

Multiple relationship essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



Abstract

Many times in counseling sessions, situations arise that require the ability to make ethical decisions. When confronting these types of situations, counselors often refer to the Elizabeth Reynold Welfel's Ethical Model, comprised of 10 steps, to guide them in making an ethical decision. These steps provide a framework which counselors may use to help with ethical dilemmas. Below are the 10 steps in the Ethical Decision-Making Model provided by Elizabeth Welfel in the book *Ethics in Counseling and Psychotherapy* to examine the multiple relationship case described in Herlihy and Corey's *ACA Ethical Standards Casebook* (2006, p. 242) "A Resistant Supervisee." Keywords: Ethical steps, ethical model, decision-making process, multiple relationships

Counselors and other helping professions are often confronted with situations which require them to make sound ethical decisions (American Counseling Association, 1996). To help in such situations, various scholars have constructed models comprised of steps to take when faced with an ethical dilemma. Elizabeth Reynolds Welfel, in her book, *Ethics in Counseling and Psychotherapy* (2012, p. 30) has developed a model to rely upon when faced with an ethical dilemma. The purpose of this model is to offer professional counselors a framework for comprehensive ethical decision-making. The steps are as follows:

Step 1: Develop ethical sensitivity.

Step 2: Clarify facts, stakeholders, and the sociocultural context of the case.

Step 3: Define the central issues and the available options.

Step 4: Refer to professional standards and relevant laws/regulations.

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Step 5: Search out ethics scholarship.

Step 6: Apply ethical principles to the situation.

Step 7: Consult with supervisor and respected colleagues.

Step 8: Deliberate and decide.

Step 9: Inform supervisor, implement and document decision-making. Step

10: Reflect on the experience.

In this paper, the steps listed above will be applied the steps to Case Study 18, “ A Resistant Supervisee” by Zarus E. Watson (Welfel, 2012, pp. 242-244) to resolve a multiple relationship ethical dilemma. I chose this model because it is easy to comprehend and broken down into very small steps that are uncomplicated and effective as well. The case study involves Phyllis, who is a 25-year-old single woman accepted into the Ph. D. program immediately after completing her Master’s Degree in clinical counseling. She is required to provide supervision to at least one Master’s-level student every semester as part of the program.

She has been assigned to Jena, age 38, who happened to attend the Master’s program at the same time as Phyllis, and they became close friends.

However, the two have grown apart since Jena was forced to take a leave of absence due to personal issues and did not finish the Master’s program at the same time as Phyllis. Consequently, Jena is still a Master’s level student while Phyllis is now a Doctorate level student. This puts Phyllis in a supervisory position with regards to Jena and, as a result, in a “ multiple relationship” with Jena as they are in a supervisor-supervisee relationship as well as friends outside of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Since Phyllis

is the supervisor and Jena the supervisee, this also shifts the balance of power in their relationship.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), a multiple relationship occurs when a psychologist is in a professional role with a person and, at the same time, is closely associated with or related to the person with whom the psychologist has the professional relationship (or promises to enter into another relationship in the future with the person or a person closely associated with or related to the person) (Welfel, 2012, p. 229). Confusion occurs when there are multiple roles within the same relationship, such as this one: supervisor/friend (Kitchener, 1988). The ethical dilemma presented in this case study is that Jena, the supervisee, appears to be resistant to supervision by Phyllis.

According to step 1, Phyllis appears to be sensitive to how her own personal principles, values, and worldview affect what is happening since she makes a mental note to discuss it with her with her doctoral supervision group, keeping Jena anonymous, in compliance with the Code of Ethics also.

Regarding step 2, Phyllis has an ethical dilemma in that she wants to protect Jena from being labeled as “ resistant to supervision”, yet at the same time, she wants to figure out a means of breaking through Jena’s resistance to supervision for Jena’s benefit.

As to step 3, Phyllis has determined the nature of the dilemma is that Jena has become enmeshed with a client and is resistant to Phyllis’s advice. Phyllis is considering her options—ask her doctoral supervision group’s advice or consult with Dr. Walsh, the faculty member in charge of

internships. However, she is fearful that doing so will make it more difficult for Jena to be accepted into the doctoral program. She winds up, at this point, giving Jena more time, which, in essence, is doing nothing (Herlihy and Corey, 2012, p. 243).

Regarding step 4, while there are no laws which pertain to this particular case as it does not involve a sexual relationship, but there are regulations and professional standards one must adhere to. Step 4 and step 5 are closely related and are the crux of this ethical dilemma. Ethics codes of all major mental health associations mandate that therapists/supervisors refrain from entering a multiple relationship if objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing professional functions could become impaired (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 2013). When faced with an ethical dilemma, a counselor/supervisor has four resources to rely upon: The second one applies to this case and is the Code of Ethics of a professional association, which includes the standards one's colleagues have set for the profession.

In conjunction with the Code of Ethics is the philosophical literature, such as Welfel's Model of Ethical Decision-Making (Welfel, 2012, p. 30), which helps professionals understand the ethical principles and theories that underlie the professional Codes of Ethics. Phyllis neglected to consult any codes, nor did she read the abundance literature available to her before entering into the supervisor-supervisee with Jena. Phyllis's failure to do so is inexcusable. Had she referred to these sources beforehand, she would have seen that the ACA states, " avoid accepting close relatives, romantic partners, or friends as supervisees" (Herlihy and Corey, 2012, p. 244).

This step is crucial as it is clearly stated in multiple sources that one should not enter into a supervisor-supervisee relationship with a former close friend. Step 6 states that the professional needs to apply the ethical principles to the situation. Phyllis has failed in this effort too in that she has not consulted with Dr. Walsh. Dr. Walsh, in turn, has the ethical responsibility of to “ensure that the rights of peers are not compromised when students provide clinical supervision” (Herlihy and Corey, 2012, p. 121). Phyllis clearly has boundary issues, self-doubts, and conflicting feelings about her relationship with Jena which are interfering with her ability to be an effective supervisor.

Though Phyllis never actually consulted Dr. Walsh, she did bring it up in her doctoral student supervision group, which is step 7. However, this was not effective in rectifying the situation. Phyllis seems as though she is reticent in bringing it up with her supervisor, Dr. Walsh, which seems rather unprofessional. Failing to read the codes and literature as well as failing to discuss it with Dr. Wash now puts Phyllis in a difficult position halfway through the semester.

Step 8 is to deliberate and decide. What Phyllis chose to do really amounts to nothing as, at this point, she decides to give it more time. As stated above, she should have consulted the literature, both the Codes of Ethics and scholarly articles, before she began the supervisor-supervisee relationship with Jena, actually discussed her qualms with Dr. Walsh, but, most importantly, not entered into the relationship in the first place. Now she is in the difficult position of perhaps forcing Jena to change supervisors in the middle of the semester or, if that is not possible, having Dr. Walsh take over

the supervisory role (Herlihy and Corey, 2012, p. 244). Again, Phyllis should have known better when she heard who her supervisee would be; she had multiple sources to consult on the subject, including codes, article, and her own supervisor. As a result, performing step 9, informing her supervisor, is going to be a difficult rather than a positive experience.

Phyllis really needs to implement step 10 and do some serious reflecting on the situation so that it does not happen in the future. The bottom line is that Phyllis neglected to consult the Code of Ethics or any one of the numerous scholarly articles for ethical decision-making regarding multiple relationships before supervising someone she knew outside the professional relationship. In neglecting to do so, she focused more on her own enthusiasm for rekindling their former friendship, rather than her professional standards and duties, which is self-serving, and betrays Jena in that she is not putting her supervisee's needs first.

References

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