

Dual Relationships: A Call for Open Discourse

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Introduction

The social work and related literature define dual relationships in a variety of ways. Some authors group dual relationships “. . . according to either the setting or the nature of the relationship.” (Pearson and Piazza, 1997, p. 89). Although the literature indicates there are sexual and non-sexual dual relationships, the distinction is often not clear where one ends and the other begins. A brief review of the variations in definitions of dual relationships illustrating this problem follows.

For those who define dual relations using the concept of roles, there is some agreement on the definition. Dual relationships occur when a professional and a client take on additional roles with one another outside of the primary professional relationship. However, tension arises for defining the relationships due to the large range of roles and the settings and practices in which they occur. These may include friend, teacher, employer, sexual partner, community member or neighbor, employee, co-members of community or church groups, acquaintance, customer, relative, research subject, supervise, or business associate (Anderson and Kitchener, 1998; Bonosky, 1995; Congress, 1996, 2001; Kagle and

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