

# Can Political Neutrality or Disclosure be an Impediment to Mental Health Therapy?

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## Introduction

Should therapists tell clients about their political views before they decide whether or not to establish a client-therapist relationship? Many mental health professionals prefer to reveal information about their race, gender, and sexual orientation. Is it OK to put politics in that list?

Clinical and counseling psychology both start with experimental social psychology. I taught numerous therapists throughout my 20 years as a psychology professor. People bring their family and friends' psychiatric problems to psychology professors, and I directed many of them to qualified clinicians [1-3].

Since early 2016, I've been contacted by a number of conservatives who have felt safe sharing their struggles receiving mental health treatment with me. Their primary concerns were being judged for their political beliefs or being treated by a therapist who would actively attempt to modify their core beliefs. Many people revealed that they had similar experiences with their therapists. Following the publication of the "Conservative Psychologist Wanted" piece, I was inundated with reports of unpleasant encounters with ideologically mismatched therapists and clients. The focus of the professional conversation was on how to tackle the situation. Should therapists reveal their political leanings?

Both have a place in the world. There are therapists who will not compromise their social activist agenda, and their work with clients reflects that commitment to social justice. That is a terrific fit for clients who share those beliefs.

Clients and therapists must agree on the elements that are important to them, just like any other aspect of variety. Conservative therapists now

have their own movement and website. Although only a small percentage of therapists publicly identify as conservative, it provides an alternative for conservative clients who are concerned about a mismatch. The issue for a potential client who values politics is how would they learn about the therapist's politics? Clients can read both overt and covert political virtue signalling signs, but clarity is preferred.

Many therapists are politically apolitical as well. This is the option I prefer. I don't care about my car mechanic's politics—just fix my car! I don't care what the civil engineer's politics are when he builds the bridge I drive over—just build a decent bridge! Unless politics is truly at the bottom of the client's problem, I prefer for a skilled therapist to do good work and leave politics out of the sessions. In this circumstance, I would expect the therapist to review the matter with a colleague to check that their own prejudices were not influencing their view of the situation [4].

I know a lot of competent clinicians, both progressive and conservative. I would send any family members or friends, regardless of political affiliation, to them without fear of brainwashing or judgment. I'm aware of a few awful ones as well, and I would not recommend them to anyone. I prefer a free-market system in which therapists can choose whether or not to disclose, with the condition that a welcoming environment for all mental health professionals is required.

Clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists, LPC's, MSW's, and other mental health professionals must work together as a team to make everyone feel comfortable in mental health therapy. The mainstream political ideals of a potential client should not be an impediment to mental health treatment. Let's all work together to get this mental health wrinkle ironed out.

## References

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