

# Disciplinary Actions by a State Board of Psychology: Does Gender and Association Membership Matter?

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## Summary

A review of disciplinary notices published in the newsletter of the Pennsylvania State Board of Psychology from 1997 to 2007 revealed 140 disciplinary actions against psychologists. Male psychologists were more likely to be disciplined than females, and nonmembers of PPA, especially male nonmember, were more likely to be disciplined than PPA members. Nonmember males accounted for almost half of all disciplinary actions and almost all boundary violations.

## Method and Results

This study used archival data consisting of descriptions of licensing board adjudications found in the state board of psychology newsletters and PPA membership directories over 12 years (1997-2009). The Board published notices of 150 adjudications (140 against psychologists).

Continuing education (CE) violations accounted for 44% of all adjudications against psychologists in Pennsylvania, followed by sexual contact with patients (10%), and other boundary violations (9%). Other infractions such as violations of record keeping standards, breaches of confidentiality, or convictions of crimes, were less frequent.

Male psychologists were involved in 95 infractions and female psychologists in 43 (and 2 where the gender of the individual could not be determined). This difference was significant ( $\chi^2 = 16.7, p > .0001$ ). Male psychologists committed all of the 15 disciplinary actions involving sexual contact with patients and 9 of the 12 disciplinary actions involving other boundary violations.

Non PPA members were involved in 106 infractions and members in 34. This difference was significant ( $\chi^2 = 14.4, p > .001$ ). Nonmembers committed 12 of the 15 disciplinary actions involving sexual contact with patients and 11 of the 12 disciplinary actions involving other boundary violations. PPA membership interacted with gender. Of all 140 violations 73, were committed by nonmember males. Of the 27 boundary violations reported, 22 were committed by nonmember males, 2 by member males, 2 by nonmember females, and 1 by a member female.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Nonmembers, especially male nonmembers, have higher rates of disciplinary action than PPA members. Perhaps the risk management services of the association reduce licensing board risks; perhaps more conscientious psychologists self-select themselves into professional associations; perhaps both factors are present. Psychologists appear to benefit from connections with a broader community of psychologists. Male psychologists who are isolated appear to be at the highest risk of committing ethical infractions. However, even nonmember female psychologists had disciplinary rates higher than female members. A social or "extroverted" approach to practicing psychology is encouraged.

### Gender and Disciplinary Actions

	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
Failure to get CE/ false renewal form	37	23	2	62
Sexual intimacies with patients	15	0	0	15
Other boundary violations	9	3	0	12
Felony or misdemeanor in practice of psychology	4	4	0	8
Disciplined by another jurisdiction	6	2	0	8
All other	22	13	0	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>140</b>

### PPA Membership and Disciplinary Actions

	Member	Non Member	Total
Failure to get CE/ false renewal form	13	49	62
Sexual intimacies with patients	2	13	15
Other boundary violations	1	11	12
Felony or misdemeanor in practice of psychology	2	6	8
Disciplined by another jurisdiction	0	8	8
All other	16	19	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>140</b>

### Gender, Association Membership and Violations<sup>1</sup>

	Male	Female
Association Member	20	14
Not Member	73	31

### Gender, Association Membership and Boundary Violations

	Male	Female
Association Member	2	1
Not Members	22	2

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<sup>1</sup> For two psychologists the gender could not be determined. Neither of these were association members.