

IN THE MATTER OF	*	BEFORE THE MARYLAND STATE
PATRICIA G. WEBBINK, Ph.D.	*	BOARD OF EXAMINERS OF
Respondent	*	PSYCHOLOGISTS
License Number: 0810	*	Case Number: 2014-002

* * * * *

CONSENT ORDER

On or about September 3, 2014, the Maryland State Board of Examiners of Psychologists (the "Board") charged **PATRICIA G. WEBBINK, Ph.D.** (the "Respondent"), License Number 0810, with violating the Maryland Psychologists Act (the "Act"), codified at Md. Code Ann., Health Occ. ("Health Occ.") §§ 18-101 *et seq.* (2009 Repl. Vol.).

Specifically, the Board charged the Respondent with violating the following provisions of the Act:

§ 18-313. Denials, reprimands, suspensions, and revocations -- Grounds

Subject to the hearing provisions of § 18-315 of this subtitle, the Board, on the affirmative vote of a majority of its members then serving, may deny a license to any applicant, reprimand any licensee, place any licensee on probation, or suspend or revoke a license of any licensee if the applicant or licensee:

(7) Violates the code of ethics adopted by the Board under § 18-311 of this subtitle;

(12) Violates any provision of this title or any regulation adopted by the Board;

(17) Commits an act of unprofessional conduct in the practice of psychology;

(20) Does an act that is inconsistent with generally accepted professional standards in the practice of psychology;

In addition, pursuant to Health Occ. § 18-313(7) and (12), shown above, the Board charges the Respondent with violating the following provisions of the Board's regulations and Code of Ethics, found at Md. Code Regs. ("COMAR"):

10.36.05.03 Responsibilities and Requirements.

A. In General.

(1) A psychologist shall:

(f) Interact with individuals in the workplace in a respectful manner without engaging in behavior that is harassing or demeaning;

10.36.05.04 Competence.

B. Impaired Competence.

(2) A psychologist may not:

(b) Engage in other relationships that could limit the psychologist's objectivity or create a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.

10.36.05.07 Client Welfare.

B. Exploitation. A psychologist may not:

(1) Exploit or harm clients, colleagues, students, research participants, or others;

(3) Exploit the trust and dependency of clients, students, and subordinates;

On or about November 20, 2014, a Case Resolution Conference ("CRC") was held before a committee of the Board. As a resolution of this case, the Respondent agreed to enter into this public Consent Order consisting of Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The Board finds the following facts.

1. The Respondent was originally licensed to practice psychology in Maryland on or about June 14, 1975 under license number 0810. The Respondent's license is current through March 31, 2016.

2. At all times relevant hereto, the Respondent maintained a home-based office to practice psychology located in Bethesda (the "Home Office").

3. On or about July 12, 2013, a Board received a complaint (the "Complaint") from the internship coordinator and chair of the forensic psychology department (the "Complainant") of a university. The Complaint alleged that the Respondent had taken advantage of one of the university's masters students in forensic psychology (the "Student") who had served as an intern under the Respondent's supervision. In particular, the Complaint alleged that the Respondent had exploited her position of authority by assigning the Student to complete tasks that served the Respondent's personal interests but were unrelated to forensic psychology.

4. Based on the Complaint, the Board initiated an investigation. In furtherance of the investigation, the Board's investigator interviewed relevant parties and obtained relevant documents. In addition, the Board procured an expert review of the matter.

Prior Discipline

5. The Respondent has been subject to prior public discipline by the

Board on two occasions.

6. First, on or about December 16, 1986, the Respondent was reprimanded by the Board. Specifically, the Board found that the Respondent had violated the Board's statute when she "failed to exercise her responsibility to be alert to personal and financial situations and pressures that might lead to misuse of her influence." The Respondent violated the Board's statute when she persuaded a patient to sign a lease on a house owned by the Respondent "with the understanding that neither party would actually carry out the requirements of the lease."

7. Second, on or about July 7, 1997, the Respondent's license to practice psychology in Maryland was suspended for a period of two years, with probationary conditions applied upon reinstatement. The Respondent committed unprofessional conduct and violated the Board's Code of Ethics when she engaged in a sexual relationship with a patient and repeatedly breastfed her infant in front of patients and a patient's minor son.

Background to the Current Case

8. The Respondent's current practice comprises a private psychotherapy practice at the Home Office. In addition, she does some assessments, occasionally serves as an expert witness in legal cases, and served as a supervisor for at least one student internship prior to this matter. It was her experience in forensic psychology that led to her association with the Student,

9. On or about February 12, 2013, after seeing the Respondent's name

listed on her university's website as a possible internship supervisor, the Student completed an application for an internship in forensic psychology with the Respondent. The internship was to be unpaid, but would earn the Student academic credit required to graduate.

10. On or about March 8, 2013, after discussion with the Complainant, the Respondent signed a Forensic Psychology Affiliation Agreement (the "Agreement") with the Student's university. The Agreement formally retained the Respondent as an internship supervisor for the university's psychology students for a term of one year.

Self-interested Assignments

11. In approximately April, 2013, the internship officially commenced. However, approximately two months earlier, in February, 2013, when the Student first applied to work with the Respondent the Student was not sure whether she wanted an internship or a paid position with Respondent. Therefore, at the suggestion of the Respondent, the Student began assisting the Respondent in promotional events for a child enrichment center affiliated with the Respondent, as well as attending general psychology-related workshops presented by the Respondent. The Student participated in these events approximately two times per week until the start date of her internship. The Student was neither paid, nor did she receive academic credit for participating in these events.

12. After the official start date of the internship, the Respondent had the Student perform other activities that bore no relation to forensic psychology and that failed to advance the Student's professional training in forensic psychology.

13. On one occasion, the Respondent had the Student chop vegetables for her in the Respondent's kitchen. The Respondent asserts that while doing so, the two discussed matters relating to forensic psychology.

On subsequent days, the Respondent asked the Student to answer the Respondent's personal emails, make edits to the Respondent's personal will, organize a cluttered room of her office, take dictation, and perform other clerical duties, some of which were unrelated to forensic psychology.

14. In total, according to the Student's estimation, approximately 30% of the Student's time was spent performing tasks related to forensic psychology, such as observing client sessions and tutoring. The other 70% was spent on unrelated tasks. After two weeks of the internship the Student described the situation to the Complainant, who advised her not to return to the internship. The Complainant then informed the Respondent that he was terminating the Agreement.

Board Interview

15. On or about October 23, 2013, the Board's investigator interviewed the Respondent under oath regarding the allegations. For the most part, the Respondent did not deny them. The Respondent acknowledged her responsibility for assigning the Student tasks unrelated to forensic psychology during the internship, saying that she had made a "dreadful mistake." The Respondent revealed that she simply lacked appropriate work for the Student to do, saying she felt "very disappointed in myself that I didn't call her supervisor and say, look, I need to send her home . . . you know, because I don't have the forensic work

during the hours she has given me." Respondent had two forensic cases she intended to have the Student participate in, but the clients in both cases cancelled appointments and did not reschedule until after the Student had terminated the internship.

16. At times in the interview the Respondent offered a different perspective on the problems that arose during the internship. For example, she cited the Student's schedule as a significant problem. The Respondent also stated that "communication was not her strong point," referring to the fact that the Student did not communicate her dissatisfaction directly to the Respondent. Regarding why she had the Student chop vegetables, she explained that, "sometimes, I don't like to be idle. So I may have done that with her so that we could talk about things..."

17. The Respondent also sought to portray the assignments as selected for the benefit of the Student: "I kept trying to give her something forensic, and doing my personal will had some legality to it, but you know, I was stretching it."

18. Before the Complaint was filed and immediately following her experience with the Student, the Respondent ceased supervision of internships. The Respondent also left her practice for three weeks to deal with the stress in her life at that time. She has been working in psychotherapy with a psychologist on all of these issues, as well as consulting with another psychologist about the issues brought up in the Complaint.

Expert Review

19. In furtherance of the investigation, the Board retained a licensed

psychologist (the "Expert"). In her report, the Expert confirmed that the Respondent's conduct fell below appropriate professional standards.

20. In particular, the Expert opined that the Respondent's usurpation of the Student's time and effort to assist with her personal affairs was unethical and exploitative, and represented a conflict of interest.

21. Finally, against the backdrop of the Respondent's previous disciplinary cases, which included similar ethical failures with respect to professional boundaries, and conflicts of interest, the Expert noted that the Respondent's "conduct in the current matter seems to demonstrate a propensity to disregard the professional and ethical standards that govern the practice of psychology."

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Respondent's assignment to the Student of tasks that benefited her own interests and that were unrelated to forensic psychology constitutes violations of the Act, including: Health Occ. § 18313(7), (12), (17), and (20); of the Code of Ethics adopted by the Board, including: COMAR 10.36.05.03A(1)(f), 10.36.05.04B(2)(b), and 10.36.05.07B(1) and (3); and of accepted standards of the profession.

ORDER

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is by a majority of the Board considering this case hereby:

ORDERED that Respondent shall be **REPRIMANDED**; and it is further

ORDERED that the Respondent's license shall be **SUSPENDED** for a period of

one (1) year, immediately **STAYED**; and it is further

ORDERED that the Respondent shall permanently refrain from participating in academic internships in any supervisory role; and it is further

ORDERED that the Respondent shall promptly give written notice that she no longer participates in academic internships to all institutions with which she has done so in the preceding five years, including Argosy University, Walden University, and Liberty University, and promptly provide proof of notification to the Board;

ORDERED that the Respondent shall be placed on **PROBATION** for a minimum period of **TWO (2) YEARS**, and until she shall fully and satisfactorily comply with the following probationary terms and conditions:

- A. Within one year of the effective date of the consent order, the Respondent shall, at her own expense, successfully complete a **BOARD-APPROVED COURSE** focusing on counseling ethics and professional boundary issues, equivalent to three (3) graduate level credits, and shall submit written verification that satisfies the Board of the successful completion of the course within 30 days of completion of the course;
- B. The course mentioned above shall not count toward the Respondent's continuing education (CE) requirements for licensure;
- C. The Respondent shall comply with the Act; and
- D. Immediately after the two (2) year period of probation, the Respondent may petition the Board in writing to terminate probation, provided that she has been fully compliant with the terms of probation and does not have any pending complaints filed against her; and it is further

ORDERED that if the Board receives credible information that the Respondent has failed to comply with any term or condition of the Consent Order, then the Board shall immediately lift the stay of the suspension referenced above, and after an

opportunity to be heard at a show cause hearing, the Board may impose a further sanction, including reprimand, probationary terms and conditions, the suspension or revocation of her license, and/or fine; and it is further

ORDERED that this Consent Order shall be a **PUBLIC DOCUMENT** pursuant to Md. Code Ann., General Provisions, § 4-101 through 4-601 (2014).

January 7, 2015
Date

Steven Sobelman, Ph.D.
Chair
Maryland State Board of Examiners
Of Psychologists

RESPONDENT'S CONSENT

1. By signing this Consent, I hereby affirm the findings of fact and conclusions of law contained herein and agree to be bound by this Consent Order.
2. By signing this Consent, I waive any rights I may have had to contest the findings and conclusions of this Consent Order.
3. I acknowledge that this is a formal order of the Board and as such is a public document.
4. I acknowledge the legal authority and the jurisdiction of the Board to enter and enforce this Consent Order.
5. I sign this Consent Order knowingly and voluntarily, having had the opportunity to consult with legal counsel.

Dec 29, 2014
Date

Patricia G. Webbink, Ph.D.

The Respondent

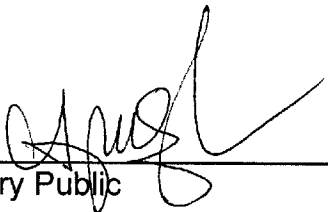
NOTARY

STATE OF Maryland

CITY/COUNTY OF Montgomery

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on this 29 day of December, 2014,
before me, a Notary Public of the foregoing State and City/County personally appeared
Patricia G. Webbink, Ph.D., and made oath in due form of law that signing the foregoing
Consent Order was her voluntary act and deed.

AS WITNESSETH my hand and notary seal



Notary Public

My commission expires:

AGNIESZKA SINGH
Notary Public-Maryland
Montgomery County
My Commission Expires
April 15, 2018