Ethics for Psychotherapists and Counselors

A Proactive Approach

Sharon K. Anderson
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Praise for *Ethics for Psychotherapists and Counselors*

“Anderson and Handelsman have written a truly unique ethics book; one that will be of value to every new as well as seasoned psychotherapist in professions from social work to psychiatry. They write about professional ethics as a process of acculturation that requires the reader to consider themselves, their motivations, and their feelings about the ethical requirements of the professions. In order to facilitate the process of self-awareness, they provide a series of activities like journaling to help the professional continue to expand their awareness as they encounter topics like confidentiality or multiple relationships. Whether or not instructor chooses this book as a primary text, it should be a supplement to every course that is taught.”

*Karen Strohm Kitchener, Professor Emeritus, University of Denver*

“This book is unique in my experience in that it encourages readers to reflect on their own ethical predispositions as they think about psychotherapy ethics. The book also helps students understand differences between being an ethical person and an ethical psychotherapist – a distinction that is difficult for most students, and many professionals, to appreciate. The authors’ emphasis on helping readers know themselves as well as the professional ethical guidelines is an important advance over other ethics texts. The discussion of ‘positive ethics’ is also unique and helpful for professionals.”

*William E. Sobesky, Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center*

“This excellent book for students or any professionals in psychotherapy and counseling is part of a welcome trend in ethics education that challenges students to strive for their highest ethical ideals. Anderson and Handelsman do far more than repeat rules and facts; they use the ethical acculturation model to encourage students to reflect on their professional identity and values. The book contains useful learning aids and exercises such as the ethics autobiography, the ethics journal, realistic vignettes, appendices, and useful charts. Anderson and Handelsman succeed in presenting their well considered perspectives on psychotherapy in a clear and personal style of writing. I highly recommend this book!”

*Samuel Knapp, Director of Professional Affairs, Pennsylvania Psychological Association*

“This book is interesting and engaging. A variety of scenarios and exercises make the process come alive for the reader and encourage self-assessment and self-reflection. As an instructor I think the text would generate many meaningful class discussions. It is easy-to-read and easy to follow.”

*Robin Lewis, Old Dominion University*

“I really like this book….it approaches ethics in a manner that is hopeful, positive, but no-nonsense and thorough. I think it is one of the best integration of concepts around ethics and ethical decision-making processes that I have seen, and one of the most easily applied to a variety of levels of training. I also like the application of an acculturation model as a way to understand our initiation into the part of our profession that has to do with ethics, ethical decision-making, and ethical behavior.”

*Susan L. Prieto-Welch, Counseling Center Director, University of Notre Dame*
To KK – mentor, colleague, and friend.

And JC – thank you! You are so good to me.

Sharon

To my mother, Eleanore Welsh. To my wife, Margie Krest. And to all my teachers, including all my students.

Mitch
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About the Authors

**Sharon K. Anderson** received her Ph.D. in counselling psychology from the University of Denver. She has taught in masters level counselling program at Colorado State University since 1994. As a professor, she teaches the professional ethics and legal issues course and supervises practicum and internship experiences for master level counsellors. For several years, Sharon delivered state approved jurisprudence workshops to psychotherapists from many disciplines seeking state licensure. She herself is a licensed psychologist. During her time as faculty, Sharon has published 2 books, 10 book chapters, and 17 articles.

**Mitchell M. Handelsman** received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Kansas. He has taught psychology at the University of Colorado Denver since 1982. He was an APA Congressional Science Fellow during 1989–1990, and in 2003–2004 he was president of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association. He is a licensed psychologist and a Fellow of the American Psychological Association. In addition, he has won the CASE (Council for the Advancement and Support of Education) Colorado Professor of the Year Award and APA’s Division 2 Teaching Award. He has served on numerous professional ethics committees, and has chaired the Colorado Psychological Association Ethics Committee.
Becoming an ethical psychotherapist or counselor is more than memorization of rules – it is a journey. We wrote this book to help students and practitioners navigate this journey toward a professional identity in a way that integrates their personal ethics and values with the professional ethics and traditions of psychotherapy and counseling.

Our book presents a variety of discussions, case scenarios, thought exercises, and writing assignments to (a) introduce readers to all the major ethical issues in psychotherapy, including boundaries, confidentiality, informed consent, supervision, and terminating therapy; (b) help readers explore their own moral and ethical backgrounds, personal values, ethical thinking, cultural awareness, and professional goals; and (c) take a proactive and preventive approach to applying ethics to every facet of their professional behavior.

The book can be used as a primary or ancillary text for ethics courses in all the mental health fields. It can also be used as a supplemental text for courses in professional issues, psychotherapy methods, counseling theories and techniques, and survey courses in clinical and counseling psychology, social work, counseling, and marital and family therapy.

Because this book focuses on the basic aspects of professional identity and ethical reasoning skills, it will be useful to readers over time as they readjust their professional identities in reaction to inevitable changes in life situations, professional positions, laws/regulations, and ethics codes.

After years of discussion – between ourselves and with colleagues and students – about what it means to be ethically excellent, not just aware of how to stay out of ethical trouble, we decided to write a book that takes a unique approach. Students will find the book engaging, positive in its approach, and respectful of their backgrounds. We invite
them to become active explorers, not passive recipients of disembodied rules and laws.

We also wrote this book to help us teach our own courses, and for our fellow instructors who may be new to teaching ethical issues as an entire course or part of a course. Instructors will find that they can organize class discussions and assignments around the exercises and vignettes from the chapters, or they can use the book to supplement their own methods and materials.

We wish to thank many people who have been involved in the long journey we’ve taken since our initial conversations about an ethics book. Our agent, Neil Salkind of Studio B, was instrumental in helping us conceive of this book in its present form and in encouraging us to undertake the project. Our editor, Christine Cardone, has been consistently supportive and instructive – providing just the right amount of guidance to bring this project to fruition. Thanks to Sam Knapp and Michael Gottlieb for their essential work on the ethical acculturation model, and to Allison Bashe for her work on the ethics autobiography. We thank those who provided such careful reviews of this text: R. Rocco Cottone, Robin Lewis, Susan Prieto-Welch, William Sobesky, and Rita Sommers-Flanagan. The following people have provided valuable assistance and feedback to us regarding previous iterations of the book: Tamar Ares, Bill Briggs, Pam Daniel, Pam Fritzler, Sharon Hamm, Susan Heitler, Mark Kirchhofer, Teresa Kostenbauer, Margie Krest, Amos Martinez, Natalie Meinerz, Amber Reed, and Deb Wescott.

Any imperfections that remain in the book, of course, are our responsibility alone.
Imagine, if you would, sitting at a first-row table at a psychotherapist comedy club. You’d probably hear something like this from one of the bright young performers:

“What’s the deal with becoming a psychotherapist? I mean, really! I figured the ethical issues – the issues of right and wrong – would be easy. Don’t date your clients, keep their interests at the top of the list, be helpful, have nice furniture. But noooo!! Learning to be an ethical psychotherapist feels like going through the security lines at the airport! You can’t do this, you can’t do that, you can’t bring that with you, and you can only bring so much of this. And then … there’s this thing about how people start to treat you. I thought I would have years to learn all this stuff about being ethical. But, nooo! I mean I just started graduate school and right away friends and family members start treating me differently – like I’m Sigmund Freud or Dr Phil. I mean they want me to solve their problems. The first day of graduate school, right? I haven’t even paid tuition or read the syllabus and when I get home my sister-in-law is there in my apartment asking how she should raise her kid! I go out to get some air and think about all her questions and my friend who lives on the floor below me asks me what I’ve been up to. I tell him that I’ve started graduate school to become a therapist and he tells me about his crazy sister – and asks if I have any time to “fix” her! My aunt calls up and says, ‘Listen, call your cousin Marty and tell him he needs to see a shrink. He’ll listen to you now.’ I don’t know how to respond to any of these pleas!”
2 Introduction

Some audience members, mostly trainees, might not get the humor – or the reality behind the humor – in these stories because they don’t see the ethical problems inherent in them. Why doesn’t our young performer just see his friend’s sister for treatment? Other members of the audience, mostly beginning therapists, might giggle and sigh at the same time because they understand the ethical dimensions and the situations are all too familiar. They recognize that psychotherapists face ethical decisions every day. How are new professionals to know the right things to do and to discern right and wrong professional behavior? Older, more experienced therapists among the audience members might shake their heads because they know that ethical situations, dilemmas, and decisions do not go away and often become more complex over the course of their careers. Of course, our young comedian can’t tell the best stories – about clients – because of confidentiality.

Our book will have little impact on the fantasy psychotherapy-comedy club business, but it will help you in your journey toward becoming an ethical professional. We have written this book for all students of psychotherapy and counseling, whether you are (a) taking an undergraduate class and figuring out whether psychotherapy might be a profession for you; (b) taking graduate courses in psychotherapy and ethics; or (c) practicing psychotherapy and exploring ways to become more ethical and or more fulfilled.

A Quick Note on Terminology

Pardon this interruption but we think it is important that we have a common understanding of some terminology. When people write about morals and ethics in philosophy, mental health, medicine, and other fields, they define the words “moral” and “ethical” in a myriad of ways. Some authors use the two terms synonymously; others give them very specific and different meanings. Both terms refer to judgments of right and wrong behavior and the justifications we make for those judgments. In this book we will use the term “ethics” when we are referring to professional behaviors and judgments, and “morals” when we are referring to a wider range of behaviors and judgments including those in personal relationships.

The term positive ethics (Handelsman, Knapp, & Gottlieb, 2002; in press) may be a brand new term to you. It refers to the study of ethics
as more than a series of rules you must follow to avoid punishment. Behaving ethically by following rules to avoid punishment has been termed remedial ethics (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2006). We are all for avoiding punishment, but behaving ethically is not just a matter of following rules – although your professional career might go better when you do. We also believe that professionals are motivated to do good work and actualize their highest moral and ethical selves. It is these higher levels of motivation and behavior that constitute positive ethics. We don’t think you have to be perfect, but we think focusing on positive themes is more effective, more professionally sustaining, and more fun than focusing on rules and what we shouldn’t do.

Mental health professionals use a variety of terms to describe what they do – the two major terms being psychotherapy and counseling. In the interest of clarity and brevity, we will use the terms counseling, psychotherapy, and therapy interchangeably.

**Ethical Acculturation**

Behaving ethically and growing toward ethical excellence are complex processes which involve adapting to a new culture – the culture of psychotherapy. This adaptation, which we call ethical acculturation (Handelsman, Gottlieb, & Knapp, 2005), involves awareness and action on two major fronts at the same time. The first front is you. Who are you, morally and ethically? What is your sense of right and wrong professional behavior? Who have you been throughout your life, in the many types of relationships of which you have been a part? The second front is the profession of psychotherapy. The profession of psychotherapy has its own culture, including ethical traditions, values, rules, rituals, and language.

As you begin your acculturation into this new culture, one of the key tasks is to explore this question: “How do I integrate the ethical traditions, values, rules – in short, the culture of psychotherapy – with my own moral intuitions, values, and backgrounds?”

This question or task might take you by surprise. You might be thinking that you already have enough of a personal foundation or moral compass to be an ethical practitioner. For example, (a) you are very motivated to listen and to help people; (b) others tell you that you are a nice person; and (c) you have never been convicted of a felony.
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These statements may all be true; however, psychotherapy is a complex profession and the therapeutic relationship includes a unique combination of behaviors and factors.

A major premise of this book is that psychotherapy is both very powerful and very fragile. Like a carefully produced chemical compound, psychotherapy has the potential to cause significant impact on people’s lives. On the other hand, if not handled in a diligent manner, psychotherapy can cause great damage. Additionally, when impurities – ethical lapses are equivalent to such foreign substances – enter the picture, psychotherapy can become quite harmful. At the least, such impurities can reduce or destroy the effectiveness of psychotherapy.

This book is a step-by-step guide to ethical acculturation that will help you understand yourself, your ethical culture of origin, and what it means to be or become an ethical psychotherapist. By the way, you will not be finished with your ethical acculturation when you’ve finished reading this book and made your office furniture purchase. Acculturation is a lifelong process because we change over time – as does the culture of psychotherapy.

Developing a Professional Identity

When you travel to countries with different cultures, you need to be aware of their customs, such as how to show respect, how to negotiate prices, how to communicate gratitude, when to make jokes, and when not to. In a similar way, when you travel to the culture of psychotherapy your ordinary moral sense will take you only so far (Kitchener, 2000). As we engage in the process of ethical acculturation, we formulate a professional identity. Our professional identities evolve over time, but we can start now to understand some of the core elements of our identities. The benefits of having a well-thought-out and well-articulated professional identity include providing better psychotherapy to our clients, preventing burnout, and experiencing a more fulfilling and productive career.

We believe there is no real difference between our ethical identities and professional identities because ethical issues are at the heart of good therapy practice. Good therapy naturally means good ethics.

A good professional identity includes four components of moral behavior as outlined by James Rest (1986; Rest & Narváez, 1994).
According to Rest, all four components must occur for moral behavior to occur. The first component is *moral sensitivity*. Ethics is relevant not only when there is a dilemma or you are considering a behavior that is clearly wrong. All of our professional behaviors have ethical components. Moral sensitivity is the ability to discern the ethical dimensions in all our professional activities. The second component is *moral decision-making*. Once we understand the ethical components in a situation, how do we think about these to make our best choices? To be good at moral decision-making means to know a lot about ourselves, ethics, and the profession. In addition, however, good moral decision-making involves a set of reasoning skills that we develop through practice (see chapter 4). The third component is *moral motivation* which refers to the process of identifying our values. Some of them might be in conflict when faced with an ethical decision. Many beginning therapists are surprised to learn that the motivation to help people, while necessary, is not sufficient to be an ethically excellent therapist. Finally, the component of *moral follow-through* refers to acting on our moral beliefs when there are both internal and external factors that may influence us to not act morally.

When you look at these four components, you may be tempted to assume that you already have all these qualities in abundance. You see yourself as sensitive to moral issues, as a moral decision-maker, as one who recognizes competing values or conflicts of interest, and as one who has the internal fortitude to do what is right. You display these qualities regularly in your day-to-day life. However, consider the following two points: (a) even if you possess these qualities now and display them by your choices, you can always develop them more as you engage in the lifelong process of ethical acculturation; (b) once again, we remind you that psychotherapy is different from all other professions and relationships.

On the other hand, you may look at the four components and come to the conclusion that you have none or just a few of these qualities. You may be thinking that becoming (or staying) a therapist is hopeless. We urge you to reserve judgment. It’s only the introduction!

**Professional Balancing Acts**

Our students tell us that becoming a psychotherapist is very enjoyable and rewarding. However, they also tell us of the numerous balancing
acts and frustrations that are involved. Each of these balancing acts has important implications for our ethical behavior. The experiences of our young psychotherapist/comedian at the beginning of this chapter highlight the major balancing act inherent in ethical acculturation – between the personal and professional. When we become a professional, or simply start the process, many of our relationships change. For example, your friends might expect to get expert knowledge from you and you just want to be their friend like before! At some point, you might start to think, “Am I moving from giving advice, as any friend would, to giving professional opinions?”

Another sense in which the personal and professional need to be balanced is within our therapy relationships. Our students say things like, “You tell me to use my personality as part of treatment and yet you also say to be professional in the relationship and not just go by my personal experience.” Indeed, helping people is much more than common sense or relying on your own experience. At the same time, without understanding your own tendencies, habits, and perceptions as well as using your personality, psychotherapy becomes merely a mechanical process.

The notion of technical knowledge and skill leads us to another balancing act: between humility and competence. Psychotherapists need to know an amazing amount of information about human behavior and develop much skill in applying that knowledge. At the same time, psychotherapists need to know that they cannot help everybody and they will never know everything. Thus, they need to cultivate the virtue of humility and appreciate the limits of their competence – which is determined by their levels of knowledge and skills. The extremes of this balance – feeling like you know everything or feeling like you know nothing – can lead to ethical infractions and burnout.

As a student or practitioner exploring ethical issues, you will face yet another balancing act: between being certain and embracing ambiguity. As you initially study the ethics codes of your discipline, you will find that the codes often read like a long list of “don’ts” that should be followed blindly. Upon closer inspection, however, you will find that most of the rules are not that definite. They are often difficult to implement in simple ways. The ethical principles and guidelines even contradict each other at times. How are we supposed to behave ethically when the rules are neither clear nor absolute? Answering this question takes careful study, long practice, and an open mind. We urge you to become
familiar with the ethics codes of your profession, and perhaps of a few related professions. You can find links to over 100 codes or sets of guidelines at kspope.com/ethcodes/index.php.

Another balance that has important ethical implications is between responsibility and respect. "They tell me I am responsible for how therapy goes," new therapists might say, "and yet they tell me that the client is in control." As psychotherapists, we must be responsible for the methods we use to help our clients, but we must also recognize that clients retain the ultimate responsibility for their own lives. Not appreciating this fact might lead us to blur the boundaries of the psychotherapeutic relationship as we take too much responsibility for clients’ lives, or push clients into unwise or premature choices. At the same time, the spheres of responsibility are not always that clearly defined. Many of the ethical issues we explore later in the book will revolve around this issue.

We’ve mentioned the term boundaries; one of the most important balancing acts that we as therapists need to master is between the intimacy involved in psychotherapy and the boundaries of that intimacy. Put another way: The intimacy involved in therapy exists in a very restricted range. For example, clients disclose many personal details in the relationship but therapists typically do not. Another quality of therapeutic intimacy is that it should never be transferred into a romantic or sexual relationship, a business relationship, or even a close friendship. Making sure to respect the boundaries of the therapy relationship is a key to making therapy effective. Thus, ethical decisions about boundaries are not only everyday decisions but every-minute decisions.

A broader balancing act is between our psychotherapeutic worldview and alternative worldviews. Psychotherapy is a western invention and includes values and traditions that seem to make more sense in western cultures. For example, many of the western psychotherapeutic approaches stress or value individuality and independence. Other worldviews value interdependence and seeking the best for the community.

At this point, you might be tempted to throw up your hands and say one of two following statements, “I didn’t sign up for all these balancing acts. I just want to help people,” or, “OK, this is all interesting but I don’t have the slightest clue how to maneuver ethically through all of these issues.” If this describes you, take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Relax a little. We wrote this book with you in mind. We want to help you successfully acculturate to the world of psychotherapy.
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How We Will Help You in the Process of Ethical Acculturation

The three As of our approach to acculturation are:

- Activity
- Awareness
- Actualization

Activity

We don’t know you. We don’t know the courses you have taken. We don’t know the discipline that you are in. What we do know is that we want to help you develop the skill of reflecting upon yourself and your profession in systematic, integrative, and fulfilling ways. Although we are going to focus on universal ethical issues that all psychotherapists face, your professional identity is yours alone. It comprises your thoughts, values, virtues, skills, attitudes, and character. We invite you to be partners with us in actively exploring your identity. Indeed, the core of your learning experience will be your reactions to what we have written. To this end, we have provided three types of activities throughout the book.

The first type of activity is titled “Journal Entries.” This activity offers the most formal way to explore and take more responsibility for your learning from this book. With this activity we encourage you to keep a journal where you record your reactions to the reading. You can keep your journal in a hard-copy notebook or a computer file. You might even want to audiotape some entries and transcribe them later. We will make some suggestions for journal entries, but we encourage you to be willing to write down reactions and thoughts about what you read.

The second type of activity we call “Food for Thought.” These are opportunities for you to sit back and reflect upon what you’re reading and how you relate to it. The third type of activity we call “Red Flag” and “Green Flag” stories which we will introduce in chapter 4. The concept of red flags indicates ethical pitfalls and the concept of green flags indicates ethical excellence. The flag stories contain specific examples of behaviors and attitudes that you can think about, react to, and expand upon.

If you are reading this book for a class, your professor may ask you to do some additional entries or exercises, or ask you to share your work as part of a class discussion. The purpose of every activity is to
facilitate your ethical acculturation – to explore yourself, the culture of psychotherapy, and/or the relationship between the two. As you respond to our prompts, remember that there are very few clearly right or wrong answers; we’ve left most of the questions open-ended to facilitate your exploration.

You probably won’t need to do each activity at one sitting. We encourage you to take your time and reflect. Also, you probably won’t need to answer every subquestion in every activity. However, we believe the more you do, the more you will benefit from this book. Think of these activities as similar to physical exercises. You need to develop your ethical muscles and these exercises will give you a good workout!

**Awareness**

We ask you to keep an open mind and to continue expanding your awareness. For example, in our activities we sometimes ask you to take different perspectives. We will ask you to respond as a therapist, but we will also ask you to put yourself in the position of a client, a colleague, or a member of an ethics committee that has to judge whether a particular behavior was ethical or not. These perspectives will help you understand the complexity and uniqueness of psychotherapy.

Most of our suggestions will be worded in such a way as to apply primarily to beginning therapists. However, we think practicing psychotherapists would do well to revisit this book on a regular basis. If you are an experienced therapist, you can easily adapt the activities by thinking about the next stage of your career as a renewal or re-entry into a changing professional culture. But do not modify the activities too much! There is much to be gained from moving back a few steps and casting fresh eyes upon ground that we believe we have already covered.

**Food for Thought: Personal and Professional Relationships**

Here is your first activity: Remember the psychotherapist at the comedy club and all of the family and friends with new expectations? We want to give you some time to think about some of the relationships in
Introduction

your own life that have changed because of your entry into this new profession.

Part 1  Think of some of the personal relationships you are in. For example, you might be a best friend, a child in relation to your parents, a sibling, etc. How have these relationships changed since entering school or since beginning your practice?

Part 2  Now think about the new types of professional relationships you are in because you have begun your studies or practice. For example, you might be a classmate, a practicum student, a psychotherapist, a colleague of other psychotherapists, etc. What makes these professional relationships professional? What makes them different from personal relationships? What qualities or skills do you think you will want to have in place to make the relationships work?

Actualization

One way to think about developing an ethical identity is that it’s a way of actualizing your vision of what it means to be a professional. We want to emphasize that developing your ethical muscles can be a positive and personal venture rather than an alienating attempt to follow a disembodied set of rules (Handelsman, Knapp, & Gottlieb, in press). For example, it is unethical for psychotherapists to accept expensive gifts from clients. Many new therapists see this prohibition as an intrusion into the therapeutic relationship and an unnecessary constraint on their behavior. A more positive perspective is to see the acceptance of expensive gifts as outside the boundaries of psychotherapy; it is one of those impurities that might dilute or even destroy the therapeutic relationship. Accepting expensive gifts runs a high risk of compromising our objectivity and promoting a conflict of interest. These work against our desire to produce beneficial therapeutic outcomes and to act in clients’ best interests. Thus, not accepting expensive gifts is an expression of our concern for clients and a way to make sure that we provide what we promised to clients.
Introduction

What This Book Is Not

We have written this book to be different from other ethics books, some of which you may be using along with this one. The first difference is that this book is not discipline-specific. We have written it for all who are or will be performing psychotherapy, including counselors, marriage and family therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and others. Thus, we will not provide a comprehensive guide to every ethical situation covered by other discipline-specific ethics books.

The second difference is that this book is not a set of rules to follow in every situation. We will provide some answers about what to do in some situations (like the previous example with the expensive gift), but we are more interested in helping you develop your ability to (a) recognize ethical issues because you are more sensitized to them; (b) think about ethical issues from a knowledgeable position; (c) integrate what you read in the ethics codes with who you are as a person and professional; and (d) develop the character strengths to act in concert with your convictions. If we achieve these goals, you will be more likely to follow your ethics codes now and as they evolve in the future.

Journal Entry: Adjectives

Take some time to write in your journal: Think about a time in the future when you will have been a psychotherapist for several years and have developed a reputation. What four adjectives would you like your clients to use when they describe you as a professional? What four adjectives would you like your colleagues to use to describe you as a professional? Why have you chosen these adjectives? What do they reflect about you?
Journal Entry: Chapter Reflections

Here is your second journal entry. We have posed some questions to help you reflect on this chapter.

- How did you react to this first chapter?
- What surprised you about what we said?
- What parts of the chapter seemed to make the most sense and what parts were counterintuitive?
- Did you find yourself getting defensive at anything we said? What?
- What are you most looking forward to about this book? What are you least looking forward to?

This is a journal entry that you can repeat at the end of every chapter!

Food for Thought: What Would You Do?

First scenario: In an ethics class of Sharon’s, a scenario came up in discussion about an armored truck having an accident right outside the building and money spilling out into the street. One of the students said, “I’d pick up as much as I could! The money doesn’t belong to anyone.” Another student said, “But it doesn’t belong to you.” A third student said, “Wow, I don’t know what I would do. I guess maybe it would depend on whether my family was struggling financially.”

- What are your reactions to these statements?
- What would you do in that situation, and why?
Now change the scenario a bit. Suppose the accident happened right outside your psychotherapy office and your client and colleagues are watching the same scene.

- What would you do?
- Would your response be the same as it was in the previous scene? Why or why not?

Notice the kinds of arguments you made. Your justifications for your courses of action are reflections of your ethical and moral background, your values, and your sense of what it means to be a professional.

**Coming Attractions**

In the next two chapters we will ask you to think more about your background and how it might prepare you for your professional roles. In chapter 3, we will discuss in more detail the process of acculturation and how to develop your professional identity. Readers who want a broad overview before getting into specifics may want to read chapter 3 first.
Part I

Taking Stock
We open this chapter with a story from Mitch:

When I reached middle age (early, early, middle age), we got a treadmill to get some exercise. I was very anxious to get started, so I just turned the machine on, got the tread revolving, and started walking. On the model we bought, there are about twenty different built-in programs that simulate everything from a power walk to a climb up a hill at heart-pumping speed. There are hundreds of different settings, none of which I’ve used in ten years!

As you are reading this scenario you might be thinking, “Wow Mitch, what a waste. You are really missing out on some good exercise.” And you are right! By Mitch not familiarizing himself with the basic machinery – not reading the instructions nor doing some systematic assessment – he’s missing out on a high level of effectiveness even though he gets an adequate amount of exercise. Or you might be thinking, “No big deal Mitch; you’re getting enough exercise. Listen, there’s no need to bother with all the bells and whistles.” You might be right on this view too. For a home treadmill, this may be a perfectly fine way to go. After all, it’s Mitch’s money; he can do with it as he pleases. He’s not influencing anybody else.

But the scenario and our responses change when we’re talking about a professional activity with potentially huge impacts – positive or negative – on other people. This is when positive ethics come into play. When we involve positive ethics, we are obligated to do more than the minimum. We need to move beyond the ethical floor (staying out of trouble) and shoot for the ethical ceiling (excellent and exemplary professional practice) (Handelsman, Knapp, & Gottlieb, 2002; Knapp & VandeCreek, 2006).