

Lifetime Achievement in Counseling Series: An Interview with Barbara Herlihy



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Each year TPC presents an interview with an influential veteran in counseling as part of its Lifetime Achievement in Counseling series. This year, Dr. Barbara Herlihy shared insights from her decades-long commitment to the professionalization of counseling and the evolution of the profession's ethical standards. Dr. Herlihy's scholarship and service have had a profound effect on how counseling ethics are taught, applied, and revised to remain relevant in an ever-evolving world. In this interview, she connects counselors' professional ethical obligations to the advancement of social justice and the internationalization of the profession. We are grateful for Dr. Herlihy's contributions to our profession and for the wisdom that she shared in this interview.

—J. Richelle Joe, Editor



Barbara Herlihy, PhD, NCC, is Professor Emerita in the counselor education program in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of New Orleans. She is a Fellow of the American Counseling Association and is a recipient of the Chi Sigma Iota Thomas J. Sweeney Professional Leadership Award, the SACES Courtland Lee Social Justice Award, and the ACES Distinguished Mentor Award.

A prolific writer, she is co-author (with Dr. Gerald Corey) of the *ACA Ethical Standards Casebook* and (with Dr. Theodore Remley) of *Ethical, Legal, and Professional Issues in Counseling*, and co-editor (with Dr. Cassie Storlie) of *Counseling Leaders & Advocates*. She has authored or co-authored over 100 journal articles and book chapters, primarily on ethics, social justice, and feminist therapy. She serves as Associate Editor for Ethics for *Counseling and Values*. She has served twice as Chair of the ACA Ethics Committee, and she currently serves as Chair of the ACA Ethics Appeals Committee. In recent years, she has become passionate about furthering the globalization of the counseling profession and has presented seminars and workshops across the United States and in other countries. She currently serves as Co-Director of Global Issues for the International Institute for the Advancement of Counseling Theory.

- 1. Can you provide more details about your experience as Chair of the ACA Ethics Appeal Committee? What were your key responsibilities, and how did the committee operate in addressing ethical issues in the counseling profession? What drew you to the field of counseling ethics, and what makes this area so meaningful to you, both personally and professionally?**

Looking back, I realize I've been engaged consistently with the *ACA Code of Ethics* in some way for several decades now. I've served on the ACA Ethics Committee, the ACA Ethics Appeal Committee, and on Ethics Code Revision task forces; co-authored (first with Larry Golden and then with Gerald Corey) the most recent four editions of the *ACA Ethical Standards Casebook*; and presented on various ethical issues at numerous professional conferences. With this constant engagement, one might think that I can recite the *Code of Ethics* from memory. No, not even close! However, I do have a feel for how the Code has evolved over the decades to continue to meet the needs of counselors in a constantly changing and increasingly complex world of practice.

That constant evolution is a major reason why ethics has remained interesting and meaningful to me over the years. Opportunities are constantly being created to ponder new and intriguing ethical dilemmas. I'm routinely challenged to refine how I teach ethics to help students develop finely honed ethical reasoning skills, to research and write about ethical issues as they emerge, and to serve the counseling profession through membership on committees and task forces.

Of all the committees on which I have served, I would say that the ACA Ethics Committee and the Ethics Appeal Committee are the most challenging. Ethics and Ethics Appeals Committee members are charged with reviewing all the evidence provided in a complaint or an appeal and then rendering a judgment. If a counselor is found to be in violation of one or more ethical standards, then the appropriate consequence (which can be anything from a recommendation to change a particular practice to permanent expulsion from ACA) must be chosen and applied. Because counselors are trained to be nonjudgmental and because we gravitate toward forgiveness and compassion rather than imposing punishments, the entire process can be very uncomfortable. In my experience, the ACA members who take on these committee assignments take them very seriously and are keenly aware that their decisions can be consequential. Thankfully, these committees typically have only a very small number of complaints to adjudicate over the course of a year. Formal complaints of ethical violations against counselors are rare, considering the thousands of ACA members who are in practice at any given time, and appeals are even more uncommon. This speaks to the integrity of the practitioners of our profession!

2. Given the current climate, ethical concerns are becoming even more pressing. What are your thoughts on the tension between personal and professional values, and how counselors can uphold ethical standards while respecting cultural diversity and individual client autonomy?

Conflicts between personal and professional values is an issue that jumped into bold relief about 15 years ago as a result of two court cases, *Ward v. Wilbanks* (2010, 2012) and *Keeton v. Augusta State University* (2011), in which students were dismissed from their master's programs in counseling after they refused to counsel clients regarding the clients' same-sex affectional relationships. The students argued that these relationships were not acceptable according to their religious beliefs. These cases spawned considerable discussion about values conflicts in counseling. Counselor educators grappled with how to best teach students to set aside, or "bracket," their personal values when entering a counseling session. A body of professional literature developed around managing conflicts between personal and professional values and around the ethical decision-making process when values conflicts exist.

The difficulties associated with counseling clients whose values differ from those of the counselor re-emerged during the run-up to the 2024 presidential election, a time when it seemed that most Americans had such strong political feelings that they found it difficult if not impossible to really hear each other's viewpoints. Again, counselors struggled when clients expressed views with which the counselors strongly disagreed. Although the specific values-laden issues were different from those that emerged around the students who were dismissed from their training programs, counselors sometimes struggled to set aside their personal values so they could be fully present for their clients. To me, it seems inevitable that in our diverse culture, these issues will continue to emerge. Our work as counselors will be challenged by values conflicts, and I believe we will need to remain vigilant to our own experiences, and work to identify both our explicit and implicit biases so that we can continue to honor and respect our clients without judging their personal value systems. We are a richly diverse society, and as I've been saying for many years, multicultural competence and ethical practice go hand in hand—neither one can exist without the other.

3. Given your extensive knowledge and experience in counseling, how do you maintain your motivation and enthusiasm for your work, especially during difficult periods? What aspects of counseling resonate most with you, and are there any particular initiatives or methods that you're currently excited about?

I have been blessed with the incredibly good fortune of working in what is, for me, the perfect profession. Knowing that as a counselor I may have touched some lives in meaningful ways, and that as a counselor educator I've had the privilege of mentoring young professionals who went on to make significant contributions, has been more than enough to maintain my motivation and enthusiasm. Seeking out my own counselor whenever I hit a rough spot on my own personal journey has also sustained me.

Ethics, multicultural competence, social justice, and feminist therapy have been consistent themes throughout my work. At this point in my journey, I am also passionate about the internationalization of counseling. I hope to help find ways to extend helping and healing, whether or not the process is formally called "counseling," to serve marginalized communities across the globe. I'm also intrigued by the broad spectrum of counseling theory, and how we can connect it more directly to effective practice, particularly with culturally diverse client populations in the United States and internationally.

4. Would you take a moment and share your thoughts on the internationalization of counseling—specifically, how counseling practices are expanding across borders and adapting to different cultural contexts? What are the challenges and benefits of these cross-cultural exchanges, and how does the profession develop effective practice across diverse populations?

One of the exciting projects in which I am currently involved is a "world mapping" initiative, sponsored by the International Institute for the Advancement of Counseling Theory and spearheaded by Dr. Ed Neukrug of Old Dominion University. Along with Dr. Courtland C. Lee, I co-chair the Global Subgroup that is engaged in the mapping project. This year we are exploring South America; our incredible graduate assistant, Kacey Bunting, is presently conducting interviews with leaders who engage in and teach counseling/helping/healing in South American countries. (We refer broadly to "counseling/helping/healing" as many countries don't have formal counseling professions.) As we analyze Kacey's interviews, we hope to learn about approaches that are unique to these countries and the extent to which and how Euro-American theories and practices are being adapted. We're eager to see what we can learn about mental health and the helping process in other countries. Of course, many challenges exist, including language barriers and lack of contact information that would enable us to identify and connect with key people. However, the anticipated benefits far outweigh the challenges. In addition to helping counselors and counseling students improve their "global citizenship," an attribute that Dr. Lee has emphasized in his writings, this project should provide us with a wealth of information that can be used to improve our counseling practices here in the United States, particularly with culturally diverse clients.

5. How have you seen the counseling profession evolve over the years? What changes, either positive or negative, have you observed?

Over my several decades as a counselor and counselor educator, I have witnessed incredible changes in our profession. I think these changes are reflected in the ways that the *ACA Code of Ethics* has evolved since it was first published in 1961. The original contained no section on technology, of course, but it also made no mention of diversity or multicultural competence. Early versions made what seem now to be rather simplistic statements like “dual relationships should be avoided.” Over the years, the code has been revised periodically to reflect a constantly changing and increasingly complex world of practice.

Overall, I think the most significant change in a positive direction has been the increased professionalization of counseling. Hard-won battles have resulted in the achievement of counselor licensure in all 50 states, the establishment of training standards, and the inclusion of counselors in diverse work settings like the military, inpatient and outpatient mental health facilities, and business and industry.

6. Looking ahead, what do you envision for the future of counseling, and what do you see as potential challenges or boundaries that might delay progress or limit growth in the profession? How do your relationships with counseling associations and organizations influence or shape the evolution of your practice, and do you see any potential challenges or support coming from these affiliations?

The counseling profession in the United States is, inevitably, a microcosm of our society. I am concerned that relationships among our professional associations seem to be divisive in some ways, and that right now our profession does not seem to speak with one voice to our public. My hope is that we will be able to focus on our common purpose and use our united voice to help ensure that social justice issues have a prominent position in our politics, our lives, and our work. Professional associations such as ACA and NBCC have been instrumental in my own professional development, and they continue to be a source of support. I am honored to have had opportunities to give back, in small measure, what I have received, through service to professional associations. If I may end with a word to early-career counselors and counselor educators—those service opportunities exist for you, as well. I hope you will get involved!

This concludes the 10th interview for the annual Lifetime Achievement in Counseling Series. TPC is grateful to Wendi L. Ferrell, Joshua D. Smith, and Neal D. Gray for providing this interview. Wendi L. Ferrell is a graduate candidate at the University of Mount Olive. Joshua D. Smith, PhD, NCC, LCMHC, is an assistant professor at the University of Mount Olive. Neal D. Gray, PhD, LCMHC-S, is a professor at Lenoir-Rhyne University. Correspondence can be emailed to Joshua Smith at jsmith@umo.edu.