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7 **BEFORE THE**  
8 **BOARD OF PSYCHOLOGY**  
9 **DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS**  
10 **STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

11 In the Matter of the Accusation Against:

Case No. 600-2015-000531

12 **CHRISTINA VILLARREAL, Ph.D.**  
220 Montgomery St, Ste. 1019  
San Francisco, CA 94104-3434

**A C C U S A T I O N**

13 Psychologist License No. PSY 20996

14 Respondent.

15  
16 Complainant alleges:

17 **PARTIES**

18 1. Antonette Sorrick (Complainant) brings this Accusation solely in her official capacity  
19 as the Executive Officer of the Board of Psychology (Board), Department of Consumer Affairs.

20 2. On August 7, 2006, the Board issued Psychologist License Number PSY 20996 to  
21 Christina Villarreal, Ph.D. (Respondent). The license is renewed and current, with an expiration  
22 date of November 30, 2017.

23 **JURISDICTION**

24 3. This Accusation is brought before the Board of Psychology under the authority of the  
25 following laws and regulations:<sup>1</sup>

26 \_\_\_\_\_  
27 <sup>1</sup> All statutory references are to the California Business and Professions Code (Code) unless  
28 otherwise indicated.

1 A. Section 726 of the Business and Professions Code provides that the commission of  
2 any act of sexual abuse, misconduct, or relations with a patient, client or customer  
3 constitutes unprofessional conduct and grounds for disciplinary action.

4 B. Section 729 of the Code provides that a psychologist who engages in sexual  
5 contact with a patient or client, or with a former patient or client when the relationship was  
6 terminated primarily for the purpose of engaging in those acts, is guilty of sexual  
7 exploitation.

8 C. Section 2960 of the Business and Professions Code states in pertinent part that the  
9 Board of Psychology may suspend, revoke, or place on probation a licensee for  
10 unprofessional conduct which is defined to include, but is not limited to any of the  
11 following causes:

12 (i) Violating any rule of professional conduct promulgated by the board and set  
13 forth in regulations duly adopted under [Chapter 6.6 of Division 2 of the Business  
14 and Professions Code].

15 (k) Violating any of the provisions of [Chapter 6.6 of Division 2 of the Business and  
16 Professions Code] or regulations duly adopted thereunder.

17 (o) Any act of sexual abuse, or sexual relations with a patient or former patient  
18 within two years following termination of therapy, or sexual misconduct that is  
19 substantially related to the qualifications, functions or duties of a psychologist.

20 D. Section 2960.1 of the Code provides that “any proposed decision or decision  
21 issued under this chapter...that contains any finding of fact that the licensee...engaged in  
22 any act of sexual contact...when that act is with a patient, or with a former patient within  
23 two years following termination of therapy, shall contain an order of revocation. The  
24 revocation shall not be stayed by the administrative law judge.”

25 E. Section 2936 of the Business and Professions Code provides that the Board shall  
26 establish as its standards of ethical conduct relating to the practice of psychology, the  
27 “Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct” published by the American Psychological  
28 Association (APA). Those standards shall be applied by the Board as the accepted

1 standard of care in all Board enforcement policies and disciplinary case evaluations.

2 F. American Psychological Association Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code  
3 of Conduct, Ethical Standard 10.05, Sexual Intimacies with Current Therapy  
4 Clients/Patients, provides that “Psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies with  
5 current therapy clients/patients. Ethical Standard 10.08, Sexual Intimacies with Former  
6 Therapy Clients/Patients, provides that “Psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies  
7 with former clients/patients for at least two years after cessation or termination of  
8 therapy,” and “Psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies with former  
9 clients/patient even after a two-year interval except in the most unusual circumstances.  
10 Psychologists who engage in such activity after the two years following cessation or  
11 termination of therapy and of having no sexual contact with the former client/patient bear  
12 the burden of demonstrating that there has been no exploitation, in light of all relevant  
13 factors, including (1) the amount of time that has passed since therapy terminated; (2) the  
14 nature, duration, and intensity of the therapy; (3) the circumstances of termination; (4) the  
15 client’s/patient’s personal history; (5) the client’s/patient’s current mental status; (6) the  
16 likelihood of adverse impact on the client/patient; and(7) any statements or actions made  
17 by the therapist during the course of therapy suggesting or inviting the possibility of a post  
18 termination sexual or romantic relationship with the client/patient.”

19 G. American Psychological Association Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code  
20 of Conduct, Ethical Standard 3.04, Avoiding Harm, provides that psychologists must take  
21 reasonable steps to avoid harming their clients/patients and to minimize harm where it is  
22 foreseeable and unavoidable.

23 H. Section 125.3 of the Code provides, in part, that the Board may request the  
24 administrative law judge to direct any licentiate found to have committed a violation or  
25 violations of the licensing act, to pay the Board a sum not to exceed the reasonable costs  
26 of the investigation and enforcement of the case.

27 I. Section 2964.6 of the Code provides that an administrative disciplinary decision that  
28 imposes terms of probation may include, among other things, a requirement that the

1 licensee who is being placed on probation pay the monetary costs associated with  
2 monitoring the probation.

3 **FIRST CAUSE FOR DISCIPLINE**

4  
5 (Unprofessional Conduct, Sexual Relations with Patient/Former Patient,  
6 Violation of Rules of Professional Conduct)

7 4. At all times relevant to this matter, Respondent has been licensed as a psychologist  
8 in the State of California.

9 5. Patient<sup>2</sup> sought psychotherapy from Respondent in approximately May 2009 to  
10 address depression following a difficult breakup with a girlfriend. Patient saw Respondent on a  
11 weekly basis from May 2009 through November 2009. Over the course of therapy, Respondent  
12 and Patient began to engage in social interactions such as emailing and on line communications,  
13 and discussing their personal lives during therapy sessions.

14 6. In late November 2009, Patient informed Respondent during a scheduled therapy  
15 session that he planned to discontinue his therapy. Patient and Respondent discussed the fact they  
16 wished to engage in a social, dating relationship. Respondent informed Patient that the  
17 psychologist patient relationship had to end before they could begin a personal relationship, and  
18 admonished him not to tell anyone as she could lose her license. Patient and Respondent  
19 arranged a social date for approximately a week after the last therapy session.

20 7. Between December 2009 and September 2013, Respondent and Patient had an  
21 intermittent sexual relationship. The sexual relationship continued even after Patient moved away  
22 from the Bay Area. Respondent and Patient continued to exchange email and text messages until  
23 approximately May 2014.

24 8. Respondent is subject to disciplinary action pursuant to Business and Professions  
25 Code sections 2960 [unprofessional conduct]; and/or 726 [sexual misconduct]; and/or 729 [sexual  
26 exploitation]; and/or 2960(k) [violating laws or regulations governing the practice of  
27 psychology]; and/or 2960(o) [sexual relations with a patient or former patient]; and/or 2936

28 <sup>2</sup> The patient in question is unidentified to protect privacy. Respondent is aware of  
Patient's identity.


1 [violation of APA Code of Ethics]; and/or the AMA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code  
2 of Conduct, Ethical Standards 10.03 and/or 10.08 [sexual intimacies with current and/or former  
3 patient); and/or Ethical Standard 3.04 [Avoiding Harm]. Respondent proposed a social/sexual  
4 relationship with Patient during a therapy session, terminated therapy with Patient in order to  
5 enter into a social/sexual relationship, and engaged in a personal and sexualized relationship with  
6 Patient within days of termination of therapy. Respondent acted upon her own perceived desire  
7 for a relationship in a manner that was not designed to avoid or minimize foreseeable harm to  
8 Patient.

9 **PRAYER**

10 WHEREFORE, Complainant requests that a hearing be held on the matters herein alleged,  
11 and that following the hearing, the Board issue a decision:

- 12 1. Revoking or suspending Psychology License No. Psy. 20996 issued to Christina  
13 Villarreal, Ph.D.
- 14 2. Ordering Respondent to pay the reasonable costs of the investigation and  
15 enforcement of this case, and if placed on probation, the costs of probation monitoring;
- 16 3. Taking such other and further action as the Board deems necessary and proper.

17  
18  
19 DATED: April 12, 2017

  
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ANTONETTE SORRICK  
Executive Officer  
Board of Psychology  
Department of Consumer Affairs  
State of California  
*Complainant*