



# Module Overview



## Multiple Role Relationships and Dual Relationships

*Half the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important. They don't mean to do harm. But the harm does not interest them.*

—T.S. Eliot



Figure 2.1 (psychologytoday.com)

Consider the following Ofer Zur (2012) quote regarding multiple role relationships, and the several implications and considerations they compel practitioners to address:

Multiple relationships can be ethical or unethical, legal or illegal, and can be avoidable, unavoidable or mandated. They can also be planned and anticipated or unexpected. Then they can be concurrent or sequential and can also vary with different levels of involvement, from low/minimal to intense... Non-sexual multiple relationships are not necessarily unethical or illegal. Multiple relationships can't be avoided in many settings and are mandated in others. Multiple relationships are a healthy part of small and rural communities. Sexual multiple relationships with current clients are always unethical.

THERE IS A REASON WHY OUR CLASS TEXTBOOK DEVOTES THREE CHAPTERS TO MULTIPLE ROLE relationships. They are common and sometimes unavoidable, but always need to be addressed. Module Two will address multiple role relationships, dual relationships, the difference between the two, and how to avoid conflict by adhering to an established protocol regarding professional boundaries.

Multiple role relationships and dual relationships are often lumped together as the same thing. In most of the literature in psychology they are considered the same or similar. Most often we can think of a multiple relationship as those where unavoidable conditions are presented. Multiple relationships are most often those relationships where an unintentional overlap of roles takes place or is about to take place. A dual relationship is intentional and occurs when an overlap of roles or intersection points has already taken place between the professional and the client, supervisee, graduate student, or research participant. It helps to think of dual relationships as avoidable and multiple relationships as unavoidable. A dual relationship is frequently the result of having made an error, whereas a multiple relationship asks for problem solving to be initiated in order to avoid an error.

Consider the situation where you have a private practice in a rural setting where you offer psychotherapy to adults and children in your community. You have been in this community for about two years and your wife works as a teacher at one of the local elementary schools. One day your wife comes home complaining about one of her colleagues who had erupted angrily at her. Your wife tells you who it is and wants to talk about her. The person she is having a conflict with is an established client of yours. This is an unintentional potential multiple role relationship conflict. You have not done anything yet, but something has presented and you must now navigate through what to do next. You will be seeing this client in two days. When you took on the client, she was working at another school. You were unaware she had transferred to the school where your wife works.

- Now consider that you have been teaching a class in *Ethics in Psychology* at a local university. One of your students comes by your office most days when you are on campus. One day he brings you a gift of a painting he bought at a local art fair. It looks expensive. It is a painting of Sigmund Freud on the couch with a client in the analyst's chair. Your student asks if you might like to join him for dinner on Friday night at his apartment. You accept his invitation, because he said he had so much he wanted to share with you about ethics. This is an example of a dual relationship. A dual relationship is intentional and the overlap of roles (in this case from teacher to friendship or dating)

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