



ETHICS IN COUNSELING & THERAPY

developing an ethical identity

Rick A. Houser
Stephen Thoma



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ETHICS IN
COUNSELING
& THERAPY

*This book is dedicated to my lifelong best friend and spouse Carmen;
my wonderfully practical daughter Clarissa; my two grandchildren Ian and
Soraya, who provide pleasure and inspiration with their innocence; and my sensitive,
thoughtful, and scholarly daughter Serena who is a colleague in the profession.*

—RH

To Amy, Sara, and Nick.

—ST

FOREWORD

Most writers in the counseling profession are likely to acknowledge that it is an honor to be asked to write a foreword for a new book on counseling ethics. I must admit that it is a particular honor when the request is to write a foreword for a book of such importance as this one, authored by Drs. Rick Houser and Steve Thoma, titled *Ethics in Counseling and Therapy: Developing an Ethical Identity*. Before describing why this book represents a significant resource for counselor educators, practitioners, and graduate students, it is useful to first briefly comment on the sort of ethical issues and related topics that have been discussed or have failed to be addressed in previous books and articles.

As professional counselors, we are expected to provide helping services that reflect our commitment for effectiveness, cultural competence, and ethical practices. These three factors represent the cornerstones of the work counselors are expected to do in the field.

The importance of the latter point is reflected in the noticeable increase in the number of books and articles that have been published in the counseling profession during the past several years that focus on professional ethics. These publications typically focus on two main areas of relevance for counseling ethics.

One of these major areas involves describing the specific ethical standards that have been developed and endorsed by numerous professional counseling associations. This includes the publication of ethical standards and revisions of existing codes of ethics by the American Counseling Association, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, American School Counseling Association, Commission on Rehabilitation Counseling Certification, and Counselors for Social Justice, to name a few. A second major area of attention in previous publications on counseling ethics involves a description of steps that counselors are encouraged to take when making ethical decisions in their professional practices.

Although both of the above-stated areas are important in understanding our ethical responsibilities as professional counselors and in making ethical decisions in our work, there are two missing links that have not been thoroughly addressed in past publications. These missing links include the lack of attention to (a) the process and content of counselors' ethical identity development and (b) a comprehensive analysis of cultural considerations as they relate to ethical decision making.

These missing links have resulted in counselor educators', practitioners', and graduate students' focusing more narrowly on ethical issues than what is arguably needed when working in a complex, rapidly changing, and increasingly diverse 21st-century society. The publication of *Ethics in Counseling and Therapy: Developing an Ethical Identity* effectively addresses these issues in ways that can create a sea change in how many persons in the counseling profession have previously thought about their professional ethical responsibilities and actions.

The authors break new ground by exploring the notion of ethical identity development in the first section of the book. Their efforts to illuminate the relevance and importance of counselors' development in this area is clearly reflected in the effective way the authors synthesize many concepts associated with counselors' moral and cognitive development as they relate to their own ethical identity development. While these concepts are new in discussions about ethical decision making, the authors go further by exploring how counselors' emotions, intuitions, and social compassion affect their ethical perspectives.

Counselor educators, practitioners, and graduate students will predictably feel themselves becoming more empowered, personally and professionally, by learning about the ways that these factors affect their own and other persons' ethical decision-making abilities and preferences. As a result of being more empowered when learning about these issues in the first section of this new book, counselors will be better positioned to act more intentionally and with a greater level of cognitive complexity when faced with ethical dilemmas in their work.

Another major aspect of this book that distinguishes it from others is the attention it directs to multicultural issues as they relate to ethical decision making. Given the transformative changes that the multicultural counseling movement has effected and continues to effect in the mental health profession, it is both surprising and disappointing to note the dearth of information included in previous publications that focuses on the relevance of culturally diverse perspectives as they relate to ethics in counseling. The authors address the dearth of information in these areas by writing the first book I am aware of that provides substantial information that will greatly extend readers' understanding of culturally diverse perspectives of ethics and ethical decision making.

The authors summarize how they address the two missing links described above early in this new book. They do so by clearly stating that much of the book describes “a hermeneutic model of ethical decision making” that includes “a culturally sensitive framework.” This latter framework is built on a broad range of culturally diverse ethical principles, values, and perspectives to foster the reader’s own ethical identity development. More specifically, the culturally sensitive model the authors describe in this book includes succinct presentations of Western, Eastern, Middle Eastern, Native American, Latino/Hispanic, and African American ethical perspectives.

Although *Ethics in Counseling and Therapy* breaks new ground in addressing the missing links described above, the authors do not shy away from exploring traditional issues related to counseling ethics. As a result, this book incorporates discussions of several foundational issues as they relate to ethical challenges many counselors commonly face in their work. This includes presenting numerous ethical dilemmas that require one to reflect on the ways he or she might address boundary issues, questions about a counselor’s competence, confidentiality issues, and ethical dilemmas associated with clients’ right to autonomy. What makes the presentation of these ethical dilemmas different from more traditional approaches to such ethical concepts and responsibilities is that the authors frame their exploration of these principles within the scope of ethical identity development theory and culturally competent ethical practices.

After reading this book, I was excited by its potential to assist counselor educators, practitioners, and graduate students realize more complex levels of ethical identity development as well as complement their ongoing journey to becoming culturally competent mental health professionals. I am confident that you will experience advancements in your own professional, personal, and ethical development as a result of reading this book. For all of these reasons I want to honestly say that if I were in a position to read only one book about counseling ethics this year, *Ethics in Counseling and Therapy: Developing an Ethical Identity* is the one I would choose and recommend to others.

Michael D’Andrea
Seton Hall University
and
National Institute for Multicultural Competence

PREFACE

Interest in and study of ethics has grown significantly during the past two decades in the counseling field. As you will see in reading this text, we emphasize a cultural perspective that is not limited to a Western orientation. The book *Culturally Relevant Ethical Decision-Making in Counseling* (Houser, Wilczenski, & Ham, 2006) first introduced a broader perspective in applying ethical theories in counseling beyond a Western view. In this book we expand the perspective introduced by Houser et al. (2006) and present in much more detail how moral psychology helps in understanding ethical decision making. In particular we discuss how developing a professional ethical identity is a critical step in becoming an ethical counselor. Developing a professional ethical identity provides a much stronger foundation for making sound decisions than a somewhat haphazard approach that is situation specific. We encourage you to think about your own personal development and ethical development and pursue it over the course of your professional career. A hermeneutic model of ethical decision making is introduced, and a culturally sensitive model of incorporating a range of theories is offered. We present information on Western, Eastern, Middle Eastern, Native American, Latino/Hispanic, and African American theories, which provide you with a broad understanding of the various perspectives that clients may bring to counseling.

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We want to acknowledge a number of individuals who made significant contributions to the development and preparation of this book. First, Kassie Graves, acquisitions editor—human services for Sage Publications, has been, as usual, extremely helpful and supportive. Her suggestions and feedback were excellent and we feel significantly improved the book. Allen Wilcoxon, University of Alabama, also provided helpful feedback, and we appreciate his willingness to share his knowledge and expertise. We want to thank the reviewers who provided helpful feedback and also improved the quality: Suzanne Mayer, Neumann College—Aston; Madelyn Isaacs, Florida Gulf Coast University—Ft. Myers; and Kathleen Woods, Chadron State College. We want to thank Dr. Michael D’Andrea for a thoughtful, detailed Foreword. Many who write a book’s Foreword give a cursory review, but Dr. D’Andrea shares comments that provide a good introduction to the book. Finally, we want to thank the copy editor, Barbara Corrigan, for her detailed and excellent editing. She diligently worked through the manuscript with a careful eye, and she made excellent suggestions for improving the readability of the text.

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Rick Houser is the department head in educational studies in psychology, research methodology, and counseling at the University of Alabama. He has been a professor, department chair, and associate dean in the College of Education at the University of Massachusetts. Rick Houser has taught graduate-level ethics courses for more than 15 years. He received his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh in rehabilitation counseling with a minor in research methodology. He conducts research in ethical decision making, stress and coping, and the use of virtual reality in counseling.

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