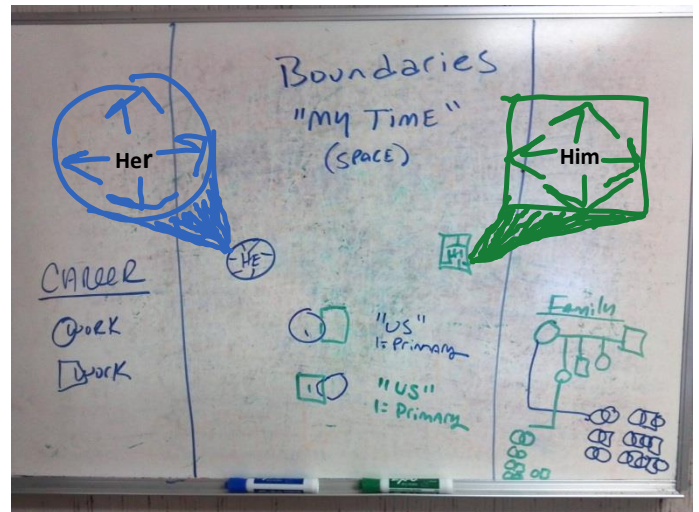


Boundaries: a Matter of Time and Space

Kurt LaRose MSW LCSW CHT CSW Qualified Supervisor

Boundaries can be viewed in the context of personal space (a range of distance between two parties, for example). And while an arm's length might be generally "normal" in measuring or assessing "personal space" other boundaries are much more difficult to define. Psychological space, emotional space, spiritual space, and sexual space are not demarcated by "an arm's length." Even so, personal space and psychological, emotional, sexual, and spiritual boundaries are all factors in what creates a sense of overall wellbeing.



Boundaries can be viewed in the context of healthy, unhealthy, confused, permissive, guarded, pushed, stretched, compromised, absent, rigid, and violated. Boundary confusion, that maybe the "space" is vague, or appears to adjust according to others' expectations, needs, wants, desires, and sometimes by others' demands, is evident in human interactions.

Boundaries could be considered as intrinsic and extrinsic; and while many boundaries would appear to be inherent to a person, family, community, or culture – such appearances would have to include presumptions. Presumptive boundaries may be a "norm" but in all systems, the norm is relative to the culture (and to its subcultures). In other words, some boundaries are idiosyncratic. An assumptive boundary is one that applies to self (in the first person experience) whereas a presumptive boundary may apply to self, but usually it applies to others (in the second or third person observation).

Boundaries are often negotiable (which means two or more parties agree to them and/or there is an agreement to change the boundary). Sometimes boundaries are absolute. Safety considerations usually void boundary negotiation, and in safety threats, presumptive boundaries often (and unfortunately) prevail.

Boundary violations can occur on a continuum, from non-existent (a person is oblivious or unaware of others' boundaries), to mild (a bump without follow-up), moderate (some justification for the violation - which may or may not be an excuse) and extreme (life threatening and or lifesaving). Circumstance and context matter in how a boundary is set, tested, asserted, negotiated, navigated, and maintained.

Sources for boundary origination (the determination by which boundaries guide interaction) develop in a life event or a series of events of significance. Boundaries can be shaped during the course of a life span. The more repetition there is in boundary development (healthy and unhealthy) the more deeply held a boundary is; often boundaries are learned in family of origins. Boundaries can be "imprinted" (a strong memory that is created and stored, so to speak) based upon relationships of some high regard (love and affection) and/or based upon those having a high impact on the psyche (whether fictive kin, biological, and in the case of trauma, the "imprint" can occur sometimes with strangers).

Boundary confusion is rooted in logistics and matters of managing time and managing priorities. "My Space / My Time" is separate from "Your Space / Your Time;" these two are unique to "Our Time." Further, in the context of "Our Time" there is the matter of prerogative, choice, and there is an arrangement involving the primary and secondary boundaries (where primary and secondary roles can be reversed in another or separate event).