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NEW JERSEY STATE BOARD
OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINERS

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEP'T OF LAW & PUBLIC SAFETY
DIVISION OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS
BOARD OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINERS
DOCKET NO.

IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY INTO :
THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF :
WILLIAM D. COX, Ed.D. : Administrative Action
LICENSED TO PRACTICE PSYCHOLOGY :
IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY : FINAL ORDER

This matter was presented to the State Board of Psychological Examiners on inquiry into certain conduct by William D. Cox, Ed.D., who has held license number 2240 during all times pertinent to this matter. His current address is 26 Gates Road, Worchester, Massachusetts 01613. He is represented herein by Jill S. Slattery, Esq.

It appears that patient Ms T.S.L. first met Dr. Cox informally early in 1987, shortly after he commenced practice in New Jersey. Both were members at a gymnasium where they were in regular contact. Casual conversation over the course of several months led to her request to consult him professionally. He agreed, and began to see her professionally at his office as of June 3, 1987, providing psychotherapy treatment.¹ In approximately August 1987,

¹ Dr. Cox was then affiliated with a multi-practitioner partnership then called Short Hills Associates in Clinical Psychology.

the patient informed respondent of her sexual interest in him and he advised they would have to terminate their professional relationship. During the therapy, the patient believed that she had confided matters of great intimacy to him and had become very dependent upon him. She was billed \$1080.00.

Within two weeks of the treatment "termination," an intense social relationship developed and evolved into a sexual relationship no later than two months after the last treatment session. This relationship continued until the Summer of 1990. During that period, T.S.L. gave respondent numerous gifts of significant monetary value including clothing, house furnishings, and extensive travel expenses for national and international trips they took together. The patient has provided to the Board copies of checks, credit card billing statements relating to gifts, greeting cards signed in a distinctive style by respondent, a photograph of respondent, and a videotape of personal areas of his home. Dr. Cox states that he, too, gave T.L. numerous gifts during their relationship. Further, the patient loaned him some \$40,000 to enable him to purchase a house in April 1989 where she was led to believe they both would live. Dr. Cox ultimately repaid this loan.

Dr. Cox, accompanied by his counsel, appeared before a Committee of this Board to discuss the matter. He confirmed the chronology of treatment and indicated that he had assessed a diagnosis of adjustment disorder with mixed features; CPT 309.28,

and recognized that the patient had a fragile sense of self-worth. He acknowledged the general outlines of the patient's contentions, and acknowledged his awareness that there should be a clear separation between social and professional contacts; that this was not the case in his commencement of professional services to Ms T.S.L.; that he had anxiety about the arrangement; and that the usual method of termination of a therapy relationship did not take place.² He stated that, although he is accustomed to working with "the most difficult patients," he found this patient very sexually seductive, and a strong counter-transference developed. He claims that he discussed his feelings about with this patient with his colleagues at the multi-practitioner office and thereafter with his own therapist. However, he acknowledges that he did not disclose to his colleagues his sexual attraction to the patient. He admits receipt of the monies for the house-purchase loan, and does not dispute that substantial gifts were given to him. He states that he has had no direct contact with T.S.L. since 1990. Respondent left the State and moved to Massachusetts where he currently practices. He reports that he has resumed personal psychotherapy.

The Board has considered the various circumstances made known by T.S.L. and by Dr. Cox. The Board finds that, in light of the particular social relationship which preceded the commencement of

² He has stated, through counsel, that he believed there "never was a therapeutic relationship established between himself and T.L." The Board rejects such dismissal of the three months of sessions billed as professional psychotherapy.

therapy, respondent's agreement to provide therapy to T.S.L. constituted participation in a conflict of interest with her. He maintained a dual relationship which limited or presented the ready potential for limiting his objectivity, impaired his professional judgment and increased the risk of exploitation of his patient; N.J.A.C. 13:42-4.1(a)(1)xvii. As the social relationship continued unabated after "termination," leading to the sexual relationship which commenced quite shortly (no more than a few months) after the nominal termination of psychological treatment, the Board finds that the sexual contact must be deemed to have commenced during therapy or during a period while the T.S.L. was under the influence of the therapy, in violation of N.J.A.C. 13:42-(a)(1)xvi(1). Both matters constitute violation of N.J.S.A. 45:1-21(e).

The Board has taken into account all the events summarized above: respondent's inappropriate commencement of this professional relationship colored by a sexual interest in the patient; his nominal termination of the therapy when confronted with that interest by the patient herself; his prompt encouragement of (or failure to stop) engagement in the social and then sexual relationship shortly after the "termination"; and his acceptance of a large sum loaned to him by the patient during the course of the continued relationship. The Board has further taken into account such mitigating circumstances as there may be, including respondent's repayment of the large loan from the patient, his

departure from the State and his commencement of therapy in Massachusetts, and the fact that there have been no other complaints from patients against him. Finally, the Board has considered respondent's candor in acknowledging the events and deems this an indication of rehabilitation potential. For good cause shown,

IT IS, ON THIS 1st DAY OF November 1993

ORDERED:

1. Respondent's license to practice psychology in the State of New Jersey is hereby suspended for one year, the entirety of which shall be stayed and be deemed a period of probation, conditioned upon his compliance with each of the following conditions:

(a) Respondent shall reimburse T.S.L. \$1,080.00 for the "treatment" inappropriately commenced and terminated in 1987. Said payment shall be made within 10 days of the entry of this Order or, alternatively, in no more than two installments payable to T.S.L. The first shall be \$500 sent to the Board within 10 days of the entry of this Order, and the balance shall be transmitted no later than December 1, 1993;

(b) Respondent shall reimburse the Board for costs of investigation, totalling \$2,261.35, within 10 days of the entry of this Order or, alternatively, in installments of no less than \$500 due on the first day of each month commencing January 1, 1994. A Certificate of Debt shall be filed by the Board, pursuant to

N.J.S.A. 45:1-25, with the State of New Jersey and the State of Massachusetts to protect the judgments in paragraphs (a) and (b).

(c) Respondent shall scrupulously comply henceforth with law and implementing rules of the State Board of Psychological Examiners in all respects, including but not limited to avoidance of any forms of dual relationships and sexual relationships with patients (current or terminated within the past two years).

(d) Respondent shall commence, or continue, psychotherapy with a licensed treatment provider acceptable to the Board. Approval shall not be unreasonably withheld, and said treatment may take place in Massachusetts. Said treatment shall continue, at least once weekly, throughout the probation period or until further order of the Board.

(e) Respondent shall provide a copy of this Order to the treatment provider and shall obtain from the therapist a written agreement to: submit quarterly reports to this Board regarding status of the therapy; promptly notify this Board of unilateral termination of treatment unauthorized by the Board; promptly notify this Board of a deterioration in psychological status which would be likely to present a significant threat to patients or others under respondent's care.

(f) Respondent has informed the Board that he currently practices only with adolescents and only in an institutional setting. In the event that he resumes outpatient practice or private practice, he shall first notify this Board and shall then

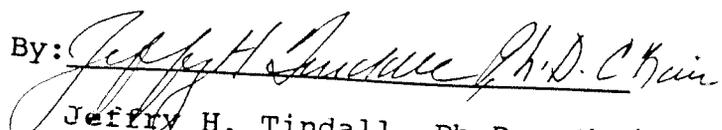
practice only under supervision for the probationary year by a supervisor approved by this Board, at a level of one hour for each five client cases/sessions. The cost of supervision shall not be passed on to the clients. The supervisor shall provide to the Board written quarterly reports summarizing the number of cases supervised, their nature and extent of treatment by respondent, and evaluating the quality of respondent's professional services. Particular attention shall be paid to respondent's insight into transference issues and boundary problems and respondent's appropriate handling thereof. The supervisor shall agree to promptly notify this Board of work which significantly or regularly fails to meet accepted standards of professional practice.

Approval of the supervisor shall not be unreasonably withheld by the Board. The Board will approve a supervisor deemed appropriate by the Massachusetts Board of Psychological Examiners.

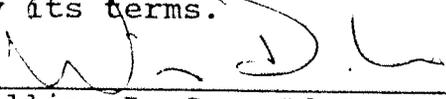
2. Prior to resuming professional practice in the State of New Jersey, respondent shall notify the Board and shall first submit to the Board a summary report from his treating therapist and from his supervisor. Respondent shall then appear, on notice, before a Board Committee to discuss his personal and professional practice circumstances and continuing professional education.

This Order shall be effective upon entry.

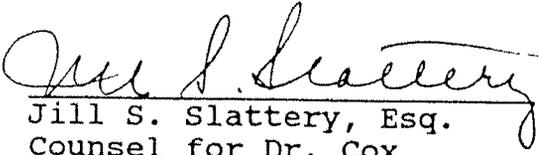
STATE BOARD OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINERS

By: 
Jeffrey H. Tindall, Ph.D., Chair

I have read and understood the
within Order and agree to be bound
by its terms.



William D. Cox, Ed.D.



Jill S. Slattery, Esq.
Counsel for Dr. Cox