For example, Okasha (2000) reports that in Arab countries malpractice, or harm resulting from incompetent medical practice, does not exist because outcome is determined solely by God. Social interaction is valued more than autonomy, and dependence and interdependence is valued more than self-determination. Decisions are made at a familial, tribal, or communal level in the interests of the collective good. Child rearing is oriented toward accommodation, conformity, cooperation, affection, and interdependence as opposed to individuation, intellectualization, independence, and compartmentalization. Traditional and religious healers deal with mental health problems. The majority of Arab countries are Islamic where the state is the servant of revealed religion.

Olatawura (2000) reports that in sub-Saharan Africa illness is believed to result when contact with ancestors in the spirit world is not maintained. It is important for the family to follow cultural rituals and festivals. The elderly are venerated. Wives and children cannot give consent. Traditional faith healers mingle with western trained professionals. Financial resources to support health care are sparse.

Alarcon (2000) reports that in the United States managed care organizations operating in the context of competition and commercialism are the ultimate expression of self-serving individualism. Managed care challenges the concept that the recipient of services is the primary client, and that the professional's primary responsibility and obligation is to serve the needs and well-being of the client.

The International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS)

In 1976 the IUPsyS (which does not have an international code of ethics) approved the *Statement of the IUPS* (same as IUPsyS) that asked member-societies to be certain to enact a code of ethics and to take action against members who were guilty of human rights abuses. The IUPS denounced all practices that were inconsistent with the high moral standards required for psychologists to conduct scientific and professional activities (Amnesty International, n.d.). Twenty-six years later, the

IUPsyS has established a Working Group to draft a Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles. Amnesty International lists dozens of declarations and codes that demand the elimination of abuses of human rights.

The international professional association-approved ethical guidelines appear to be strongly dominated by western values, while still attempting to recognize and respect diversity. They have not demonstrated to their critics that unintentional racism and trivialization of cultural differences are things of the past. While a universal declaration of ethical principles may help to unify the profession and raise standards of practice world wide, it should not be seen as Euro-North American psychologists imposing their views on the rest of the world. Okasha (Okasha, Arboleda-Florez, & Sartorius, 2000) raises crucial questions in addressing the apparent conflict between universality of ethical principles and respect for diversity.

How can we adhere to our ethical guidelines and at the same time not disregard the local values and norms of our target population? How can we practice without showing disrespect or disregard for local values? On the other hand, how can we ensure that respect for the local culture does not become a pretext for bypassing ethical guidelines, to the detriment of the patient's rights? (p. 18).

The Center for Global Ethics

The Center for Global Ethics (1993) moves our thinking from the single profession to that of world citizenship. The *Declaration of a Global Ethic* was produced at the 1993 Council of the Parliament of Religions. By Global Ethic is meant a fundamental consensus across all religions on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes. The irrevocable directives in the document are: 1) commitment to a culture of nonviolence and respect for life, 2) commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order, 3) commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness, 4) commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women. The various communities of faith may formulate their specific ethical standards within this global moral framework. The Global Ethic is seen as confirming the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and deepening its meaning from the perspective of an ethic. The *Global Ethic* was signed by some 120 representatives of world religions. In 1997, building on the earlier work on the *Global Ethic*, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2000) established the *Universal Ethics Project*

to identify basic ethical principles for the emerging global society and to forge new understandings of universality in the context of cultural diversity.

Psychologists Seeking Commonalities in Codes of Ethics

Within this larger framework let us return to the discipline of psychology's search for common ethical principles that cross national boundaries and different cultures.

European Federation of Psychologists Associations (EFPA)

EFPA (1995) adopted a *Metacode* as a template for members of the European Union to develop their own codes of ethics in psychology. The *Metacode* provides a model of common principles or values, and yet allows for differences in structure and application of the principles in different countries. The overarching ethical principles that are described are: Respect for a Person's Rights and Dignity, Competence, Responsibility, and Integrity.

Nordic Countries' Common Code

Five Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland) have had a common code of ethics since 1988. In 1998 they revised their code to make it consistent with the EFPA's *Metacode*. Although the cultures and values in the Nordic countries have many similarities, there are differences in how the code is used in regulating the profession (Aanonsen, 2003). The question arises whether a common code could be adopted by larger groupings of countries, or even globally, where cultural differences are obviously greater.

New Zealand Accommodation of Bi-Culture

The New Zealand *Revised Code of Ethics* (2002) accommodates the cultural differences between European and Maori peoples. It respects the dignity of peoples as well as of individuals, and it accepts the need for equality and social justice as promised the Maori people in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi (New Zealand – Treaty of Waitangi, 1840) agreement between Queen Victoria and Maori chiefs. This code of ethics bridges the gap between the individualistic approach of western countries and the collectivist values of many aboriginal and non-Western peoples. It emphasizes sensitivity to cultural and social differences that are an integral part of the person (Seymour, 2003). It is both a strong ethical statement for psychologists to respect diversity and also a political state-

ment for governments to protect the equal rights of all its citizens.

Tri-Lateral Forum on Professional Psychology

The Tri-Lateral Forum in 2000 established a Working Group to consider common principles in the ethics codes of the Canadian Psychological Association, the American Psychological Association and the Mexican Psychological Society with a view to developing a Metacode for psychology in North America (Tri-lateral Forum, 2000; Ritchie & Sabourin, 2001; Hernandez-Guzman & Ritchie, 2001). This project was seen as possibly leading to a global code of ethics for psychologists.

The American Psychological Association

The development of the first code of ethics by the American Psychological Association (1953) had a significant impact on the international community (Sinclair, 1993; Sinclair, Simon, & Pettifor, 1996) and for many years it was considered the model for psychologists in other countries. The APA Code was approaching the status of an international code despite some criticisms, e.g., that it was too legalistic and ethnocentric (Bersoff, 1999), that it was lacking a moral foundation (Pedersen, 1995), that it was too individualistic and culturally oppressive (Nairn, 1998), and that it reflected specifically American concerns (Sinclair et al., 1987). All these criticisms were made prior to the current revision of the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (2002). The current code, with respect to age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status, requires psychologists to respect people's rights and dignity, to not knowingly engage in harassing or demeaning behavior, and to ensure that they provide competent services. It requires psychologists to be culturally competent in their practice. In 2002 the APA also adopted the *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists* (American Psychological Association, 2003).

The Canadian Psychological Association

The most important contribution internationally of the nine unique features of the Canadian Code, as described by Sinclair (1998), is the organization of all standards around the four overarching ethical principles of (1) Respect for the Dignity of Persons, (2) Responsible Caring, (3) Integrity in Relationships, and (4) Responsibility to Society. The articulation of overarching moral principles before defining specific behaviors may be the key to de-

veloping a universal declaration of ethical principles. *Respect*, as described in the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, Third Edition* (2000), means valuing the inherent worth of all persons. This concept is more inclusive and culturally appropriate than individual autonomy or self-determination. Psychologists acknowledge and respect differences across communities and cultures in the exercising of moral rights, while at the same time guarding against clear violations and abuses. However, the prioritizing of ethical principles in the Canadian Code when they are in conflict with one another, such as placing the individual first and society fourth, is a cultural priority that is not universal.

Empirical Studies

Studies on Ethically Troubling Incidents

In 1995 a small group of psychologists agreed to replicate the Pope and Vetter (1992) study that consisted of asking psychologists for an ethically troubling incident that they had encountered in the past year. The results of several of these studies were presented at meetings of the European Congress of Psychology. The objective was to identify commonalities and differences across national boundaries. This study had already been replicated in the United Kingdom (Lindsay & Colley, 1995). Other countries that have conducted similar studies are Norway, (Odland & Nielsen, 1996), Sweden (Colnerud, 1999), Finland (Colnerud, Hansson, Salling, & Tikanen, 1996), South Africa (Slack & Wassenaar, 1999), Colombia (Sinclair & Pettifor, 1996), New Zealand (Davis, Seymour, & Read, 1997), Canada (Sinclair & Pettifor, 1996), and Mexico (Hernandez-Guzman & Ritchie, 2001).

The countries represented in these studies showed considerable similarities in the types of ethical dilemmas that were encountered by psychologists. Concerns around confidentiality were the most common type of dilemma reported. Dual relationships were the second most common category in the case of the USA, Canada, Sweden, Finland, and South Africa, yet not in the top five for the United Kingdom. There were some country-specific differences that seemed more related to applications in work settings, or population characteristics, or nature of payment for psychological services, than to cultural differences.

Caution is required in comparing data from these studies because of the lack of standard methodology, the ambiguity of the Pope and Vetter categories, and the different working conditions in different countries. Also,

non-Western nations were not represented. A qualitative content analysis of the ethical dilemmas might have been more revealing of the nature of the dilemmas than a counting of categories.

Psychological Ethics Codes: A Comparison of 24 Countries

The purpose of the Leach and Harbin (1997) study was to compare psychologist codes of ethics in order to identify both universal and context-dependent ethical principles and standards across countries. The methodology consisted of analyzing the percentage of the APA standards found in other countries' codes and the percentage of countries that include each APA standard in their respective codes. Generally there was a high percentage of agreement with ten standards found in 75% of the codes. These standards were Privacy, Confidentiality, Competence, Avoiding Harm, Exploitive Relationships, Supervision, Fees and Financial Arrangements, Avoidance of False or Deceptive Statements, Informed Consent to Therapy, and Informed Consent to Research. However, some differences were noted including emphasis on school testing, forensic and legal issues, the use of torture, respect for diversity, and sexual misconduct. The authors recognized that their assumptions regarding language equivalence and literal interpretation of the codes may not have been valid. The quantitative approach showed that there were commonalities in the standard's statements, but this approach was limited in understanding cultural differences.

Questions and Unresolved issues

How International Is Psychology?

Psychology appears to be largely a Western concept. The language for communication of research and practice is almost entirely in English, the majority of scholarly journals are published in the United States, and psychology has a significant presence in only 47 out of 129 countries (Adair et al., 2002; Sanchez-Sosa, 2001). However, psychology is expanding in other countries and psychologists in non-Western countries are generally educated at western universities where they learn about western codes of ethics. If codes of ethics are transplanted to another culture, to what extent are the values and the standards consistent with actual practice? An Asian psychologist told me that her authoritarian government prioritized their responsibilities in the following order: the nation, the community, the family, and, lastly, the individ-

ual. When I noted that this was not reflected in their code of ethics, she said oh, no, their code was modeled on the APA code. The discrepancy did not appear to be a matter of concern. However, Mpofu (1997) suggests that the application of western psychology in developing countries can, in some instances, be harmful by training native psychologists in culturally unresponsive methods.

Several authors report that as psychology expands in non-Western countries a process of *indigenization* is taking place, or an attempt to integrate western psychology with local beliefs (Church & Katigbak, 2002; Mpofu, 2002). Clay (2002) reports that there is growing interest in India in indigenizing psychology to combine western ideas with a stronger focus on families and communities over individuals, to recommend self-discipline and meditation, and to promote a belief in both spiritual and material worlds. Murray (2002 a) reports that Pakistani psychologists, although trained in the west, are increasingly shaped by an indigenous culture that is largely collectivist, family-oriented, male-led, and 97% Islamic. Improved prayer practices and meditation along with strategies for conflict resolution are deemed appropriate.

Changing political systems can also have a major impact on the ethics and practice of psychology. Kreegipuu and Maarits (2001) report that when Estonia was under Soviet control it was unthinkable to have a professional code of ethics because the totalitarian ideology required total identity of Soviet people and discouraged individual or group identities. They report that today code development is still constrained by a lack of knowledge of codes of ethics and of professional legislation. However, Estonian psychologists are now building a strong psychology curriculum and scientific infrastructure. Murray (2002 b) reports that in the past South African psychology was restricted in order to serve the interests of apartheid and today needs to reflect the country's more collectivist indigenous culture. Social problems that are seen as needing psychology's interventions include violent crime, HIV, poverty, and racism.

All societies have concepts of good and evil, but not necessarily of professional ethics. I heard an aboriginal woman in the far north allege that ethics was another white man's scheme to oppress native peoples. When a Russian translator tells me that it is difficult to translate the concept of respect for the dignity of persons, and asks if it would mean people caring for each other in order to survive, I realize that we may live in different worlds on issues of individualism, the collective good, and survival. In countries with centuries of authoritarian rule, it is difficult to conceptualize an independent profession of psychology. Where the daily struggle for

physical survival is precarious, there is little room to consider the finer points of ethical thinking. Where open communication with others may be life-threatening, there is no safe or trusting environment for questioning what is right and wrong in human behavior. A basic level of safety, open communication, democratic institutions, and human rights may be essential for professional ethics to be meaningful.

Social Justice and Responsibility to Society

Psychologists do not agree on whether they have a responsibility to promote social justice and to bring about societal changes. There is also lack of agreement on what constitutes working for social justice. Most psychologists and helping professionals are trained to serve identified persons, to conduct research, or to teach – not to bring about social or political changes in society. Professional training usually does not address social advocacy. However, over the years there have been severe criticisms of the professions for addressing only the ills of individuals while ignoring the the adverse societal conditions that cause these ills (Sasz, 1961; Illich, 1977; Pril-letensky, 1994; Pettifor & Horne, 2001).

Many codes of ethics do not speak to social justice or responsibility to society, although psychologists are expected to neither engage in, or condone, behavior that is abusive or violates human rights. In the 2002 revision of its code of ethics, the American Psychological Association deleted the principle of Social Responsibility that was included in the 1992 revision. The Canadian Psychological Association, in retaining the Principle of Responsibility to Society, expects psychologists to base social advocacy activities on a foundation of knowledge and ethical principles. Psychiatry's *Declaration of Madrid* and social work's *Second Draft Ethics in Social Work Statement of Principles* are committed to promoting social justice. The Feminist Therapy Code of Ethics (Feminist Therapy Institute, 1999) is more proactive and specific in addressing social change than other codes. Those who perceive individual problems as socially constructed, or who identify suffering with oppressive aspects of society, are more likely to include social justice as an ethical principle. Maori psychologists promoted Social Justice and Responsibility to Society as an ethical principle for New Zealand psychologists. Social action can vary from presenting the results of research studies that address social issues to active lobbying and public protests. Pro-

fessions and professionals may choose to what extent social action is deemed appropriate.

Conclusion

Psychologists have joined the search for universal ethical principles. Professional guidelines in the west that emphasize the priority of individual rights and self-determination, e.g., individual consent, confidentiality, decision making, truth telling, and professional boundaries, run counter to some cultural beliefs. The struggle for western professionals revolves around the dilemma of defining universal values while at the same time valuing diversity in beliefs, culture, religion, and political systems. At what point does acceptance of other cultural beliefs violate ethical principles as known in the west, and when does doing so erode the identity of psychology as a professional discipline? Within western societies, progress has been made in developing international ethical guidelines for psychologists that are acceptable, appropriate, and relevant across national boundaries. The bigger challenge today is to identify ethical principles that bridge, accommodate and respect western, eastern, and aboriginal cultures. As this process begins, ethical principles as moral values must be distinguished from prescriptive rules of conduct. Enforcement is not on the agenda. As professionals we all need a greater understanding of life in cultures other than our own.

We seek hope in aspirations that celebrate our common humanity. One aspect is the search for universal ethical principles to guide the practice of psychologists. Another aspect is the recognition that we live and work within a larger societal context and that there are many harmful conditions that we do not support, control, condone, or include in our scopes of practice. To think globally we must be concerned with both the individual and the collective good.

The challenges are great. Yet a Global Ethic for all citizens, a Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all nations, and international association-approved guidelines, including a Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists, should all contribute to a moral force for good in improving life for all humanity. It is essential to open channels of communication in which participants feel respected, safe, and free to share thoughts, dreams, and hopes of what is good in human life. Those who seek universal ethical principles cannot ignore adverse conditions in society that constitute social injustice. We believe that a Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists has the potential to

meet the objectives of strengthening the identity of psychology worldwide and of assisting psychologists in recognizing and resolving ethical dilemmas in a diversity of settings.

Author's Note

This article is based in part on a presentation in a symposium on "A Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists: Where Is it at?" at the European Congress of Psychology on July 7, 2003. The symposium also included presentations by Carole Sinclair, Canada, on the "History of Ethical Principles in Professional Codes of Ethics," Lutz Eckensberger, Germany, on the "Universality of Ethical Principles from a Cross-Cultural Perspective," Judge Julian Hall, UK, on "Ethics and the Law: Moral Foundations for Legislated Acts," and Janel Gauthier, Canada, on "Progress Toward a Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists."

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