

# Boundary Issues – Reflections on "Self and Others"

## Juliette Kirkwood

*Juliette, completed the Grad.Dip.in Dance Therapy at Wesley Institute, Sydney. In terms of Dance Therapy, she has worked with Drug and Alcohol rehabilitation, and Women with Post Natal Depression. She is also a Food Technologist with over 10 years experience working in Research and Development. She says, "So I have made the transition from science to art. The best thing I ever did really".*

*Juliette was inspired by the book "Self and Others" written by Hamilton, N. G., Aronson, Northdale, 1992. This book highlights the importance of the formation of boundaries as a developmental task for human beings. This developmental task is seated in Object Relation theory and is essential in the development of a sense of self. Juliette also highlights the significance of the mothers' role in the successful completion of this task and how vital it is for us as a society to support mothers in such an important role- shaping the psyche of our future.*

## The importance of boundaries

*Self and Others* presents some very interesting and informative theory about growth and development. The whole book provides useful information but chapter 3, entitled 'Self-Object', was the most useful to me as a Dance Therapist.

"If there is no external object with which to compare one's self, there is no self and no stable sense of reality...for the self is nothing except half of the Self-Object duality." (N.G. Hamilton 1990)

Forming boundaries would have to be one of the most important tasks facing human beings. To have a sense of self, one would have to know what is not self. If this self and non-self boundary is not present or is blurred then our sense of reality would be lost.

Throughout the book the outstanding message was the importance of identifying and establishing boundaries. It seems that most of the growth and development of human beings hinges on this process. The stages of autism and symbiosis could be seen as pre-boundaries and separation/individuation as the identification of those boundaries. The stage of developing object constancy could be seen as the establishment of these boundaries.

Part three, entitled 'The Object Relations Continuum', highlights two key points. The first being all the things that can go wrong within the

human psyche as a result of the formation of boundaries not being sufficiently completed. The second, being the importance of the mother's role in providing love for the proper development of a child's sense of self. The mothering role is key in this process. Without this mothering aspect, the development of a child can be seriously thwarted.

The following chapters, in part four, provide information on treatment approaches. The dynamics that exist between the client and therapist are extremely complex. It appears that the process of providing "good enough mothering" is not as simple as it sounds. It begs the question, how easy and natural is it to provide a child with "good enough mothering" to ensure he/she successfully travels along the continuum of identifying and establishing a sense of self? It might be radical to suggest that mothers need training and ongoing support for this very important task.

This book has proven to be incredibly useful to me as a Dance Therapist by clarifying boundary issues:

(5) Having a lack of boundaries and tending to merge with the therapist being unaware of where the self ends and where the other begins. An example of this would be when a client projects their feelings, whether negative or positive, onto the therapist and then reacts to them as if the feelings belong to the therapist. In Object Relations this process is called projective identification or countertransference.

(6) Having very strong boundaries but unable to let people in or reach out. This type of client would probably have trust and intimacy issues. An example of this would be when the client shows very high degrees of resistance and possible intellectualisation. Intellectualisation is a loose term I use to describe clients who spend too much time in their head and resist feelings.

The ultimate goal of therapy would be to help clients to gain control and have choice over their boundaries. To have the ability to open up and be intimate whilst being able to protect oneself when necessary.

As a Dance Therapist, I see the relevance of approaching the issue of boundaries through:

1. Authentic Movement: developing a way of staying in touch with the authentic self; and
2. Moving the polarities of movement. The polarities provide a great place to start in approaching any issue facing the client. The aim would be to help the client find a comfortable place within the continuum of those polarities. And then integrate this movement into a meaningful

relationship with the whole self. I believe that it is in the act of embracing the whole that meaning can be found. As I have experienced in my own movement history, finding meaning can help facilitate the healing process.

*Self and Others* has answered a lot of questions in regards to growth and development, but it has also raised a few questions, which I have not addressed

here. “How can we as a society better support mothers in the role of mothering?” “What role can Dance Therapy have in the provision of that support?” These are the kinds of questions that may take a lifetime to answer but I, for one, am motivated to explore this aspect.

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