Pack-Brown, S. P. & Williams, C. B. (2003). *Ethics in a multicultural context.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications**.** Reviewed by Wayne C. Evens, Ph.D.

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In the Preface, the authors state three goals for the book: to point out culturally troublesome issues and aspects of current ethical codes for the American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW); to promote culturally appropriate interpretations of existing ethical codes for mental health professionals; and to promote ethical behavior, within a multicultural context, among professionals and within the profession (p. xiii).

Certainly, it is important to examine the role of professional ethics and how they should be understood in a multicultural context. In an era of globalization, we are all having to deal with the issues of diversity and multiculturality in teaching, practice and in wider spheres. This book makes an attempt to address these issues in mental health practice. The authors raise some basic issues in this area. Many of the exercises provided could be useful to both students and practitioners in developing understanding of ethics in a multicultural context. The thrust of the exercises and the book is that practitioners are embedded in cultural contexts that may have negative effects on their work with clients from other cultural backgrounds. The exercises are designed to help the practitioner explore these issues. The book further asserts that codes of ethics reflect primarily a euro-centric world view. Some of the exercises encourage exploring the biases in the codes.

The thrust of the book, as summarized on the last page, is to encourage practitioners to address: 1) their commitment to increasing their professional competence with a range of culturally different clients; 2) strategies for furthering their cultural competence; 3) whether their education

and training provide sufficient foundation for ethical multicultural practice; 4) being thoughtful about how they will know whether their education, training, and worldviews about cultural differences provide them with the competence to treat a client from a dissimilar culture or whether their ethical obligation is to refer (p. 221).

The book assumes the reader has a very low level of knowledge and awareness of multicultural issues. It walks the reader through a series of thoughts and exercises. It begins by exploring codes of ethics, moves to exploring personal understanding, then to doing ethical thinking in a multicultural context. For a novice (i.e., an entry level BSW student), this could be very helpful.

Overall, I do not find this book useful or very relevant to social work. Professional codes of ethics are instantiated in practice and, at least in social work, they are understood in the context of values prevalent in the field. The authors show no awareness of any of the discussions of diversity in the social work literature. Their citations are primarily from the counseling literature. In fact, they cite no social work literature. As an example, on page 28, after citing the NASW standard relating to client self determination, the authors state, "A core value is individualism as represented in *self-determination*. An assumption is that all clients value self-determination rather than a more collectivist approach to life, such as the self as a member of the group, which may then mean *group determination*" (italics in original). Reamer (1995) in his discussion of the self-determination ethic makes clear that this ethic limits the action of the social worker, not the client. In fact, the interpretation given by these authors would violate this ethic. The ethic would prohibit the social worker from promoting an individualistic approach if the client preferred a group approach.

On page 111, the authors state, "To date, the American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) have not developed or accepted standards that would define competent ethical and decision making within a multicultural context." The authors either are unaware that NASW (2001) issued *Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* in 2001, or they choose to ignore the statement. This statement clearly provides standards to guide cross- cultural practice and clearly links these to the *Code of Ethics* in a way that guides ethical thinking in the area. I do not argue that social work has resolved all of the issues in multicultural work, nor that individual

social workers would not benefit from thinking more seriously about these issues, but NASW has addressed and continues to address the issues.

In addition to the standards, NASW (2006) addresses "cultural and linguistic competence." This is a comprehensive statement on competence in the area. Further, CSWE (2004) has required programs to teach diversity and cultural issues for some time. Social workers are prepared by their education to understand the ethics in a multicultural context.

The examples could be expanded. The entire book, to some extent, misreads the NASW *Code of Ethics*. I found the lack of understanding of social work and the context in which social work ethics are understood particularly disturbing in a book that encourages awareness of other cultures and understanding. Social work has, perhaps more than most professions, struggled with these issues and sought to develop competent and ethical cross-cultural practice.

From its inception, social work has sought to address multiculturality. Mary Richmond (1922) certainly suggested that those doing diagnosis and case work needed to be aware of each person's context. Jane Addams (1912) showed a deep awareness of cultural issues. Cannon (1928/1939) stated, "Other professions have social concepts and social objectives, but I think only social work never has a purely individual objective" (p. 17). Hamilton (1941) emphasized person in situation, and Perlman (1957) stressed the person in environment. Germain and Gitterman (1980) developed the person in environment as a single unit of analysis. In this context, Solomon (1978) discussed social work in Black communities; Norton (1978) discussed the inclusion of minority content in social work education; and many other social work publications have addressed the issues of multiculturality. In choosing to ignore this literature and the social work context, the authors produced a book that simply does not fit social work and its approach.

If you are looking for material to help students or to improve your understanding of ethical decision making in a multi cultural context, consider Hogan-Garcia (1999).

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