

# Benefits of the Board Certification in Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology for Private Practice

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Many perceive the Board Certification process in Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology as a daunting task, and often a perceived cost/benefit analysis leads to a decision to put it off or not seek it at all. The private practicing health service psychologist initially often finds the list of benefits to be sparser than the obvious items on the list of costs. However, the benefits of Board Certification are likely underestimated or perceived in a distorted fashion. My goal in this article is to use my personal experiences with Board Certification to illustrate the ways in which it can benefit the private practicing health service psychologist.

## Benefits of Board Certification.

There are four distinct benefits from Board Certification in Cognitive and Behavioral Psychology (collegiality, identification to referral sources, branding, and indication of quality health care):

1. Collegial Relationships—One of the things about which private practicing health service psychologists often complain is the degree of isolation that occurs as a result of the practice setting. In contrast to academic or hospital work, settings in which there are both organized and informal structures that promote support among colleagues; private practice often entails long, continuous hours delivering therapy and consultation, and seldom includes structured or informal opportunities to share experiences or talk of recent articles.

I have found that Board Certification creates an opportunity to build relationships with others who have like-minded approaches to treatment and who share a common language. The Board Certified Behavioral and Cognitive psychologists in a particular area typically know each other, and often reach out to each other to collaborate. Similarly, when attending conferences such as APA or ABCT, board certified psychologists often seek each other out to socialize. Common experiences, common treatment models, and common affiliations that build within the network of Behavioral and Cognitive psychologists drive the affiliation.

Yet another way in which Board Certification promotes collegial relationship is the number of opportunities for involvement in leadership. Individuals with board certification have the option to serve both the Board that oversees the certification process, and the Academy (when one exists) that promotes recruitment and professional development. By serving in leadership roles, one can develop sustaining relationships with others who have the same interests; and further one can become acquainted with leaders in the field.

2. The second benefit is the opportunity to create a clear identity that can be communicated to referral sources. Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology is a specialty that communicates certain assumptions that are understood by most other professionals, including physicians. These assumptions include an approach to treatment that is based on validated techniques, the use of a directed form of treatment, treatments that are often tailored to specific disorders (e.g., exposure and response prevention treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder; cognitive-behavioral therapy of depression), and assessment techniques that include idiographic data. Our society has become increasingly sophisticated about the utility of Behavioral and Cognitive approaches, including parents of children with autism understanding the value of Applied Behavior Analysis in the treatment for their children; the value of behaviorally-based parent training for families of children with behavioral problems and/or ADHD; and the role of cognitive therapy strategies in the treatment of depression and anxiety.

3. A third benefit of Board Certification in Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology is the manner in which one can create a brand identity to be held out to the public. This benefit refers less to the general understanding of the therapeutic approaches used, and more the brand of being board certified. This is an important aspect of the marketing of psychological services.

The public holds, rightfully so, a perception of competency associated with a psychologist who earned the certification. The public is familiar, thanks to the boarding process of physicians, with the idea of specialization and its defining characteristics of specific training, experience, and competency. The public understands that Board Certification indicates these things, and it creates for them a better initial understanding of the level of quality and competency in the treatment approach from a board certified psychologist.

4. A fourth benefit of Board Certification is that it has become an indicator of quality health care in the broader context of health service. As healthcare reform progresses, providers will be expected to demonstrate indicators of quality services—in health care one such indicator is board certification in one's specialty. As medical homes and affordable care organizations populate what was one a fee-for-service environment, Board Certification will become (or has already become in some instances) one indicator to payers of value and quality.

Board Certification, not a Magic Pill. The value Board Certification in Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology comes not from simply earning the certification, but from using what it represents to create the benefits described above.

The Board Certification process is itself an opportunity to not only demonstrate competencies, but also improve one's knowledge of various components of Behavioral and Cognitive approaches while studying to complete the practice sample and take the oral examination. Earning the certificate creates opportunities to obtain benefits, but those who want those benefits must do those

tasks necessary to take advantage of the identification with the Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology specialization. Once one passes the exam, the work of educating others about its value and communicating the meaning of Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology becomes ongoing. And some may want to become active in some aspect of the governance structure of the credentialing organization.

If you, the reader, have considered Board Certification in Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology, but have heard from someone that earning a certificate failed to provide him or her with benefits, you should consider whether or not that individual did anything to promote their specialization. My own experience is that, having obtained the Board Certification in Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology, it was necessary to continue my efforts to take advantage of the opportunities it provides. In my own experience, my Board Certification led to personal and business benefits that outweighed my efforts and costs in obtaining the certificate.