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A COMMENT ON KATARZYNA SIKORA'S ARTICLE

In her article, Katarzyna Sikora presents a well supported perspective on the meaning of caring for the client's welfare as well as on how this concept is included in psychology ethics codes and in declarations of ethical principles for psychology. It is well shown how the core of ethical professional behavior is sometimes reflected in moral dilemmas and also how client welfare has usually been more related to aspirational values than to prescriptive standards. The author analyzes the concept of client welfare in ethics codes as more related to the concept of benefit or well being than to philosophical ideas of good and evil. The paper points out that ethics codes have to be locally developed as any general principle has to be culturally shaped within a particular society, and here the author makes an important point about the European and North American influence in current psychology ethics codes worldwide. Also presented is the challenge of universalizing ethical principles and perspectives for developing a common basis for local ethics codes within a multicultural context. The *Meta-Code of Ethics* is mentioned, adopted by the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations in 1995, which can also be linked to the *Agreement Protocol of Ethical Principles for the Professional Practice of Psychologists in Mercosur and Associated Countries*, which was signed in South America in 1997, with the same spirit and quite similar principles. Finally, the paper mentions the *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* passed in 2008, its relation to human rights, and the possibility of universalization of ethics taking into account intercultural differences. Within this process, the author points out that to understand the principle of caring means to consider not only the *primum non nocere* principle but the principle of maximizing client welfare by respecting both individual and social dignity and rights.

Keywords: psychology, ethics codes, principle of caring, universalization, comment.

In her article, Katarzyna Sikora presents a well supported perspective on the meaning of the concept of caring for the client's welfare as well as on how this

concept is included in psychology ethics codes and in declarations of ethical principles for psychology. It is pointed out that ethical values in psychology are in constant development, making it necessary to find common worldwide perspectives in a multicultural context. Within this context, the author points out that the notion of client welfare has not been precisely defined and that it is basically related to aspirational values rather than to the prescriptive standards of psychologists' professional conduct. Here arises the problem of how to universalize ethical principles that should work as the basis for local codes of ethics.

In Sikora's article it is well shown how moral dilemmas sometimes reflect what is considered to be the core of any ethical professional behavior. Should this behavior just avoid doing harm or should it go further and explicitly promote the client's benefit? To answer this question, the author reevaluates the importance of basic ethical principles that underlie any behavioral standard. Although not explicitly expressed, this perspective agrees with the idea that professional ethics, including ethics in psychology, amounts to much more than a deontological point of view, as deontology basically refers to the prescriptive issues included in ethics codes. Therefore, the author rightly observes that ethics should not be restricted to behavioral standards as it includes a deeper and broader prospect related to moral issues. In fact, the main role of ethics codes, even though they do contain specific standards, is to inspire good professional conduct rather than to condemn improper attitudes of practitioners.

At the same time, the idea that ethics codes include the concepts of good and evil in an idealistic sense and without real definitions, may become clearer if we consider that these concepts are mostly shaped by culture and history. There is no evil or good *per se* but moral points of view about what is considered evil or good. In fact, the author returns to this idea when mentioning that codes can only fulfill their function in the context of the specific professional community and the community at large in which it has been developed.

As regards professional responsibilities to society, the author presents an interesting point of view based on considering the conflict perspective, the functionalist perspective, and how the contract perspective can be overcome. In this last one, the role of trust is essential because if people do not have trust in professionals' honorability there is little chance to help them. But it is also necessary to consider the importance of formally regulating the professional practice of psychology, in which ethics codes play a central role. The regulation of psychology through professional associations should be accompanied by national policies and professional laws that help to ensure the welfare of society. It is necessary that all professional psychological associations obtain complete control over the

rules that determine who is allowed to practice or not, and over what is considered ethical or unethical behavior when practicing.

Discussing to the concept of welfare, the author analyzes its inclusion in ethics codes as more related to the concept of benefit or well-being than to philosophical ideas of good and evil. This is due not only to cultural differences but also to the diversity of fields in which psychologists can work. Consequently, ethics codes have to be locally developed because a general principle has to be shaped in a way that is culturally meaningful to a particular society.

The author makes an important point about the influence of Western culture represented by the European and North American ethnocentrism, and about how this influence is also reflected in psychology ethics codes. But at this point it is necessary to say that even the so extended concept of “Western” influence shows a particular *bias* itself, as for South American countries (and probably for African ones, too) it has always been a North-South polarization, not West-East or Occident-Orient. Therefore, it can be said that South American ethics codes suffer from a “northern” influence, and this way of speaking about it goes beyond the geographical point of view (Pettifor & Ferrero, 2012). Although supported by tradition, the expression “Western influence” should sometimes be replaced by “European and North American influence,” as the author also mentions on one occasion.

Discussing this cultural complexity, the author poses the idea of gradually progressing towards the universalization of ethical principles in such a way that both common human dignity and cultural diversity are respected. At this point, respect for human rights and the important role that they play in ethics codes is considered. As the author refers to the idea of the first international set of ethical standards for psychologists, EFPA's Meta-Code of Ethics, which was passed in Athens in 1995 and revised in Granada in 2005 (EFPA 1995/2005), it should be added that almost simultaneously with the first version, in 1997, a declaration of ethical principles for psychologists was developed in the southeast countries of South America. Those countries were part of the Mercosur – Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market), originally a regional trade agreement that also applies to diverse areas of society, including professions. This declaration was called *Agreement Protocol of Ethical Principles for the Professional Practice of Psychologists in the Mercosur and Associated Countries*, and was subscribed to by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay as full members, and by Bolivia and Chile as associated members (Coordinating Committee of the Psychologists of Mercosur and Associated Countries, 1997). The document includes five ethical principles: Respect for the Rights and Dignity of People, Compe-

tence, Professional and Scientific Commitment, Integrity, and Social Responsibility. As we can see, these principles are very similar to EFPA's. The Mercosur declaration of principles for psychologists had a significant impact on the development of national ethics codes in the subscribing countries (Ferrero, 2012).

Mentioning the regional ethical agreement of the EFPA prepares the ground in Sikora's paper for a very good question that the author raises concerning the possibility of universalizing the ethical principles of psychology worldwide, also going beyond relativism or absolutism. Thus, the author presents the *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* (UDEPP) and its relation to human rights, as they strongly support some general ethical principles in psychology. If those general and common principles are considered as a shared basis, then behavioral standards always have to be locally developed so that they can reflect the perspective of each particular culture. The concept of client welfare fits into this context well, as the UDEPP promotes the relational model of the human being and goes beyond the dominant individualism by promoting collective welfare according to each culture (Gauthier, Pettifor, & Ferrero, 2010). By the way, this is the right context to comment that translating the title of the UDEPP (originally English) into Spanish posed a challenge connected with either using or not using discriminatory gendered language. Unlike in English, in Spanish all common nouns have feminine or masculine gender, but the dominant patriarchal culture of our society results in the masculine noun being usually used in Spanish to refer to both genders. For instance, *psychologist* is always translated as *psicólogo*, meaning a male or a female psychologist, but strictly speaking the word means only a male psychologist. So, the Spanish translation of the title is *Declaración Universal de Principios Éticos para Psicólogas y Psicólogos*, explicitly including both nouns and both genders at the end, and challenging the traditional use of language. Fortunately, using this kind of non-discriminatory wording is a growing tendency in Latin America, but it is still a battle to be fought.

The author presents an interesting perspective on three possible stages of ethical development in psychology, culminating in the third one, with the possibility of universalization of ethics, but also taking intercultural differences into account. In this third stage the author includes the Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists. In the same way, the *primum non nocere* principle is nowadays complemented by the principle of maximizing client welfare, respecting both individual and social dignity and rights. Within this context, it can be said that the main goal of Katarzyna Sikora's article is successfully accomplished, as the understanding of the principle of caring for the client's welfare is

incorporated into a similar process of universalization, answering the questions posed at the beginning of the paper.

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