

# Ethical issues for the integration of religion and spirituality in therapy resear...

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



## **Psychology**

### Abstract

Psychologist practice a career that is based on a moral framework. As a result, psychology is closely intertwined to religious beliefs as they form a moral background for most people all around the world. The American psychological association has, therefore, had to put up a framework that governs the behaviors of psychologist while dealing with patients of sensitive religious belief systems. This code of the framework does not necessarily forbid religion in psychology but separates it enough to provide an agreeable boundary for therapist who integrate religion in psychology as well as patients who do not necessarily share similar religious beliefs. This paper will address the code of ethics created by the American Psychological Association about religion. In addition, it will address some of the emerging issues that have developed with the integration of religion in psychology practice and separation for clients who do not share the same belief systems.

The American Psychological Association formally acknowledged religion when creating their ethical guidelines as an issue that psychologist should consider in their practice (Nickles 2011). In the APA, code of ethics, under the section of human relations, states that psychologists should not discriminate against their clients due to difference in their religious or cultural background. In 1992, the American Psychological Association created several guidelines that would be used psychologist about religion in therapy. Among them, one stated that psychologists should hold high

sensitivity towards a client with a diverse belief system (Nickles 2011). In addition, psychologists are required to accept difference in religious beliefs and communication in their clients.

Garzon et al. (2009) argues that integration of psychology and theology has taken a dramatically maturity since the 1960's. Such practices are now governed by numerous codes of practice and ethical guidelines due to the broad ethical beliefs throughout the world. As a result, such psychologist should engage in specialized training since they need to be adequate informed and equipped to deal with this class of client. However, this does not mean that due to the religious affiliation that these clients should be subjected to substandard quality of therapy (Plante 2008). Therefore, psychologist who wishes to take this path in their career should engage in the necessary training. This is because of the fact that there have been numerous cases of substandard quality in therapy due to the increase of such needed services.

Gregory et al. (2008) argue that the disclosure by a psychologist regarding their religious affiliations has a huge impact on the decision by the client to choose the said psychologist as their therapists. This is a notion that has been supported by various studies performed by numerous researchers. Notably, research indicated that participants reported to be more likely inclined to see a psychologist with a religious affiliation than an atheist psychologist does. However, many argue that this is because many more people have a background in religion and are, therefore, more comfortable sharing with a psychologist with similar alignment (Walker 2013). Patients with atheist believe or no religious affiliations, on the other hand, prefer

therapist with similar ideologies.

Some of the factors that drive patients to make such decisions due to religious affiliations are factors like homosexuality and other choices of lifestyle, which stir controversies. Walker (2013) states that psychologists are nevertheless allowed to impose their religious beliefs on clients if they are not offering psychological assistance aligned with theological assistance. Not only do such tendencies violate the code by which psychologists practice on, but also make their patients feel uncomfortable.

It is important to note that religion offers a contemporary outlook in how psychologist practices this form of medicine. Plante (2008) argues that while therapists consider themselves as religious people, they have very little training in using religion to serve their clients. If properly trained, psychologist can use religion to provide better services for their client. This counts for clients with both religious affiliations and even those without. In conclusion, religious affiliations are a big factor for patients choosing a therapist for the first time. While most clients feel that the religious affiliations of their psychologist might influence the way they offer therapy, this is usually hardly the case. This is because psychologist who offers non-religious based therapy usually follows a code of conduct that prevents them from imposing their belief on to clients as per the American Psychological Association standard. In addition, it is important to note that psychologist with religious affiliation may use their background to provide even better services without violating this code.

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