

Last week in discussing sexual misconduct by clergy, we looked at several important factors that may precede and contribute to this kind of misconduct:

(1) **Work-related stress** (sometimes rooted in pastor's own false beliefs/values)

- a. Pastor's personal identity/sense of value is derived from ministry image/activities;
- b. Pastor's need to overperform in public settings in an environment that has poorly defined boundaries and expectations;
- c. Pastor's need to receive affirmation/approval makes it difficult for him/her to receive constructive criticism/redirection. This may result in the pastor having
 - i. Difficulty in working on teams;
 - ii. A tendency to self-isolate and mistrust others;
 - iii. Trying to control situations and people.
- d. Pastor's marriage relationship is depleted
 - i. Unstructured time where pastor is attentive to family becomes less;
 - ii. Spouse is emotionally overloaded by pastor's need to process work-related stress and receive appreciation for work-related tasks/identity.
 - iii. Financial stress from lower clergy salaries/disposable income and higher healthcare-related debt creates stress that affects pastor's marriage/family.
 - iv. When the pastor's marriage no longer provides a buffer against work-related stress but the marriage itself becomes a place of stress, the pastor will look outside marriage for a place to find approval/praise/comfort regarding work identity/performance.
- e. Pastor is depleted/distressed by negative impacts of aging, decrease in health, unfulfilled expectations and disappointments in one's work, perceived loss of status, loss of loved ones, etc.

(2) **Responding to stress**, anxiety, disappointment, shame or low self-esteem **by focusing on sexualized images to divert oneself and regain a sense of power in relation to others.**

(3) **Unrecognized transference**

- a. Definition=**Transference is an unconscious redirection of feelings from one person to another, often having its roots in an inappropriate repetition of relationships retained from childhood which are now projected upon a new object or person.**
- b. Assumptions:
 - i. We all need understanding, appreciation, approval, and acceptance (different forms that love takes in our primary relationships).
 - ii. In growing up, we try to find a sense of ourselves as valuable and want to be valued by others.
 1. Responding to our provisional sense of self, other people may accept and approve parts of who we are trying to be and try to impose their own sense of structure on this.

2. Others may also reject/express disapproval of some of the other parts of who we are trying to be; they may encourage us also to reject/disapprove of these things ourselves.
 - iii. The past (childhood plus certain later formative experiences) sets up a filter through which we understand and respond to the world.
 - iv. As a result, we never see events in an objective, wholly unfiltered way; instead we use a framework inherited from our past to presort and interpret experiences.
 - v. Things in the present are colored and shaped by past experiences which we see as being similar in character. These past relationships and feelings are carried into the present and shape our perceptions of present relationships.
- c. Because the transfer of past feelings to present relationships is largely unconscious, we become aware of transference only when we notice a particularly strong and inexplicable influence on our attitudes and actions when we are in direct contact with another person who reminds us of some past person toward whom we had certain feelings in the past.
- i. Movement toward another person (who is viewed as “special” because of the role they have or the qualities they are imagined to possess)
 1. Ingratiation—I want to please them by what I do and want to show that I am willing to work hard to gain their favor/approval
 2. Dependence—I want to move close to them to be comforted by them; I want them to relieve my feelings of anxiety and insecurity and make me feel complete.
 - a. See “Royce’s Story” in Virginia Todd Holeman and Stephen L. Martyn, *Inside the Leader’s Head: Unraveling Personal Obstacles to Ministry*, Nashville: Abingdon, 2008, 59-60
 3. Attraction—I want to possess the beauty that the other person has and keep it for myself so I can re-experience it and be gratified/stimulated by it.
 4. Idealization—The other person is
 - a. Imagined to be qualitatively different from the rest
 - b. Is thought to continuously uphold the highest values
 - c. Should be admired because they have made the greatest progress toward values I myself admire.
 - i. Idealizing transference (projected on spiritual teachers) is the subject of Schoen’s book, *Buddha Betrayed*, which we read in class last week.
 - ii. Idealizing transference becomes a substitute for real, healthy love: “But a third thing too can kill love; and it is idolatry. If you exalt the objects of your love until your picture is a false one; if you idealize them; *if you project upon them your own ideal picture of your own ideal self*; then you are

loving not a real person but a dream...What we need [instead] is real love of real people, to heal our loneliness; and that means seeing them as they really are and loving that" (Gerald Vann, *The Seven Swords*, n.p.: Sheed and Ward, 1953, 39).

- ii. Movement against another person (isolate and oppose)
 1. I need the attention that they might receive
 2. I need to show that I know better than them (am more competent/experienced than them).
 3. I must win instead of them (even at any cost)/I must be seen as dominant in the dispute.
- iii. Movement away from another person (isolate and detach)
 1. Being around the other person raises my anxiety level and makes me fearful about
 - a. how I will be judged or
 - b. whether unwanted conflict will occur.
 2. I begin by trying to charm them or placate them but then need to withdraw or flee, so that I do not feel exposed/am not subject to judgment/do not have to witness or be involved in conflict.

**Several of the books we read in prior weeks have examined the role that transference plays in structuring our present relationships in unhelpful ways (see esp. Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*; Baur, *Boundary Wars*; and Schoen, *Buddha Betrayed*).

One other book that is helpful in understanding how people, in response to transference, move toward or away from one another is Symeon Kragiopoulos, *Do You Know Yourself?: Psychological Problems and the Spiritual Life* (Manton, CA: Divine Ascent Press, 2010), which can be obtained from St. Vladimir's Seminary Press (<http://www.svspress.com/do-you-know-yourself/>) or Holy Cross Bookstore (<https://holycrossbookstore.com/products/do-you-know-yourself-psychological-problems-and-the-spiritual-life?variant=15341367811>) **

Moving toward other people due to unhealthy attraction or an unhealthy need for dependence can cause a pastor or a counselor to **change the nature of the relationship with the person they are counseling.**

Instead of listening carefully and helping the counselee with the issue they present, the pastor/counselor tries to shift the relationship with the counselee in a different direction, so that counselee is expected to care for the pastor/counselor and meet the pastor's/counselor's needs. This is called "**role reversal**" and is one of the most important predictors of pastors/counselors crossing boundaries and engaging in sexual misconduct with counselees/vulnerable people.

- On role reversal and the things that motivate it (loneliness, the impulse to confide, idealization of the "special patient," etc.) see Donna M. Norris, Thomas G. Gutheil and Larry Strasburger, "This Couldn't Happen to Me: Boundary Problems and Sexual Misconduct in the Psychotherapy Relationship," 519-520.

- For an example of “the special counselee” in a ministry setting, see Andrea Celenza, *Sexual Boundary Violations*, Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2007, 81-82.
- On how touch, gifts, confiding in another person, and keeping secrets can change the character of the relationship and create role reversal, see L. Ronald Brushwyler, “Staying in Bounds: Professional Boundaries for Clergy,” Westchester, IL: Midwest Ministry Development Service, 1996, 1-2 (<http://midwestministrydevelopment.org/pdf/Staying-In-Bounds.pdf>).
- The pastor/counselor may test boundaries by supposedly harmless touch or speech (which could be explained away if challenged). If not stopped or challenged by the counselee, the pastor may try to shift the roles and get the counselee to accept/act out a role in the pastor’s fantasy of what he/she thinks he/she needs to be well.
 - See Eileen Schmitz, *Staying in Bounds: Straight Talk on Boundaries for Effective Ministry*, St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010, 150-151 (which refers back to a case study on pp. 18-22).
 - For further examples, read Marilyn R. Peterson, *At Personal Risk: Boundary Violations in Professional-Client Relationships*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1992, 78-79 with comments on 80-81.
- If one does not keep track of how the relationship is changing and avoid role reversal, exploitation of the counselee by the pastor/counselor can result.
 - See R.S. Epstein, “The Exploitation Index” (https://www.oregon.gov/OBCE/publications/emebc_appendix_f.pdf) which looks at behavior that often leads counselors to cross boundaries and engage in sexual misconduct.

(4) Cognitive Distortions

- a. If we need something to be a certain way (the way our past suggests) but the present thing isn’t really the past thing or there is a significant gap between fantasy (what we think we need to be well) and reality (what’s actually going on), we can minimize or overlook this gap by using certain semi-conscious strategies. These strategies allow us to
 - i. Limit which details we see as relevant;
 - ii. Shift or refocus our attention to see some things as being at the center (necessary/most important) and other things as at the periphery (much less important/can be overlooked);
 - iii. Select or filter which interpretations are applied to the events (e.g. overgeneralization or polar [all or nothing] thinking).
 - iv. Using a false sense of objectivity to focus effort on achieving private goals (“Things should be this way,” so I must work hard to make sure things turn out just this way and only this way.)
 1. For examples of some of the most common cognitive distortions, see the handout from Burns, “The Ten Forms of Twisted Thinking.”
 2. Cognitive distortions become relevant to sexual misconduct because once a 1/counselor has decided to change the

relationship (so that the pastor/counselor can get something he/she needs by manipulating/using the counselee), the pastor/counselor can use cognitive distortions to “normalize” the situation, rationalize inappropriate behavior, and minimize any guilt felt after sexually offending.

- a. For examples, see handout from Adam Saradjian and Dany Nobus, “Cognitive Distortions of Religious Professionals Who Sexually Abuse Children,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 18 (2003): 911-913.

(5) **Compartmentalization**=Separation of one’s life into different domains which are viewed as unrelated and operate according to different principles or guidelines. See Loftus, 47 on compartmentalization.

- a. Using cognitive distortions to “normalize” crossing boundaries
(Pastor → lover)
(As a servant, I care for you → Now you must care for me and serve me)
requires a certain amount of energy. (It involves actively keeping things from oneself, but one can never admit to oneself that this is actually what one is doing.)
- b. To keep things going, one divides aspects of one’s life into different spheres, which operate according to different principles and different goals, with each sphere being kept strictly distinct from the other (as if it had nothing to do with other spheres of life or the logic/sense of good and evil that guided those other spheres of life).

We’ve all heard stories about

- i. The churchgoer who was an angel at church on Sunday, but was cruel and abusive in the workplace on Monday.
- ii. The pastor who seemed so concerned for the emotional needs of hurting people in the church, but was surprisingly distant and detached from the emotional needs of the pastor’s own spouse and children.
- c. In working in a high-stress, service-oriented job with poor boundaries and little feedback, a pastor may use **compartmentalization** to draw his/her own boundaries and say to himself/herself, “I’ve spent a lot of time and energy looking after other people and their problems—now it’s time for me to look out for myself and get what I want and need!” This conveys a sense of **entitlement** and **gives one permission to act according to a different logic**.

(6) **Narcissism**=A love for oneself which limits one’s concern to the pursuit of one’s own felt needs and the gratification of one’s desires. As a result, one may feel entitled to pursue personal gratification without regard to the feelings of others or the impacts of one’s behavior on others. As a result, narcissists may have little empathy for others and/or show little or no remorse for their actions.

- a. Narcissism/ego strength makes it easier to maintain compartmentalization and keep cognitive distortions in play, so that one does not feel conflicted when

crossing boundaries and exploiting dependent/vulnerable people. See Loftus, 39-40 on the role of ego strength in mitigating anxiety and distress.

Case Studies for Class Discussion

- Week #8: Pastoral Power and the Ethics of Sexual Misconduct Case Study (<http://www.didymus.org/case-study-on-pastoral-sexual-misconduct.html>)
- Allen Salkin and Julie Prey-Harbaugh, "Molested by Her Female Pastor," in Laurie Wills (ed.), *Sexual Predators*, Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 58-63.