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**FILED**  
*12 May 2016*  
STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
BOARD OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY  
EXAMINERS  
*Melissa Blum*

STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
DEPARTMENT OF LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY  
DIVISION OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS  
BOARD OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY  
EXAMINERS

IN THE MATTER OF THE SUSPENSION  
OR REVOCATION OF THE LICENSE OF:  
  
**Stephen Armstrong, LMFT**  
**License No. 37F100113200**  
  
TO PRACTICE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY  
THERAPY IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

Administrative Action

**CONSENT ORDER**

This matter was opened to the New Jersey State Board of Marriage and Family Therapy Examiners (the "Board") upon receipt of information that respondent Stephen Armstrong ("respondent") allegedly engaged in professional misconduct in that he had a sexual relationship with his patient C.F. Specifically, the Board and the Committee received a complaint from C.F.'s husband, B.F., alleging that respondent exchanged phone calls and emails with C.F., encouraged her to keep information about the emails and therapy sessions from her husband; and in August or September of 2010 began a

sexual relationship with C.F. Respondent appeared with counsel, Christopher R. Barbrack, Esq., at an inquiry into this matter conducted by the Board.

At the inquiry, respondent discussed his treatment of C.F. and B.F. from September 2009 through May 2012. Respondent testified that he saw C.F. and B.F. as a couple for the initial five to six months of the therapy. However, C.F. then requested to be seen individually, and B.F. did not take the initiative to schedule individual sessions for himself. The emails from C.F. did not begin until after she began seeing respondent in individual sessions; Respondent stated that he does not allow separate or confidential communication with individuals who are being seen as part of a couple. Respondent testified that C.F. told him that she had a history of journaling, and preferred to express herself through writing. C.F.'s e-mails related personal issues from her past, as well as in her marriage, and also expressed her level of trust in respondent. Respondent told the Board that he found the e-mails intriguing and wanted to read more.

Respondent concedes that the emails from C.F. imply that he was close to violating professional boundaries, and he began to develop an emotional attraction for C.F. He says that he did, however, discuss the need to set boundaries with C.F. on a number of occasions. Respondent testified to the Board that he felt professionally responsible for C.F., and only made comments to her that would build her self-esteem and validate her. He testified that he did not want to cause any undeserved harm to C.F. by presenting his feelings, or terminating his therapeutic relationship with her and abandoning her. Although respondent spoke with a peer supervisor concerning this matter, the supervisor did not make any recommendations.

Respondent maintains that he felt ashamed of his feelings, and he also felt an exaggerated sense of professional responsibility towards his clients, as a few of his clients have committed suicide in the past. He also states that despite his attraction, he did not engage in an inappropriate sexual relationship with C.F. Additionally, he testified that he received a threatening note and email from B.F. Although his email response to B.F. implied that he would no longer practice marriage and family therapy, respondent testified to the Board that he did not plan to shut down his practice. Subsequently, however, respondent notified the Board that he has moved to Colorado, and is unlikely to return to New Jersey to practice.

Having reviewed the entire record, including respondent's client progress notes and his testimony at the inquiry, it appears to the Board that respondent continued to provide services to C.F. in circumstances where his objectivity would be limited and his professional judgment impaired, in violation of N.J.A.C. 13:34-5.2(c).

The Board finds that the described conduct provides grounds to take disciplinary action against respondent's license to practice marriage and family therapy in New Jersey pursuant to N.J.S.A. 45:1-21(e) and (h). The parties desiring to resolve this matter without recourse to formal proceedings, respondent having waived his right to a hearing in this matter, and the Board finding that entry of this Order adequately protects the public health, safety, and welfare, for good cause shown:

IT IS ON THIS 12 DAY OF May, 2016

HEREBY ORDERED AND AGREED THAT:

1. In the event respondent intends to return to practice in New Jersey, respondent shall notify the Board. At that time, respondent shall complete a minimum

of one year of supervision with a Board-approved qualified supervisor who is a New Jersey licensed LMFT, and who was previously unknown to respondent personally and professionally. The prospective supervisor shall be provided with a copy of this Consent Order. He or she shall submit to the Board a curriculum vitae along with a signed copy of this Consent Order, indicating that he or she has read the Order and agrees to comply with its terms. Respondent and his supervisor shall meet face-to-face a minimum of once a week. After six months respondent and his supervisor may apply to reduce the frequency of supervision, and after a year they may apply to reduce the supervision further or terminate it entirely. In addition to a review of all client progress notes, the supervision shall focus on boundary issues, the appropriate use of transference and counter-transference in therapeutic relationships, record keeping, and ethics for marriage and family therapists. The supervisor shall provide quarterly progress reports regarding supervision of respondent. An unfavorable report may be considered a violation of this Consent Order. In the event the supervisor becomes aware of a boundary violation by respondent, the supervisor shall notify the Board by telephone and in writing within twenty-four hours of learning of the events. If the supervisor believes that respondent should also be in therapy, respondent shall comply with that recommendation. At the conclusion of one year of supervision, the supervisor shall provide a complete report to the Board concerning respondent's supervision, including the supervisor's recommendation as to whether respondent may resume the unsupervised practice of marriage and family therapy. Respondent may not terminate supervision without the consent of the Board.

2. Respondent shall complete 15 credits of continuing education courses, all in person. A minimum of 6 credits must be in ethics, to include boundaries, transference and counter-transference; record-keeping; and treatment of sexual or process addictions. Respondent shall submit the specific courses proposed to satisfy these requirements to the Board for approval within sixty (60) days of the entry of this Order. These courses are in addition to the 40 credits of continuing education credits regularly required for licensure. Respondent shall provide the Board with proof of successful completion for each course taken.

3. Respondent shall be assessed the costs of the State's investigation in this matter in the amount of **\$459.00**. Payment shall be made by money order, bank cashier check or certified check, made payable to the State of New Jersey or by wire transfer, direct deposit or credit card payment delivered or mailed to Milagros Collazzo, Executive Director, 124 Halsey Street, Sixth Floor, P.O. Box 45007, Newark, New Jersey 07101, contemporaneously with the signing of this Consent Order.

NEW JERSEY BOARD OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY  
THERAPY EXAMINERS

By:  LMFT  
Ben K. Beitin, LMFT  
Board Chair

I have read and understand the within  
Consent Order and agree to be bound by  
its terms. Consent is hereby given to the Board to  
enter this Order.

  
Stephen Armstrong, LMFT

3-27-16  
Date

I have read the attached Consent Order.  
I agree to supervise Stephen Armstrong's clinical practice of marriage and family therapy during face-to-face sessions a minimum of **one hour per week** and to report quarterly to the Board regarding his progress, as set forth above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor Signature

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ License #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_  
(including area code and extension number)