

## Dual relationships

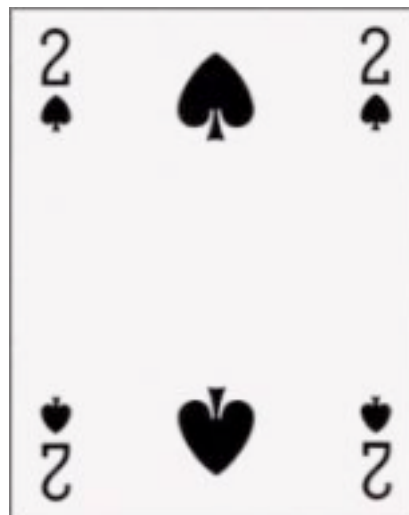
Tony White  
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In discussing the topic of regulation in psychotherapy one must talk about the regulation of dual relationships. This is another area where regulation has gone mad. Many professional organisations are pushing for no dual relationships. The Australian Psychological Society is and the local Transactional Analysis association (WPATA) is also. It should be noted that very few such organisations have actually banned dual relationships, instead they state that it is not a good idea and should be avoided where ever possible.

### What is a dual relationship?

It is what it sounds like. If a person is a client and also be your friend, business partner, close relative and so forth then those two people have a dual relationship. The most common type discussed is where the therapist has a person who is a client and is also a psychotherapy trainee or a student at the same time. The best scenario according to these organisations is, if a person is your client then you have no other form of contact with. Mainly if they are your client then you do not take them on as a counselling trainee. Or if a person is your trainee then you don't take them on as your client.

Unfortunately this is regulation gone mad. In some cases this regulation is made because people are too scared to deal with situations and relationships them self. I have trained counsellors for 20 years and counselled people for 25. There are some trainees who I would never take on as a client and there are some clients who I would never take on as a trainee. There are many situations where a person being both a trainee and a client is powerful from both a training and treatment point of view. It needs to be assessed on a case by case basis.



Bob Goulding in his book, *The Power is in the Patient* states, "My position is that training must include therapy,...."(P76). Obviously I concur with him, except that I would not recommend it always. However I do see the value in it and would encourage it in many cases.

### Problems with dual relationships

One of the problems with dual relationships is that one relationship can impact on the other. They can interfere with and disrupt each other. This does happen. A client may have angry feelings at the therapist and because of that it interferes with their relationship in the trainer/trainee relationship.

However you don't have to regulate all dual relationships out of existence because this happens sometimes. Before dual relationships were regulated people dealt with such situations. They coped and life went on without some sort of disaster occurring. The problem is how do you deal with it?

This is where the concept of personal power in the client becomes important. In this view the therapist sees the client as a competent person who does have some personal fortitude. Of course this varies from person to person where some are more fragile than others.

In some psychotherapy circles there has been a move away from this view and clients in general are seen much more delicate and fragile so that ones needs to be very careful with them. In dealing with dual relationship problems there some times has to be confrontation of some kind. This does not mean the therapist hits the client over the head with a club type of confrontation. What it does mean is that it respects the client with some level of ability to cope with their emotions that may be uncomfortable. So there is the problem.

In current thinking some argue if you confront a client/trainee then that is re-traumatizing the client or you are publicly shaming them in some way. This in my view is just absurd. However it shows how the current trend in psychotherapy is to see the client as a powerless and impotent person who can't handle any confrontation. It is this change in view of the client that has led to the need to regulate dual relationships much more so.

Society in general has begun to treat people as much more fragile and sensitive and thus we have the evolution of the "nanny state" mentality. If a newspaper puts a picture of a dead body on the front page there is an outcry of shock and horror. Psychotherapy has followed along with this and tends to view people in the same way.

If you can't confront a client because you believe that will shame them then you

can't deal with any dual relationship problems. Thus there is no alternative but to say to the client that they can't have a dual relationship because it is against regulations. What they really saying is:

1. I see you are fragile
2. Therefore I can't confront you
3. If I do then you will be traumatised
4. In dual relationships confrontation is sometimes necessary
5. Therefore we can never have a dual relationship
6. So dual relationships will be regulated as unprofessional and that solves the problem.

So in one sense the client is being lied to as the therapist is hiding behind the regulation rather than being honest with the above. They say to the client, "The professional organisation does not allow dual relationships so that is why I can't have one with you", when this is not the real reason at all. At the very least the therapist is not fully candid with the client.



If I am a client then I want the therapist to respect my personal power and potency. If a therapist says something that I feel hurt or upset about then I

can handle that. I am old enough and durable enough to be able to deal with my feelings. I don't need a therapist or professional organisation to do it for me.

Of course there are others who are not so emotionally strong and robust. That is why one does not have a regulation for all but assesses such things on a case by case basis. If I am dealing with a client who is emotionally fragile then I might say to them that I will not enter into a teacher/student relationship with them at this time because of potential dual relationship problems and their ability to handle those. I think that is far more respectful and honest with the client than telling the client that I can't because it is a regulation.

Every therapeutic relationship is a dual relationship.

Before finishing I have to make one other point. Those who wish to regulate dual relationships don't seem to realise that every client/therapist relationship is already a dual relationship.

The client and therapist have a therapeutic relationship where the client attends a session and the therapist does therapy on him/her

AND

The client and therapist have a business relationship where at the end of the session the client pays for the session.

This adds up to 2 relationships

And indeed sometimes these two relationships interfere with each other. A client who is developing an angry transference to the therapist can begin to stop paying the bill or will make appointments and cancel them or mess up the times and so forth. That certainly does happen and people generally deal with it successfully. So in this sense such regulations are a nonsense as therapists are already in dual relationships with their clients.

Positives from dual relationships

As is widely stated it is the relational or the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and the client that carries the most potent curative powers for the client. When a client sees a therapist most often that is for 1 hour per week. The client gets to see the therapist and meet face to face with the therapist 1 out of 168 hours per week. That is not a lot of contact.

What sometimes happens in this part of the world is that some clients take on counsellor training with the counsellor who also happens to be a trainer. Thus a dual relationship is formed with a client/therapist relationship and a

teacher/student relationship being created between the two people. One of the main advantages of this is it allows the client to have much more contact with the therapist who is also in a training role.



Keeping the absolute 'single' relationship would really involve someone living life largely like this. How about trusting people that they can deal with difficulties in their relationships rather than trying to regulate them away.

Some of the clients who take on a counsellor training programme have no real interest in becoming a counsellor at the end but use it for personal growth and to have other relational contact with the therapist/trainer. The client/trainee gets two types of benefit from this. First they are placing themselves in a training group that is therapeutic in itself. A good support group that by an large includes positive strokes and encouraging of the person to grow and develop. Secondly they get much more face to face contact with the therapist and thus all the therapeutic flow on from that which can be considerable indeed.

#### New developments in dual relationships

With the development of the WWW we now have new forms of dual relationships. We have therapist & client in a dual relationship with blog writer & blog reader, twitter writers & readers, facebook friends, through websites and so forth endlessly. A client can now have much more "contact" with their therapist via communication on the internet. They can read what the therapist is saying, maybe even comment on the blog, twitter or facebook, they can see photographs posted by the therapist, read about their activities via facebook and twitter and all the

other huge variety of things that can now be done via the internet.



Now comes the interesting part. What does the therapist do with this new internet dual relationship with the client? They could do nothing or it could be used at times in some way should the circumstances be right? To my mind an area of much possible research and development.

I can only see one way that professional bodies can stop such dual relationships and that is by requiring the therapist simply not to use the internet in these ways. Alternatively they could take the view that their members are at least reasonable communicators and say, "We trust that you guys to have the expertise to deal with it". I know that I do and can. I have already dealt with some problem situations that have arisen due to these new dual internet relationship.

### One final note

At a week long workshop I recently attended there were some people there who were my clients, trainees and colleagues. In the workshop I did a piece of personal work (as the client) in front of them. I spoke in depth about my early relationship with my mother, her personal demons and how that impacted on me as a child and so forth. Another type of dual relationship was created because of this.

I always find it entertaining when therapists and trainers say they would never do a piece of their own personal work in front of their clients or trainees as it would damage them and traumatise them. I suspect that this not the real reason at all. They just feel insecure about showing self like that in front of the client. They are worried that their therapist persona may come crashing down. Of course it is OK for them not to self disclose in such a way if they do not want to, but it is not fair and square to give a fake reason for doing so.

Since that workshop I have asked my clients and trainees what was their reaction to seeing me do that. All of them (so far at least) have said that they admired me for doing so and indeed it has helped them therapeutically and they see me as more real now. Certainly no one has been traumatised by it.



Keeping up appearances

## References

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