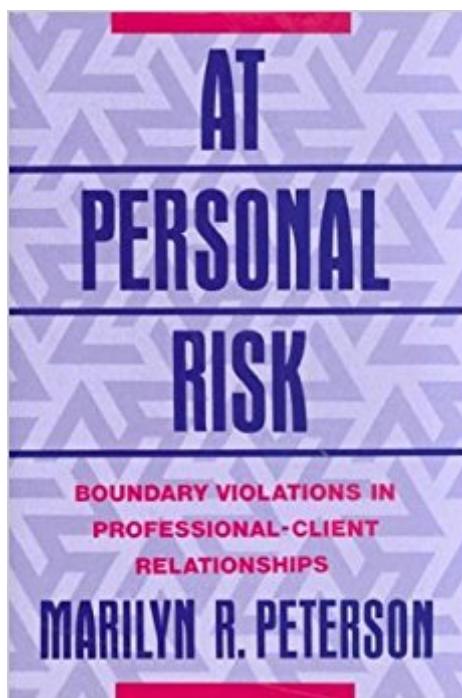


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# At Personal Risk: Boundary Violations In Professional-Client Relationships



## **Synopsis**

This book addresses boundary violations through the lens of the professional-client relationship, drawing examples of misconduct from law, medicine, religion, education and psychotherapy. The first three chapters cover the social context of the relationship, the inherent power differential that delineates the relational boundaries, and professionals' difficulty with managing that power appropriately. Also discussed are the four characteristics of a boundary violation—a reversal of roles, a secret, a double bind, and an indulgence of professional privilege—and the damage to the client. Throughout the book, clients share their stories of violations—sometimes blatant, often subtle—in relationships. These vignettes, along with Peterson's engaging style, transform ethics from dry, abstract, and theoretical principles to vital struggles to understand and appropriately manage power with clients.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Professionals can no longer afford to be uninformed about their professional vulnerability. A better informed public and increasingly litigious society place them at risk for possible legal action and professional sanctions when they violate professional-client boundaries. This book addresses boundary violations through the lens of the professional-client relationship, drawing examples of misconduct from law, medicine, religion, education, and psychotherapy—professions which oblige the professional to place the client's needs first. Professional misconduct is commonly defined by content (for example, sexual harassment or misuse of client funds); this practice eclipses the injury

to the relationship itself and ignores, dismisses, or normalizes violations that do not fit within the specific categories of malfeasance or codes of ethics. *At Personal Risk* expands the spectrum of behaviors that are hurtful to clients by redefining violations as a process of disconnection that occurs within the relational context. The first three chapters cover the social context of the relationship, the inherent power differential that delineates the relational boundaries, and professionals' difficulty with managing that power appropriately. The fourth and fifth chapters describe the four characteristics of a boundary violation--a reversal of roles, a secret, a double bind, and an indulgence of professional privilege--and the damage to the client. The sixth chapter prescribes the healing process for the client and the professional, and the seventh examines the blocks to a relational solution. Throughout the book, clients share their stories of violations--sometimes blatant, often subtle--in relationships with doctors, therapists, clergy, teachers, and lawyers. These vignettes, along with Peterson's engaging style, change ethics from dry, abstract, and theoretical principles to vital struggles to understand and appropriately manage power with clients. *At Personal Risk* is preventative, in providing professionals with an early warning system to alert them to impending trouble. It is also unique in that it prescribes the healing that can help professionals recognize their impact and take steps to restore breached boundaries and repair the relationship. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

I think Peterson's book is a step in the right direction by acknowledging how the power imbalance in relationships between professionals and clients can facilitate abuse and exploitation of people who rely on doctors, lawyers, clergy, teachers and therapists. However it is a significant flaw not to recognize that these are not just "spiritual" relationships based on a "covenant" but fiduciary relationships where professionals are supported economically by their clients. In terms of the ethos of care and putting the client first, all jobs put the clients first in order for the working world to produce. The ethos of care of putting clients first can imply that what professionals do is still a favor, when the reality is that is how professionals make a living. Another significant issue with Petersons book is how she approaches relational healing between the professional and client. Again, a professional acknowledging the violation is a step in the right direction, however, leaving out a sincere apology is a major flaw for without that, meaningful healing cannot take place. In terms of clients sueing, it is ultimately the right of a client to seek justice and not be accused of just seeking "revenge" which further blames the victim and does not hold the perpetrator accountable. I think a relational healing with a sincere apology could potentially be a better solution towards healing, however it is still unrealistic and oftentimes the only way that people without privilege can assert

their rights is through higher courts of justice. As Peterson herself ultimately stated, the boundary violation belongs to the professional, not the client.

Lots of great information that worked well for my class. Definitely recommend from if you need this text for a class. Easy to read and apply to the class I was taking.

This book is a "must-read" for therapists and other professionals (namely doctors, attorneys, teachers and clergy). Brings to light many relevant ethical issues. I read this as an assigned book for a Masters program in MFT and found it excellent!!!

Excellent in defining boundaries and useful tactics in maintenance. Great examples for ethical use

Excellent book

This text is required reading for a class I teach to students majoring in Community and Human Services through SUNY Empire State.

A friend recommended this book to me to help increase my feelings of self awareness in a more violent society. While it does contain some useful information, I think that it tends to present the idea that one needs to be overly suspicious to be safe. To me, there is a difference between awareness and paranoia. I would not recommend this book.

I was fortunate enough to have read this book when it first came out as I was beginning my practice. Now as a faculty member I have used this book for a number of graduate clinical courses over the last eleven years. Peterson is insightful in her analysis of the fiduciary relationship between therapist and client. This approach is especially needed in the current climate of the recovery model of mental illness. Students far too easily adapt a client/friend/coach attitude and become unaware of the inherent imbalance of power that cannot be ignored in helping relationships. As someone who has given testimony to governing boards concerning therapist boundary violations I believe that At Personal Risk gives students an excellent theoretical ground from which to build healthy practice ethics and guidelines.

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