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# APA Guidelines Awareness and Utilization: A First Look

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## *2014 Annual Report of the Policy and Planning Board*

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The 2014 Policy and Planning Board of the American Psychological Association (APA) was chaired by Kristin A. Hancock, PhD. Other members of the board included M. Lynne Cooper, PhD; Carol A. Dwyer, PhD; Douglas C. Haldeman, PhD; Ali M. Mattu, PhD; Maureen A. O'Connor, PhD; Richard E. Petty, PhD; Sandra L. Shullman, PhD; and Kristi Sands Van Sickle, PsyD.<sup>1</sup> Barry S. Anton, PhD, was the liaison for the Board of Directors. APA Bylaws Article XI.7 (<http://www.apa.org/about/governance/bylaws/article-11.aspx>) requires that the Policy and Planning Board report annually by publication to the membership and review the structure and function of the Association as a whole every fifth year.

### Introduction

In its 2011 annual report, the Policy and Planning Board (P&P) emphasized the importance of data-driven decision-making in the American Psychological Association (APA; American Psychological Association, 2012). P&P observed that “valid and reliable data are critical” to APA’s Strategic Plan (APA, 2009, Goals and Objectives), particularly Goal #1, which speaks to maximizing organizational effectiveness.

APA guidelines, defined in Association Rule 30-8 as “pronouncements, statements, or declarations that suggest or recommend specific professional behavior, endeavor, or conduct for psychologists or for individuals or organizations that work with psychologists” (APA, 2014a, p. 13), have been developed and used for many years to “. . . educate and to inform the practice of psychologists” and “. . . to stimulate debate and research” (APA, 2002, p. 1048). In developing its proposal for a systematic guidelines revision process for its 2013 annual report (APA, 2014b), P&P discovered that, to date, there had been no systematic data collection on the degree to which guidelines are actually used. Those who develop guidelines have had intended audiences and clear visions of how these documents could be used and have certainly had occasion to hear about how they are being used by psychologists (e.g., practitioners, educators, supervisors, students, etc.). Nevertheless, the association had yet to collect data about their actual use.

Consistent with its emphasis on the importance of data-driven decision making, P&P believed that data about the utilization of guidelines would inform future plans and policies around the development, use, revision, and dissemination of these documents. Such data would provide in-

formation for developers and governance groups alike on who uses these documents, the purposes for which they are being used, and the frequency of use. It would also give the association information on how to better disseminate these products. P&P decided, therefore, to collect preliminary data about the use of the 28 APA-approved guidelines that have been reviewed under Association Rule 30-8 and adopted as APA policy by the Council of Representatives. Table 1 presents a complete list of these guidelines.

### Method and Results

#### *Sources of Information*

The present study took three approaches to estimating the frequency and purposes of guidelines usage: (a) downloads and page views from the APA web pages using Google Analytics; (b) citations to published versions of the guidelines using Harzing’s (2007) Publish or Perish; and (c) reports of awareness, use, and ratings of importance from a random sample survey of the APA membership database. Each approach is characterized by its own unique strengths and weaknesses. However, P&P believes that, together, these paint a reasonably consistent picture of patterns of use and offer the association information which has not, until now, been systematically collected.

#### *Use as Indicated by Web Page Downloads and Page Views*

Google Analytics was used to analyze the number of page downloads and views of guidelines on the APA website. There are numerous ways in which individuals can access APA guidelines on the APA website. The guidelines are accessible at the APA Council of Representatives Policy Manual web page (<http://www.apa.org/about/policy/approved-guidelines.aspx>), the Press Room (<http://www.apa.org/news/press/statements/index.aspx>), and within relevant APA Directorate and Office web pages (e.g., Education, Practice, Public Interest, Science, Ethics, etc.). Links to practice guidelines are also listed in the sidebar of numerous APA web pages, particularly those in the Topic (<http://www.apa.org/topics/index.aspx>), News ([---

<sup>1</sup> The members of the Policy and Planning Board acknowledge with gratitude the guidance, major substantive contributions, and ongoing coordination provided by staff liaisons Sarah Jordan and Christine Chambers, as well as the ongoing consultation from Center for Workforce Studies Senior Research Officer Dr. Karen Stamm.](http://</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

**Table 1**

Number of Unique Views for All HTML American Psychological Association Guidelines Available on [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) From July 1, 2010, Through November 7, 2013 (Listed in Descending Order of Frequency)

Guidelines (year of approval)	Unique views
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research (2012)	115,568
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients (2000, 2011)	79,292
Guidelines for Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists (2002)	64,153
National Standards: The Teaching of High School Psychology (2012)	58,852
Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology (2011)	57,801
Guidelines for Test User Qualifications (2000)	49,750
Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education (2004)	27,116
Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention With Persons With Disabilities (2011)	24,007
Principles for the Validation and Use of Personal Selection Procedures (2003)	14,576
Guidelines for the Evaluation of Dementia and Age-Related Cognitive Change (1998, 2011)	13,041
Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major (2006, 2013)	8,515
Guidelines for Education and Training at the Doctoral and Postdoctoral Level in Consulting Psychology/Organizational Consulting Psychology (2005)	7,999
Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology (1994, 2011)	6,134
Record Keeping Guidelines (2007)	3,955
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Older Adults (2003, 2013)	3,050
Guidelines for Preparing High School Teachers: Course-Based and Standards-Based Approaches (2012)	2,814
Ethical Conduct of Behavioral Projects Involving Human Participants by High School Students (1997, 2012)	2,145
Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluations in Family Life Proceedings (1994, 2009)	2,067
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Girls and Women (2007)	1,061
Education and Training Guidelines: A Taxonomy for Education and Training in Professional Psychology (2012)	860
Guidelines for the Practice of Parenting Coordination (2011)	528
Guidelines for Psychological Practice in Health Care Delivery (1989, 2011)	519
Practice Parameter: Screening and Diagnosis of Autism (2000)	426
Guidelines for Prevention in Psychology (2013)	426
Guidelines for Psychological Evaluation in Child Protection Matters (1998, 2011)	424
Practice Guidelines regarding Psychologists' Involvement in Pharmacological Issues (2009)	239
Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Behavioral Projects in Schools (K–12; 2003, 2013)	231
Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology (2013)	108

[www.apa.org/news/index.aspx](http://www.apa.org/news/index.aspx)), [Monitor](http://www.apa.org/monitor) (<http://www.apa.org/monitor>), and [gradPSYCH](http://www.apa.org/gradpsych) (<http://www.apa.org/gradpsych>) sections of the APA website. The multiplicity of ways in which guidelines can be accessed makes it difficult to compile accurate statistics on use.

The data for this analysis were drawn from visits to the APA website between July 2010 and November 2013. Therefore, results from these data provide a “snapshot” of use and do not capture change over time. **Table 1** presents an overview of the number of unique views of guidelines on the [apa.org](http://www.apa.org) website from July 1, 2010, to November 7, 2013.

Several limitations apply to these data. First, they do not take into account the length of time each set of guidelines has been approved by the APA Council of Representatives or their availability or accessibility on the APA website. For example, the “Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology” were adopted in 2013; thus, the results for these guidelines represent only a few months compared to

most of the other guidelines listed. This is an important limitation as guidelines are most frequently accessed after their initial approval and dissemination. P&P suggests that further analyses of unique visits might utilize a specific timeframe for each set of guidelines. In other words, measuring unique views for 12 or 24 months following their adoption or following their publication in the *American Psychologist*. Another limitation identified by P&P is that guidelines are available on the APA website in both Adobe PDF and HTML formats. However, Google Analytics only tracks HTML page views. Thus, the data provided here are a likely underestimate of use. Additionally, no information is available on how visitors were referred to the guidelines. While it is likely visitors arrived at these guidelines through a combination of browsing the APA web page, a link from another website, or a web search, information on strategies used to access guidelines was not available. Finally, these data might also mask availability differences. It might be that some guidelines, especially those highly relevant to a

professional subset, are accessed frequently from other web pages or other sources. With no standard format or access point, there is no guarantee of uniform availability.

### Scholarly Citations

Another aspect of P&P's study on guidelines utilization involved investigating how often guidelines were being cited in published (i.e., print and electronic) professional literature. Early on, P&P decided to use Harzing.com's widely used software program, Publish or Perish (Harzing, 2007), to investigate citations. This program retrieves and analyzes academic citations, using Google Scholar and (since the Publish or Perish Version 4.1 release) Microsoft Academic Search to obtain data. Publish or Perish then analyzes these citations and presents them in a reasonably user-friendly way along with a number of specialized metrics that depict the extent to which an author or publication is cited in the scholarly literature. The citations that are accessed and analyzed by Publish or Perish are limited to those that reside in its two underlying external databases (Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic Search). Publish or Perish does not generate additional citation searches itself and has no independent database of its own.

It should be emphasized that Publish or Perish is described by its developers as being ". . . designed to empower *individual academics* [emphasis added] to present their case for research impact to its best advantage" (Harzing, 2007). The most common use of Publish or Perish seems to be in support of tenure applications by faculty members. This typical use by individuals on their own behalf is different in a number of respects from the use of Publish or Perish as an indicator of the impact of publications on the field. Primarily, these differences arise from the fact that it is usually a straightforward matter for individual scholars to conduct thorough and reliable searches in Publish or Perish for variations of their own names. They will also, of course, be clear about the titles of their works and the correct names of the publications in which they appear. Published articles are seldom reissued in revised form and books' new and revised editions are obvious and carefully noted. None of these is the case with APA's guidelines, however, which means that, for the purposes of this study, much more open-ended searches were required with much more need for professional judgment and interpretation of the results. The intended use of these guidelines drives several other factors relevant to tracking the citations of these publications. Guidelines are typically created and disseminated through APA and its constituent parts (e.g., divisions, boards and committees, ad hoc task forces). Developers (authors) are generally groups rather than individuals. These groups, in trying to ensure that their work reaches its intended audience, are creative in devising multiple outlets for their work and may partner with other organizations with similar interests. Thus, there have been opportunities and rationales for making changes in the guidelines' titles, authors, and minor editorial changes, corrections, and ad hoc updates. For instance, guidelines adopted by APA cite the association as author; however, this has not always been the case. Issues such as

revisions (with possible changes in titles), changes in authorship policy, and editorial errors can pose significant challenges for citation analysis. Given these constraints, the reliability of results from any particular search cannot be assured.

### Guidelines Utilization Survey

**Survey design and response rate.** For the purpose of the P&P survey, the Center for Workforce Studies drew a sample of 10,000 members and affiliates from the APA membership database. Individuals with no e-mail address on file and those who asked that APA restrict the use of their e-mail address were first excluded. A simple random sample of 10,000 was then drawn from the pared-down database, with oversampling of low base rate member categories to ensure a minimum sample size of 100 per group. Community College Teacher Affiliates was the only group that required oversampling to achieve this goal. In May 2014, an e-mail containing a link to the survey was then mailed to all 10,000 selected individuals. Second and third reminders were sent at approximately 1-week intervals. The final response rate was 16.6%, which is higher than member surveys typically sponsored by APA, which hover around 10%.

Responder and nonresponder comparisons on gender, age, race/ethnicity, highest degree obtained, member status and employment status revealed few differences. However, fellows were more likely to respond than members and affiliates, and members working full-time were more likely to respond than those working part-time or not at all (44.4% of responders vs. 29.9% of nonresponders).

**Sample description.** For the purposes of the present report, student affiliate responses ( $n = 356$ ) and responses from those who were working but not in school ( $n = 1,078$ ) were analyzed separately. Retired respondents ( $n = 104$ ) and those who were neither working nor attending school ( $n = 47$ ) were excluded from the current analysis because our interest was in determining how members and affiliates currently use the guidelines in their day-to-day professional lives.

The primary sample of working respondents was 52 years old, on average. Sixty-one percent were female and 83% were non-Hispanic Whites versus 17% who were members of one or more ethnic/racial minority groups. Seventy-one percent of working respondents held a PhD as their terminal degree, and 14% held a PsyD degree.

In comparison, the student sample relative to the working sample was significantly younger (31 vs. 52 years old,  $F = 840.4$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ), as expected, and also more ethnically and racially diverse (28% minority status vs. 17%,  $\chi^2 = 20.4$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Reflecting the increasing feminization of the field, the student sample was 80% female versus 61% in the working sample ( $\chi^2 = 40.7$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Finally, relative to the degree profile of the working sample, a greater proportion of students were pursuing a PsyD degree (25% vs. 14%,  $\chi^2 = 26.0$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and a smaller proportion were pursuing a PhD degree (46% vs. 71%,  $\chi^2 = 68.3$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

**Table 2**  
*Primary Professional Identity for Student and Working Samples*

	Working		Student	
	N	%	N	%
Scientist	156	14.7	83	24.3
Educator	218	20.6	13	3.8
Clinician	547	51.7	198	57.9
Administrator	47	4.4	1	.3
Applied/Consulting	55	5.2	19	5.6
Other	35	3.3	28	8.2

Respondents were also asked to indicate their primary identity as a psychologist. As shown in Table 2, the majority of both the student and working sample identified as clinicians. Among students, the second most common identity was scientist, and the third most common was educator. In contrast, the rank order of endorsement of these two identities was reversed among the working sample.

**Description of primary measures.** For each set of 28 APA guidelines, respondents indicated whether they were “not aware” of it, were “aware but never used” it, or were “aware and [had] used” the guidelines. For those respondents who indicated that they were both aware of and had used the set of guidelines, a series of additional questions was asked about the frequency of using each set of guidelines in the following ways:

- Suggested to others that they consult the guidelines
- Used in teaching, supervision, curriculum development, or continuing education
- Used to design or develop a procedure, protocol, technique, or approach in your work
- Used to justify/explain an approach you’ve taken in your work to someone in or outside of your organization (e.g., an institutional review board or accrediting agency)
- Cited in a publication, presentation, social media, or other communication
- Used to prepare a report, testimony, or other document in a legal context
- Used in a public advocacy or public policy context
- Used in some “other” aspect of your work

Ratings were provided on a 5-point scale from *never* to *frequently* for each of these uses. Finally, respondents who indicated *any* use of a given set of guidelines rated the overall “importance” of those guidelines on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *very important*. The exact wording of the question was, “Thinking of *all* of the different ways in which you have ever used the [NAME OF GUIDELINES], how important would you say it has been to you in your work?”

To help us understand and characterize patterns of guideline usage, respondents were also asked to indicate

the “type of activity you devote the majority of your time to in a typical week,” that is, “your primary activity.” The forced-choice responses (consistent with those used in the APA Membership Directory) were direct client/patient care/health care services, teaching/education, research, administration/management, consultation, service to your institution or the field, and other. However, none of the subset of respondents used in the present report chose service to institution/field or other as their primary activity. Thus, only the first five categories are used in our analyses. The proportions of individuals who chose each of these categories among the subset of working respondents were direct service, 49%; teaching, 23%; research, 13%; administration, 9%; and consulting, 7%. Because the categories of primary activities may not adequately capture how students spend their time, students were not included in analyses based on primary activity.

**Survey results.** The results of the survey are described next and include findings on (a) awareness of guidelines, (b) use of guidelines, and (c) perceived importance of guidelines.

**Awareness of guidelines.** The first set of analyses examined rates of awareness overall and separately among the student and working subsets, for each of the 28 sets of guidelines (APA, 2014c). As shown in Table 3, levels of awareness in the total sample range from a low of 20.4% for “Guidelines for Preparing High School Teachers” to a high of 72.3% for the “Record Keeping Guidelines.”

Widely recognized guidelines (i.e., those that were endorsed by 60% or more of the sample) also included the following: “Ethical Guidelines for the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research” (70.4%), “Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients” (63.8%), the “Guidelines for Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists” (63.5%), “Guidelines for Working with Persons with Disabilities” (61.4%), and “Test User Qualification Guidelines” (60.5%). Over a third of the guidelines (39.3%) achieved a recognition level of at least 50%.

It is important to point out that rates of awareness for different types of guidelines reflect the composition of the sample. For example, respondents in our sample were least aware of the elementary and secondary school guidelines, with an average level of awareness of 26.2% across the four sets of guidelines. This relatively low rate of awareness is consistent with the fact that only 17% of the sample identified primarily as an educator, and only 21% of the sample said that teaching was their primary activity. In contrast, the highest rates of overall awareness were observed among the categories of guidelines most likely to be used by practicing clinicians (i.e., guidelines for general practice, for working with specialty populations, and for working in special settings). This is also consistent with the make-up of the overall sample. Fifty-three percent of our sample chose clinician as their primary identity, and 49% indicated that direct service was their primary activity.

**Table 3**

*Levels of Awareness of Guidelines in the Total Sample (Working + Students; Listed in Descending Order of Total Awareness)*

	Total awareness N (%)	Aware and used N (%)	Aware but never used N (%)	Not aware N (%)
Record Keeping Guidelines	1,033 (72.3)	757 (53)	276 (19.3)	395 (27.7)
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research	1,005 (70.4)	207 (14.5)	798 (55.9)	423 (29.6)
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients	911 (63.7)	346 (24.2)	565 (39.5)	517 (36.2)
Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists	906 (63.5)	432 (30.3)	474 (33.2)	522 (36.6)
Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention With Persons With Disabilities	875 (61.4)	339 (23.8)	536 (37.6)	551 (38.6)
Guidelines for Test User Qualifications	864 (60.5)	490 (34.3)	374 (26.2)	564 (39.5)
Guidelines for Psychological Practice of Older Adults	830 (58.2)	278 (19.5)	552 (38.7)	596 (41.8)
Guidelines for Psychological Evaluations in Child Protection Matters	816 (57.1)	236 (16.5)	580 (40.6)	612 (42.9)
Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology	796 (55.9)	219 (15.4)	577 (40.5)	630 (44.2)
Guidelines for Psychological Practice in Health Care Delivery Systems	769 (53.9)	259 (18.1)	510 (35.7)	659 (46.1)
Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluations in Family Life Proceedings	767 (53.7)	176 (12.3)	591 (41.4)	660 (46.3)
Guidelines for Evaluation of Dementia and Age-Related Cognitive Decline	690 (48.4)	188 (13.2)	502 (35.2)	737 (51.6)
Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology	691 (48.4)	151 (10.6)	540 (37.8)	737 (51.6)
Guidelines for Education and Training at the Doctoral and Postdoctoral Level in Consulting Psychology/Organizational Consulting Psychology	667 (46.7)	162 (11.3)	505 (35.4)	761 (53.3)
Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education	624 (43.7)	236 (16.5)	388 (27.2)	803 (56.3)
Education and Training Guidelines: A Taxonomy for Education and Training in Professional Psychology	623 (43.6)	217 (15.2)	406 (28.4)	806 (56.4)
Guidelines for Undergraduate Psychology Major Practice Guidelines regarding Psychologists' Involvement in Pharmacological Issues	601 (42.0)	222 (15.5)	379 (26.5)	827 (57.9)
Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education Psychology	586 (41.0)	109 (7.6)	477 (33.4)	841 (58.9)
Practice Parameter: Screening and Diagnosis of Autism	568 (39.8)	170 (11.9)	398 (27.9)	860 (60.2)
Guidelines for Psychological Practice of Girls and Women	548 (38.4)	127 (8.9)	421 (29.5)	881 (61.7)
Guidelines for Prevention in Psychology	532 (37.2)	199 (13.9)	333 (23.3)	896 (62.7)
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Behavioral Projects Involving Human Participants by High School Students	518 (36.3)	170 (11.9)	348 (24.4)	909 (63.7)
Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures	480 (33.6)	124 (8.7)	356 (24.9)	948 (66.4)
National Standards: the Teaching of High School Psychology	435 (30.5)	127 (8.9)	308 (21.6)	992 (69.5)
Guidelines for the Practice of Parenting Coordination	398 (27.9)	66 (4.6)	332 (23.3)	1,029 (72.1)
Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Behavioral Projects in Schools (K-12)	375 (26.3)	113 (7.9)	262 (18.4)	1,052 (73.7)
Guidelines for Preparing High School Teachers: Course- Based and Standards-Based Approaches	345 (24.2)	45 (3.2)	300 (21)	1,082 (75.8)
	291 (20.4)	48 (3.4)	243 (17)	1,136 (79.6)

Note. Totals do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

A comparison of levels of awareness among professionals working in the field versus students revealed that awareness did not differ across the two groups for the majority of guidelines (18 out of 28). Table 4 summarizes

the results for the 12 guidelines that significantly differed across the two groups. Students were consistently more aware of guidelines for working with specialty populations. They were also significantly more aware of the

**Table 4**  
Levels of Awareness by Working and Student Samples

	Total sample (N = 1,317) %	Working (N = 1,007) %	Students (N = 310) %	Work vs. Student (p value) %
National Standards: The Teaching of High School Psychology	27.6	30.8	17.1	<.001
Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology	39	40.5	34.2	.048
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research	69.8	68.3	74.8	.028
Guidelines for Test User Qualifications	60.4	62.2	54.5	.015
Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology	48.9	52.4	37.4	<.001
Practice Parameter: Screening and Diagnosis of Autism	38.5	36	46.4	.001
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Girls and Women	37.8	35.3	45.8	.001
Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention With Persons With Disabilities	61.3	59.4	67.3	.013
Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists	63.8	60.9	73.2	<.001
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients	64	61.8	71	.003
Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology	56	58.1	49.2	.006
Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluations in Family Life Proceedings	53	56.2	42.6	<.001

“Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research.” In contrast, professionals working in the field were significantly more aware of two of the educational guidelines, as well as “Guidelines for Test User Qualifications,” “Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology,” and “Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology.”

Detailed analyses of levels of awareness by primary activity were conducted among the working sample only. We chose to focus on primary activity rather than primary identity because guideline awareness and usage should be driven largely by one’s need for the guidelines in their day-to-day work, which should be more closely reflected by their primary activities than by their primary identity. In addition, primary activity and primary identity overlap to a large degree ( $\chi^2 = 2,195.7$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = .000$ ), indicating that highly similar results would be obtained regardless of which variable was used.

Awareness levels were also analyzed as a function of primary activity. As previously explained, these analyses were conducted among working professionals only. The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 5. Not surprisingly, levels of awareness differed by primary activity for 23 of 28 guidelines. Moreover, observed differences in levels of awareness were largely consistent with the primary activities that respondents reported. For example, individuals who reported teaching as their primary activity also reported the highest levels of awareness of guidelines for elementary, secondary, and undergraduate education. In addition, rates of awareness of the categories of guidelines judged to be most relevant to clinical practice (i.e., general practice,

specialty populations, special settings) were, in fact, most widely endorsed by those indicating direct service as their primary activity (96% of whom chose clinician as their primary identity). Although the overall rates of awareness of guidelines within these three categories conformed to this pattern, not all guidelines within the categories conformed to it. For example, almost equally high rates of awareness were found for the “Guidelines for Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists” among individuals citing direct service, teaching, and administration as their primary activities, presumably reflecting the guidelines’ broad relevance.

**Use of guidelines.** Next, we conducted detailed analyses of use by primary activity among the working sample. In this case, however, questions about use were only asked of those who indicated that they were aware of each guideline in the first place. Thus, sample sizes vary considerably across each analysis. The results of the use analyses (including the number of individuals who were aware of each guideline and were thus included in the analysis) are summarized in Table 6.

An examination of the overall rates of use reported in Table 6 reveals substantial variability in how widely the different sets of guidelines are used. The highest rates of use were reported for the “Record Keeping Guidelines,” and, interestingly, these high rates were not just limited to individuals who identified direct service as their primary activity. In contrast, relatively low rates of use (many in the single digits) were reported for three of the four sets of K–12 guidelines.

**Table 5**  
*Awareness by Primary Activity Among Working Sample*

Guideline name organized by category	Primary activity					Significance test (p value)
	Research (N = 124) %	Teaching (N = 226) %	Direct service (N = 478) %	Administration (N = 97) %	Consulting (N = 66) %	
Guidelines for Elementary and Secondary Education						
Guidelines for Preparing High School Teachers: Course-Based and Standards-Based Approaches	17.6	37.6	15.5	20.6	16.4	.000
National Standards: The Teaching of High School Psychology	25.6	50.4	22.4	34.0	28.4	.000
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Behavioral Projects Involving Human Participants by High School Students	24.8	41.2	29.9	29.9	40.3	.005
Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Behavioral Projects in Schools (K–12)	18.6	31.0	21.9	21.7	20.9	.043
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	21.7	40.1	22.4	26.6	26.5	
Guidelines for Undergraduate Education						
Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology	36.8	60.2	32.4	39.2	41.8	.000
Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major	36.0	63.3	30.9	43.3	41.8	.000
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	36.4	61.8	31.7	41.3	41.8	
Guidelines for Graduate Education						
Education and Training Guidelines: A Taxonomy for Education and Training in Professional Psychology	29.6	47.6	42.0	52.6	46.3	.004
Guidelines for Education and Training at the Doctoral and Postdoctoral Level in Consulting Psychology/Organizational Consulting Psychology	43.2	46.9	44.7	48.5	58.2	.285
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	36.4	47.3	43.4	50.6	52.3	
Research Guidelines						
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research	65.6	73.9	67.9	67.0	58.2	.139
Guidelines for Testing and Personnel						
Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures	32.0	32.3	27.1	33.0	52.2	.001
Guidelines for Test User Qualifications	47.2	56.6	67.2	63.9	68.7	.000
Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education	38.4	48.2	40.2	47.4	53.7	.061
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	39.2	45.7	44.8	48.1	58.2	
Guidelines for General Practice						
Record Keeping Guidelines	42.4	60.6	89.8	74.2	65.7	.000
Practice Guidelines Regarding Psychologists' Involvement in Pharmacological Issues	31.2	39.4	42.1	39.2	46.3	.198
Guidelines for Prevention in Psychology	24.0	35.2	38.0	34.0	35.8	.074
Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology	28.0	35.8	67.6	55.7	44.8	.000
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	31.4	42.8	59.4	50.8	48.2	

**(table continues)**

**Table 5 (continued)**

Guideline name organized by category	Primary activity					Significance test (p value)
	Research (N = 124) %	Teaching (N = 226) %	Direct service (N = 478) %	Administration (N = 97) %	Consulting (N = 66) %	
Guidelines for Working With Diverse Populations						
Practice Parameter: Screening and Diagnosis of Autism	22.4	36.6	40.0	36.1	32.8	.010
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Girls and Women	29.6	35.8	36.3	37.1	32.8	.674
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Older Adults	41.9	51.3	64.5	60.8	48.5	.000
Guidelines for the Evaluation of Dementia and Age-Related Cognitive Change	34.4	43.4	55.3	50.0	40.3	.000
Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention With Persons With Disabilities	44.0	55.8	64.6	62.9	59.7	.001
Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists	47.2	62.8	63.7	65.0	55.2	.010
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients	46.4	53.1	69.3	72.2	53.7	.000
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	38.0	48.4	56.2	54.9	46.1	
Guidelines for Working in Special Settings						
Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology	29.6	48.2	69.9	61.9	58.2	.000
Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluations in Family Life Proceedings	31.2	42.5	69.5	57.7	55.2	.000
Guidelines for Psychological Evaluations in Child Protection Matters	34.4	48.7	64.7	66.0	59.7	.000
Guidelines for the Practice of Parenting Coordination	14.4	19.8	35.4	26.8	27.3	.000
Guidelines for Psychological Practice in Health Care Delivery Systems	40.8	45.6	60.3	58.8	50.8	.000
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	30.1	41.0		54.2	50.2	

Note. 993–995 represents total N. Minimums Ns reported, but Ns varied by no more than 2 across all activities. The informal grouping of guidelines in Table 5 is for data presentation purposes.

Not surprisingly, levels of use differed by primary activity for the majority of guidelines (17 of 28), and patterns of use were again generally consistent with the primary activity respondents reported. For example, individuals who reported teaching as their primary activity reported the highest average levels of use of guidelines for elementary, secondary, and undergraduate education. Similarly, the highest overall rates of use of the three categories of guidelines judged to be most relevant to individuals engaged in clinical practice (i.e., general practice, working with diverse populations, and working in special settings) were, in fact, most commonly endorsed by those indicating direct service as their primary activity. Likewise, the highest rates of use of guidelines for testing and personnel were reported by those whose primary activity was consulting (i.e., “Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures” and the “Guidelines for Test User Qualifications”).

Despite these general patterns, there were several interesting exceptions. For example, individuals who described research as their primary activity did not re-

port the highest level of use of the “Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research”; rather, those involved in administration did. Similarly, those who described education as their primary activity did not report the highest levels of use of the graduate education guidelines—again, administrators did.

#### **Perceived importance of guidelines.**

Finally, ratings of importance were analyzed among those who had ever used, in any capacity, a given set of guidelines. As a result, the number of respondents for many of the guidelines was quite small, in some cases, falling into the single digits for a particular category of activity. For this reason, we report the overall importance rating among all those who ever used the guideline. However, to provide a sense of whether those who use a set of guideline the most also regard it as more valuable, we also provide importance ratings for the category or categories of users reporting the highest overall rates of usage. These data are summarized in Table 7.

**Table 6***Guideline Usage by Primary Activity Among Those Indicating Awareness of Each Guideline*

Guideline name organized by category	Primary activity					Significance test (p value)
	Research	Teaching	Direct service	Administration	Consulting	
Guidelines for Elementary and Secondary Education						
Guidelines for Preparing High School Teachers: Course-Based and Standards-Based Approaches	2.9 (22)	27.0 (84)	8.1 (69)	11.5 (19)	33.3 (9)	.003
National Standards: The Teaching of High School Psychology	4.3 (32)	35.0 (111)	7.1 (100)	12.5 (32)	15.2 (18)	.000
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Behavioral Projects Involving Human Participants by High School Students	24.6 (30)	35.3 (92)	22.2 (137)	24.3 (29)	24.8 (27)	.285
Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Behavioral Projects in Schools (K–12)	7.5 (23)	27.5 (69)	6.3 (99)	9.8 (21)	7.5 (14)	.001
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	9.8	31.2	10.9	14.5	19.9	
Guidelines for Undergraduate Education						
Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology	27.0 (46)	49.3 (133)	16.2 (146)	27.6 (36)	22.6 (28)	.000
Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major	33.0 (45)	52.1 (139)	25.5 (143)	27.4 (40)	29.8 (28)	.000
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	30.0	50.7	20.7	27.5	26.2	
Guidelines for Graduate Education						
Education and Training Guidelines: A Taxonomy for Education and Training in Professional Psychology	30.3 (37)	40.4 (106)	30.8 (192)	47.6 (51)	27.2 (31)	.106
Guidelines for Education and Training at the Doctoral and Postdoctoral Level in Consulting Psychology/Organizational Consulting Psychology	16.8 (54)	30.6 (105)	21.0 (207)	34.8 (46)	26.3 (39)	.097
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	23.5	35.5	25.9	41.2	26.7	
Research Guidelines						
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research	26.0 (82)	35.4 (164)	14.0 (311)	18.8 (63)	11.4 (38)	.000
Guidelines for Testing and Personnel						
Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures	33.9 (40)	34.4 (72)	17.8 (125)	31.1 (32)	57.4 (34)	.000
Guidelines for Test User Qualifications	46.3 (57)	49.4 (125)	62.2 (307)	62.6 (51)	75.1 (45)	.004
Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education	29.7 (47)	45.1 (107)	34.5 (185)	31.2 (45)	39.6 (35)	.264
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	36.6	43.0	38.2	41.6	57.4	
Guidelines for General Practice						
Record Keeping Guidelines	47.3 (52)	59 (134)	84.5 (411)	64.1 (70)	79.5 (43)	.000
Practice Guidelines Regarding Psychologists' Involvement in Pharmacological Issues	18.6 (39)	17.6 (86)	25.4 (92)	21.4 (37)	2.9 (31)	.063
Guidelines for Prevention in Psychology	28.5 (30)	33.4 (80)	38.5 (169)	28.2 (31)	37.0 (24)	.705
Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology	15.6 (35)	25.9 (79)	22.7 (307)	25.2 (52)	26.2 (28)	.783
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	27.5	34.0	42.8	34.7	36.4	
Guidelines for Working With Diverse Populations						
Practice Parameter: Screening and Diagnosis of Autism	12.7 (28)	17.1 (82)	32.9 (181)	22.2 (35)	29.0 (21)	.031

**(table continues)**

**Table 6 (continued)**

Guideline name organized by category	Primary activity					Significance test (p value)
	Research	Teaching	Direct service	Administration	Consulting	
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Girls and Women	22.7 (37)	44.6 (79)	41.1 (167)	30.2 (36)	28.1 (21)	.102
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Older Adults	17.4 (52)	26.0 (115)	39.0 (293)	29.8 (57)	28.1 (31)	.009
Guidelines for the Evaluation of Dementia and Age-Related Cognitive Change	21.3 (43)	20.8 (97)	31.1 (249)	28.3 (46)	27.3 (26)	.347
Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention With Persons With Disabilities	20.5 (55)	32.7 (124)	45.3 (294)	33.0 (60)	43.7 (39)	.003
Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists	38.7 (58)	49.0 (140)	44.4 (291)	60.0 (61)	33.5 (36)	.056
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients	23.3 (58)	36.1 (118)	44.4 (314)	39.4 (68)	19.3 (35)	.003
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	22.4	31.9	39.7	34.7	25.8	
Guidelines for Working in Special Settings						
Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology	12.4 (37)	20.1 (107)	33.8 (317)	24.4 (58)	35.4 (38)	.007
Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluations in Family Life Proceedings	11.5 (39)	27.7 (93)	26.9 (318)	17.2 (54)	27.1 (36)	.156
Guidelines for Psychological Evaluations in Child Protection Matters	23.2 (42)	29.5 (107)	35.1 (295)	15.9 (62)	36.8 (39)	.026
Guidelines for the Practice of Parenting Coordination	7.1 (18)	39.7 (44)	34.8 (161)	16.1 (25)	19.0 (17)	.027
Guidelines for Psychological Practice in Health Care Delivery Systems	26.0 (51)	20.5 (101)	41.3 (274)	50.8 (65)	33.2 (33)	.000
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	16.0	27.5	34.4	24.9	30.3	

Note. The informal grouping of guidelines in Table 6 is for data presentation purposes.

As shown in Table 7, the overall mean ratings of importance fell between 3.1 and 3.9 and, thus, were all above the midpoint of the 1-to-5 scale. When comparing the overall importance ratings to the ratings provided by the highest user categories, it is interesting to note that importance ratings were not systematically higher among those reporting the highest levels of use. Although this was true for 16 of the 28 guidelines, in nine cases, ratings among the highest user group(s) were lower than the average, and in three cases virtually identical.

**Respondent comments.** Some survey respondents also provided narrative comments. A number of them noted that the survey actually increased their awareness of the existence of APA guidelines.

Thank you for conducting this study. While I have no doubt the results will provide important information for the APA, it also served to raise my awareness of some guidelines that I was not previously aware of. [Response 8]

I just took the APA survey on guidelines, and I was amazed to find that there were so many. [Response 29]

In addition, some comments were from psychologists in other countries. One respondent wrote,

In the Netherlands I am a member of the Board of our "Dutch APA" that is: the Dutch Institute of Psychologists (NIP), section

Health Care (including Mental Health Care) and in this section I have the special position of responsibility for developing and maintaining guidelines. So it was very interesting for me to participate in your survey. [Response 30]

Such comments serve to remind us that APA guidelines may function as resources in international settings and inform the work of psychologists in other countries.

## Discussion

It is important to note that there are ways in which guidelines have been used that may not have been adequately captured in this study but that may nevertheless have far-reaching implications and should be mentioned. Many of APA's published guidelines have been referenced in court cases (e.g., "Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluations in Family Life Proceedings" in *Sumpter v. Sumpter*, 2013), statutes (e.g., "Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services to Ethnic, Linguistic, and Culturally Diverse Populations" in *Creating Presumption of Good Faith*, 2002), and regulations (e.g., "General Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services" in *Ethical Standards, Professional Conduct, and Disciplinary Procedures*, 2014; and Psychologist & Psychological Associates (2014)). "Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients" was used in the development of *Sexual Orientation*

**Table 7**  
*Importance Ratings and Highest Percentage Use, Weighted Means*

Guideline name organized by category	Overall importance		Most frequent user group	(Weighted) Mean	Group 1 N of highest user group(s)
	M	N			
Guidelines for Elementary and Secondary Education					
Guidelines for Preparing High School Teachers: Course-Based and Standards-Based Approaches	3.9	46	Consulting/Teaching	3.7	18
National Standards: The Teaching of High School Psychology	3.8	28	Teaching	4.0	33
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Behavioral Projects Involving Human Participants by High School Students	3.3	69	Teaching	3.8	27
Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Behavioral Projects in Schools (K–12)	3.2	24	Teaching	3.3	15
Average Importance for Guidelines in Category	3.6				
Guidelines for Undergraduate Education					
Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology	3.5	97	Teaching	3.9	55
Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major	3.5	132	Teaching	3.8	67
Average Importance for Guidelines in Category	3.5				
Guidelines for Graduate Education					
Education and Training Guidelines: A Taxonomy for Education and Training in Professional Psychology	3.4	121	Administration	3.9	23
Guidelines for Education and Training at the Doctoral and Postdoctoral Level in Consulting Psychology/Organizational Consulting Psychology	3.4	98	Administration	4.0	15
Average Importance for Guidelines in Category	3.4				
Research Guidelines					
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Nonhuman Animals in Research	3.1	123	Teaching	3.4	51
Guidelines for Testing and Personnel					
Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures	3.5	70	Consulting	4.1	15
Guidelines for Test User Qualifications	3.4	290	Consulting	3.5	26
Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education	3.5	123	Teaching	3.3	39
Average Awareness for Guidelines in Category	3.5				
Guidelines for General Practice					
Record Keeping Guidelines	3.7	465	Direct service	3.7	287
Practice Guidelines Regarding Psychologists' Involvement in Pharmacological Issues	3.5	65	Direct service	3.6	37
Guidelines for Prevention in Psychology	3.5	89	Direct service/Consulting	3.4	51
Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology	3.6	107	Teaching/Administration/Consulting	3.8	33
Average Importance for Guidelines in Category	3.6				

**(table continues)**

**Table 7 (continued)**

Guideline name organized by category	Overall importance		Most frequent user group	(Weighted) Mean	Group 1 N of highest user group(s)
	M	N			
Guidelines for Working With Diverse Populations					
Practice Parameter: Screening and Diagnosis of Autism	3.6	71	Direct service	3.5	45
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Girls and Women	3.5	102	Teaching	3.8	27
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Older Adults	3.4	154	Direct service	3.3	94
Guidelines for the Evaluation of Dementia and Age-Related Cognitive Change	3.5	111	Direct service	3.6	67
Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention With Persons With Disabilities	3.6	88	Direct service/Consulting	3.5	116
Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists	3.7	235	Administration	4.1	33
Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients	3.6	200	Direct service	3.6	116
Average Importance for Guidelines in Category	3.6				
Guidelines for Working in Special Settings					
Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology	3.9	140	Consulting/Direct service	4.0	97
Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluations in Family Life Proceedings	3.6	112	Teaching/Direct service/Consulting	3.6	98
Guidelines for Psychological Evaluations in Child Protection Matters	3.7	136	Direct service/Consulting	3.6	92
Guidelines for the Practice of Parenting Coordination	3.6	70	Teaching	3.2	14
Guidelines for Psychological Practice in Health Care Delivery Systems	3.5	161	Administration	3.4	27
Average Importance for Guidelines in Category	3.7				

Note. Multiple "user groups" were included if means were <2% points apart.

Change Efforts (2013), the first legislation in the country to prohibit the use of conversion therapy with minors by licensed mental health professionals. California's legislature explicitly relied on (a) APA's Resolution on Appropriate Affirmative Responses to Sexual Orientation Distress and Change Efforts and (b) the work of APA's Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation as evidence of the need for the law, both of which were informed by the guidelines. Guidelines are also used in training sessions for psychologists and attorneys in forensic settings (J. S. Meier, Personal communication, March 9, 2015). In such matters, frequency of use is not the issue. The potential impact of their use upon the public interest is.

The results of this study indicate that, in general terms, guidelines are used in work and educational settings by thousands. Their application spans the entire spectrum of research, practice, education and public policy. After decades of development and distribution, these data suggest that guidelines have an impact that affirms ongoing efforts at their development and revision as new literature appears.

However, the initial basic question of how current guidelines are being used becomes progressively complex as one considers uses, users, and settings for use. The challenge of tracking guidelines is one fraught with complexity. Frequency of use, while an obviously compelling aspect, clearly does not give a complete picture of the impact of guidelines on the practice of psychology. It is clear that some guidelines achieve substantial significance in psychology by their more limited use in special situations such as particular forensic applications. It appears that guidelines can both summarize and suggest current best practice and also be central to debate about directions for future public policy development. For instance, in the example cited above ("Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients" in supporting CA SB-1172), the guideline in question is used as a compendium of the most recent literature on a particular issue.

There appears to be a wide range of awareness and usage among existing guidelines, depending upon the range of applicability to various aspects of psychology itself. Some guidelines work within more narrowly defined do-

mains and processes (such as telepsychology) and others are used across many contexts and purposes (such as population guidelines used in both educational and practice settings). It was of interest to note that, although some guidelines matched with predictable usage groups (e.g., “Guidelines for Record Keeping” with practitioners, educational guidelines with teachers), others (such as population-specific public interest guidelines) attracted interest and use from a variety of groups. Given the widespread appeal of many guidelines, their dissemination is of critical importance.

However, there is substantial variation in how guidelines are distributed, following their development and approval by APA governance. Like some other policies adopted or reports received by APA, some guidelines appear to languish for lack of visibility. It would be helpful to establish clearer processes and more focused strategies for guidelines distribution, perhaps based on findings from Google Analytics. Now that general usage has been assessed, further studies of guideline usage should likely be more targeted on specific purposes that may inform more effective dissemination strategies.

Optimally, guidelines are developed with an awareness of their relative contexts, implicit assumptions, and values. It is recommended that future guidelines are developed, and existing ones revised, to reflect a growing understanding of a diverse, multicultural world. This is especially critical as guidelines are apparently used as educative tools across user groups and for diverse purposes. Interestingly, the students in the study were, at times, as equally aware of the existence of guidelines as working psychologists—and, in some instances, more aware of them. This would suggest that many guidelines are being used in educational and training settings, which is certainly consistent with their purpose. Some thought might be given to additional ways of including guidelines in educational and training tools (e.g., inclu-

sion in core textbooks where appropriate, links to guidelines in course syllabi, or inclusion in training site orientation materials as relevant).

Finally, it is clear the process of guidelines development successfully creates a significant level of professional discussion. This is important to the field of psychology and creates a useful adjunct to ethics, policy development, and numerous other applications.

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