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Relationships and Client Protection Differences in the APA and ACA Ethical Codes

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Introduction

- Ethical codes provide **structure and consistency** to an organization as well as ensure **protection** for those who are receiving services from an organization. In the counseling profession.
- ACA has designed its code of ethics to reflect the principles used in the medical model. (Kaplan, 2014).
- The **ACA** ethical code was **updated** in 2014, partly in order to address rising issues such as technological communication.
- Teo (2015) argues that an update to the **APA** code of ethics could be beneficial because it is **no longer sufficient** to address the moral issues of our current culture.
- Under the **ACA** ethical code, counselors must follow **precise guidelines** when interacting with others.
- Contrastingly, the **APA** ethical code has **fewer, broad guidelines** for professionals which allow members more freedom in their decision-making.

Research Procedure

- Line-by-line comparison** of the APA and ACA ethical codes regarding competency and qualification requirements.
- This was conducted by **five** separate researchers and the present reported findings represent the consensus among all research team members.
- Researchers compared notes and determined instances when the wording was different, but the meanings were essentially the same.
- Differences in meaning were then coded based on the category of the information.

Findings

Out of **144 total differences** in these ethical codes, **34 differences** pertain specifically to the topics of relationships and client protection.

ACA has very extensive **requirements** and **prohibitions** relating to **therapeutic relationships**; APA is **more general** with a principle-driven approach.

- Relationship boundary changes*
- Limited potential for multiple relationships*

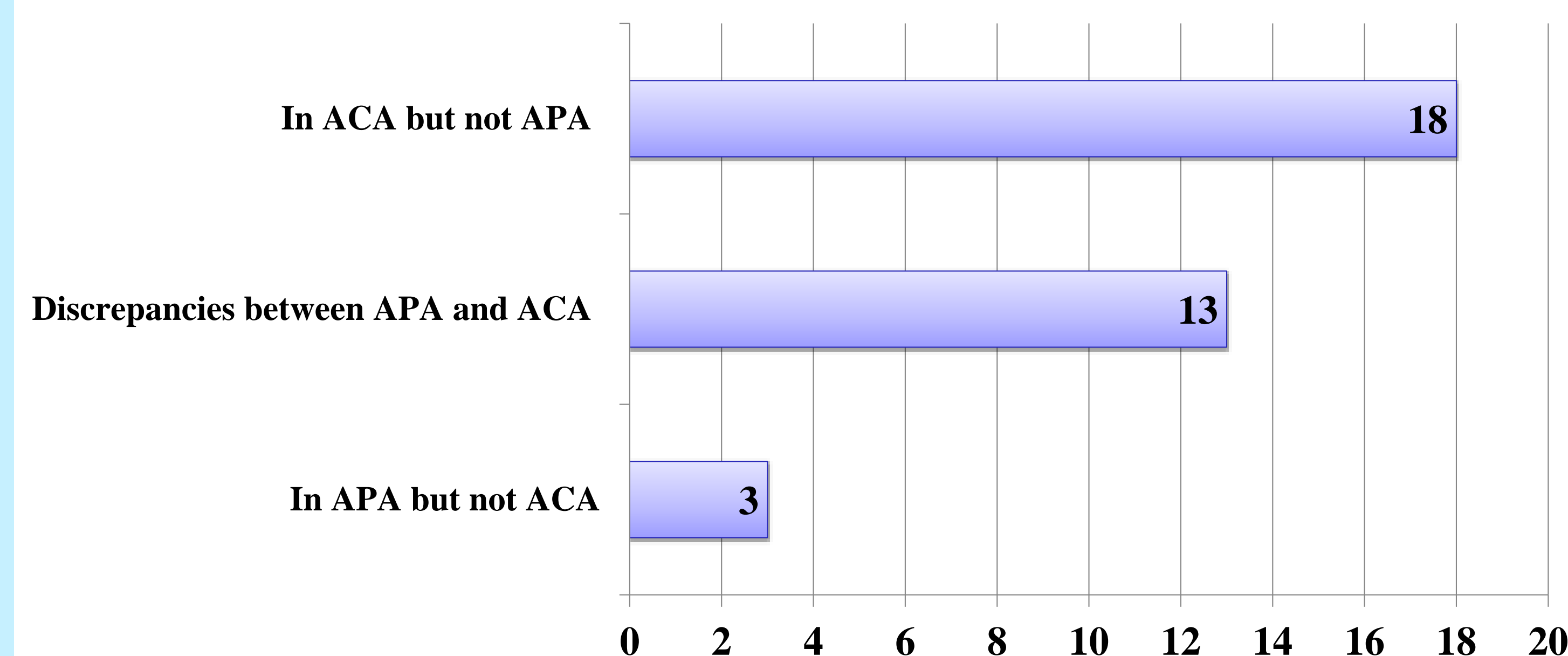
Supervisor/supervisee relationships

- ACA spells out guidelines in more detail*
- APA is very general, sometimes silent*

Results

APA Location	Discrepancies
3.05	APA defines what multiple relationships are.
3.10b1,c	ACA does not have to provide an " appropriate explanation " for persons who are incapable of giving informed consent .
5.05	Counselors may use testimonials .
6.03	Withholding records in emergency situations due to not receiving payment specifically prohibited in APA.
6.04	Counselors must specify their plan for collection of fees in the case of non-payment in the informed consent.
6.05	Counselors must document all bartering in a " clear written contract ."
7.05	APA says " required " therapy while ACA says " requested " therapy.
9.03a,c	ACA must disclose the purpose and nature of assessment; exceptions for APA (e.g., when mandated by law); Psychologists must obtain consent for interpreter
10.02	Counselors must document changes to the therapeutic relationship (ACA).
10.03	Counselors must screen all prospective group members to make sure they are compatible.
10.06	Psychologists must not terminate in order to engage in a sexual relationship with family members (APA). ACA does not specify.
10.07	" Romantic " and/or " sexual " (ACA); APA only says " sexual "
10.08	" Sexual and/or romantic "(ACA) vs. "Sexual" APA; 2 vs. 5 years
ACA Additions	
A.1.c.	Counselors should create a counseling plan with client
A.6.a.	Counselors should use caution when taking on clients with whom the counselor has had a previous relationship
A.6.b-c	Counselors use caution when extending counseling boundaries ; Document when is a must when extending boundaries.
A.6.d.	Counselors must obtain informed consent before any role changes take place in counseling.
A.7.	Counselors advocate for their clients; must obtain informed consent prior to advocacy.
A.10.f	Counselors should use caution when accepting gifts
B.3.a.	Counselors make every effort to make sure client confidentiality and privacy is upheld by subordinates .
B.3.f.	Counselors protect the confidentiality of deceased clients .
B.6.d.	Counselors obtain consent from the client before allowing anyone to observe .
D.1.c	Counselors working on interdisciplinary teams work to best serve their clients.
E.5.d.	Counselors may refrain from making/reporting a diagnosis if it is in the best interest of the client. There is nothing about this diagnosis issue in APA.
F.3.a.	Counselors should use caution when extending supervisor/supervisee relationships . Supervisors must not enter into a supervisory relationship with "individuals with whom they have an inability to remain objective ."
F.3.d.	Case examples from clients, students, or supervisee information must be used under strict guidelines.
F.7.f.	Student supervisors have the same ethical responsibilities as professionals.
F.7.g	Counselor educators use caution when choosing to engage in social, sexual, or other intimate relationships with former students.
F.10.c.	Counselor educators avoid engaging in nonacademic relationships with students.
F.10.d.	Counselors should use caution when extending educator-student boundaries .
F.10.f.	

Results (continued)



Discussion Regarding Discrepancies

- APA indicates that a psychologist is **not** allowed **to withhold a client's records** due to non-payment if there is an **emergency situation**. The ACA ethical code does not say this.
- According to APA, a psychologist must refrain from **engaging in a sexual relationship** with a past client for **at least two years** after the counseling relationship has ended. A counselor must refrain from engaging in a **sexual and/or romantic** relationship with a past client for at least **five years**.
- According to ACA, a counselor **must disclose** the **purpose and nature of assessment**. Contrastingly, the APA ethical code lists occasions when a psychologist **does not have to do so**. One of these occasions is when assessment is **court-mandated**.
- According to ACA, a counselor may **refrain from making a diagnosis** or reporting a diagnosis if it is in the best interest of the client. The APA ethical does not address this issue

Some Implications

Undergraduate students

- When choosing a career route, students must understand the ethical expectations of their potential professions.*

Psychologists supervising counselors

- Need to be aware of both **counseling and psychology's ethical codes** in order to ensure that both are upheld.*

Agencies who hire both licensed psychologists and licensed counselors

- Awareness of discrepancies is necessary for cohesion and agency agreement.*

Clients

- There could be **confusion** for clients who have seen **both psychologists and counselors**, as the two professions have different expectations for client-practitioner relationships.*

General confusion

- From the outside looking in, one might believe a psychologist is violating an ethical principle when, in reality, those specifications do not exist in their ethical code.*