Ethics and Boundaries on Intensive Teams

CEBP Conference
2012

Ohio Coordinating Center for ACT
High potential for boundary issues
AND
New TX modalities contribute

• Intensive
• Team-based
• Non-traditional settings
• Challenge is…
The Challenge:

Create an open atmosphere

Be aware of the differences

Be clear and consistent
Changing Nature of Treatment (EBPs)

- Revolutionary delivery systems (e.g. ACT and IDDT)
- Recovery, social integration, partnership
- Reassessment and redefinition of desired outcomes
- Multidimensional relationship
The Helping Relationship

- Based on "needing help"
- Vulnerability
- Give and Take
- Clients often estranged from family and community
- Power?
The Helping Relationship: Power in Non-traditional Setting

- Helpers may have more power and control in non-traditional settings
- More possibilities for exploitation and coercion
The Helping Relationship: Power in Non-traditional Setting

• Staff expected to make the right choices independently
• Discussions with supervisors may be punitive
• Difficult to admit
The Helping Relationship: Power in Non-traditional Setting

- Eating and drinking
- Presence in the home
- Redirection (e.g. dress)
Boundaries: The Basics
Why are Boundaries Important?

- Circumscribe a relationship between people
- Provide a limit that allows for a safe connection (if you don’t stand for something…)

Why are Boundaries Important?

Professional vs. Personal relationship

- Paid vs. not-paid
- Power over vs. equal power
- Contractual agreement vs. personal choice
Why are Boundaries Important?

Boundaries are based on PRINCIPLES

• Autonomy
• Beneficence
• Fidelity
• Justice
• Nonmaleficence
• Veracity
Why are Boundaries Important?

ACA Code of Ethics
The Code serves as an ethical guide designed to assist members in constructing a professional course of action that best serves those utilizing counseling services and best promotes the values of the counseling profession (#4 from the ACA Code of Ethics Purpose)
Go back as far as Hippocrates

“In every house where I come, I will enter only for the good of my patients, keeping myself far from all intentional ill-doing and all seduction, and especially from the pleasures of love with women or with men, be they free or slaves”
Professional Responsible for Boundaries

• Power
  – One-way relationship
  – Clients are more vulnerable
  – Power of role
  – Relationship is THE vehicle for change
Debate among Professionals

- Thick versus thin boundaries
- Cultural issues
- Different types of practice, theoretical orientation
- Some standards absolute, others more flexible and involve interpretations
• Existing ethical principles do not, could not, cover the full variety of clinical dilemmas

• Two or more ethical principles may conflict
Historical

Great figures in the field gave out mixed messages on the issue
  – Freud
  – Melanie Klein
Boundary Challenges

• Assume they will happen
• Need to “get out of the closet”
• “Nature of the Beast”
Ethics Game

• Always ok, sometimes ok, never ok
Survey by Pope & Vetter, 1992

- Issues regarding boundaries: most frequently encountered ethical dilemmas faced by psychologists
Survey by Pope & Vetter, 1992

• Issues regarding boundaries:
  – Touch
  – Self-Disclosure
  – Meeting Time and Place
  – Presents
  – Lending/Borrowing
  – Business Transactions
  – Socializing
  – Staff/Staff Interactions
Touch

• What kind of touch is always ok? Never ok? Hand on shoulder? Hugs?

• How frequently? Should you ask the client first? Could that be coercive?

• What if a client requests a hug? Requests to be held?

• How will you know how the client interprets your touch?
Touch Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification

*The Code:*

*Section A.5.a.*
Self Disclosure

• What is appropriate to reveal about yourself, about your personal life and circumstances?

• What is always ok to share about yourself?

• How about unintended or nonverbal self disclosure?
Meeting Place and Time

- In your role, what are appropriate places to meet with your client? What is always inappropriate?

- The kitchen, bedroom, local restaurant? What about off hours, weekends, evenings?
Presents

• Is it OK to give clients presents or receive presents from your clients?
• What occasions would be appropriate or inappropriate?
• Does the dollar value make a difference?
• What about gifts to the agency or program?
Presents

Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification

The Code:
Section A.5.g.
Lending and Borrowing

• Is it ok to lend things to clients (e.g. books, CD’s)?
• To borrow from the client?
• What are the criteria?
Business Transactions

- Is it desirable/permissible to get into transactions such as: having clients wash your car, rent an apartment to a client?
- How about barter arrangements, e.g. a client does typing or stuffs envelopes in your office.
Business Transactions

Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification…not in *The Code*
Socializing

• What type of socializing with clients is appropriate in your role. What is off limits?
...other potential concerns
“Ethics codes, standards, or rules can never legitimately serve as a substitute for a thoughtful, creative, and conscientious approach to our work. They can never relieve us of the responsibility to struggle with competing demands, multiple perspectives, evolving situations and the prospect of uncertain consequence. They serve best to awaken us to the potential pitfalls, but also to opportunities, to guide and inform our attempts to help without hurting. They cannot do our work for us” (pp49-50)
Most Frequent Boundary Dilemmas

Pope and Vasquez, 1991

- Physical Contact, non-erotic
- Self-Disclosure
- Clinician-client sexual contact
- Dual Relationships
Dual Relationships

- Clinician functions in a professional role concurrently or consecutively with another “definitive and intended role”
- Cross line between therapeutic relationship and a second relationship
- Permits abuse of power
AS YOUR COUNSELOR I SAY,  
"YOUR OBSESSION WITH POULTRY IS  
EMOTIONALLY UNHEALTHY."  
AS YOUR NEIGHBOR I SAY,  
"THANKS FOR THE EGG.S."
Dual Relationships

• Look a lot like the boundary crossings
• Difference is the formal/ongoing nature of the role.....
By Choice or by Chance?

- Conscious choice made by counselor versus when counselor has little choice about engaging in a dual relationship (e.g. fate)
- May be unavoidable
Ethical Codes

- Current ethical codes don’t prohibit
- They also don’t address complexities
The ACA on Dual Relationships

• “Counselor-client nonprofessional relationships with clients, former clients, their romantic partners, or their family members should be avoided, except when the interaction is potentially beneficial to the client.”
• “When a counselor-client nonprofessional interaction with a client or former client may be potentially beneficial to the client or former client, the counselor must document in case records, prior to the interaction (when feasible), the rationale for such an interaction, the potential benefit, and anticipated consequences for the client or former client and other individuals significantly involved with the client or former client. (contd.)
• Such interactions should be initiated with appropriate client consent. Where unintentional harm occurs to the client or former client, or to an individual significantly involved with the client or former client, due to the nonprofessional interaction, the counselor must show evidence of an attempt to remedy such harm.
Examples of potentially beneficial interactions include, but are not limited to, attending a formal ceremony (e.g., a wedding/commitment ceremony or graduation); purchasing a service or product provided by a client or former client (excepting unrestricted bartering); hospital visits to an ill family member; mutual membership in a professional association, organization, or community.”

Code of Ethics & Standards of Practice (ACA, 2005)
The NASW on Dual Relationships

- “Social workers should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. (contd.)
In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, social workers should take steps to protect clients and are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.”

*NASW Code of Ethics (1999), Standard 1.06.c*
Maria and Susannah
Ethical Codes

• Thus, ethics codes and standards are necessary but not sufficient
• There are no “hard and fast” rules to assist a practitioner in resolving multiple role relationship problems
Ethics vs. The Law

- Ethical Codes
  - Consistent across discipline
  - Violation – professional expulsion
  - Include standards of practice

- Laws
  - May vary state to state
  - Violation – civil, criminal charges or loss of licensure
  - Include do’s and dont’s
Terms Dealing with Boundaries

- Boundary Crossings
- Boundary Violations
- Pseudo-Boundary
- Gray Area
Source: Glass L. The gray areas of boundary crossings and violations. Am J Psychother 2003;57(4):429-44. Republished with permission of the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy
Boundary Crossings

- Deviation from professional code or commonly accepted clinical practice
- May be initiated to enhance treatment
- Most are not problematic
- Benign, debatable, non-progressive
- Creative and conscientious attempts to adapt treatment
Boundary Violations

• Some are very clear
  – Sexual contact
  – Gross violations of confidentiality
• Some are aggregated boundary crossings
• Serve therapist’s needs rather than patient’s
Pseudo-Boundary Violations

- Subjectively experienced by client as boundary violations
- Within realm of ethical practice
- May lead to client termination or formal action against clinician
Gray Area

- Adapt or modify boundary of established relationship
- May be experienced as seductive or intrusive
- Not inherently step down slippery slope
- Subject to differing professional opinions
- May be capable of being worked through
Case Example Allen

- Underline all “boundary crossings”
  - ID: OK/NOT OK
  - ID: Crossing/Pseudo/Violation
- Does Bill have a dual relationship with Allen?
- What would you do next if you were Bill’s Supervisor?
Supervision and Boundaries

• How can we be more effective?
Consultation/Supervision

- Help clarify and review
- Can provide reassurance
- Refresh thinking
- Make needed changes
The Supervisory Relationship

- Cultivating a relationship in which both parties feel free to discuss their concerns
- Use of self as demonstration
- Give frequent feedback and employees can clarify
The Supervisory Relationship

Help supervisees recognize their justifications (can impair one’s judgment)
Common Justifications
(Pope & Vasquez, 1991)

• “The client wanted me to do it”
• “The client’s condition made them so difficult to treat and so troublesome and risky to be around that they elicited me to…”
• “It was the only way I could get them to…”
Supervisor vs. Therapist

- Articulate parameters of the supervisory conversation
- Establish an interpersonal climate of openness
- Invite discussion of personal issues only as they impact on clinical work; issues are not “worked through”
- Refer
Guidelines for Decision Making for use in Supervision
Curtis & Hodge, 1994

• Review specific situations with supervisee using these questions
Ten Clues to Boundary Problems

- Walker & Clark, 1999
- Handout
Team-based Settings
(ethics and boundaries)
Team-based Settings (ethics and boundaries)

Boundaries Exercise
Team-based Settings (ethics and boundaries)

Why so difficult?

- Diversity of Background
- Diversity of Experience
- Diversity of Expertise
- CRCC 6 Principles
- ACA Code of Ethics D.1.a.
Team-based Settings (ethics and boundaries)

Create Open Atmosphere

- ACA Code of Ethics: section D.1.e.
- Administrative Policies
- Discussion of staff to staff interaction(s)
Team-based Settings (ethics and boundaries)

Create Open Atmosphere
- On-going discussion in meetings
- Full and honest communication
- Don’t assume training/guidelines is enough
- Can’t trust common sense
Team-based Settings (ethics and boundaries)

Create Open Atmosphere

• Personal filters are just that…personal!
• Be aware of other’s sensitivity level
• Be aware of YOUR OWN sensitivity level
Team-based Settings (ethics and boundaries)

Benefits of Open Atmosphere

• Shared decision making
• The devil you know…
• Personal/Professional growth
• Client Care
Ohio Coordinating Center for ACT

Thanks!

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