

Overview: Institutional Abuse

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SACRED SPACES



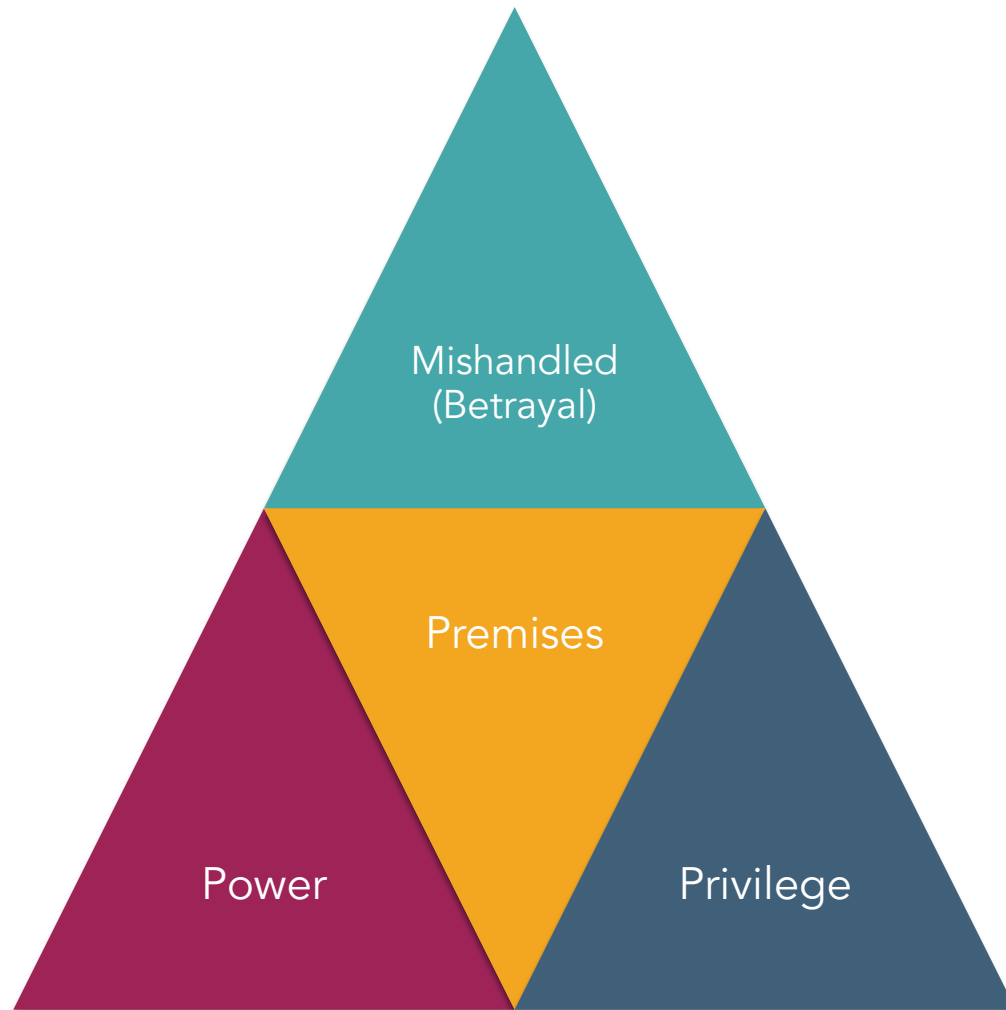
ADVANCING HEALTH EDUCATION & RESEARCH

Our Agenda

- Institutional Abuse
- Three Factors that Impede Ethical Responses
 - Psychological
 - Legal
 - Theological
- Framework for navigating moral complexity



Defining Institutional Abuse



Poll Question 1:

What gets in the way of an ethical institutional response in the face of abuse?

Questions to Consider

1. How do great leaders get it so wrong?
2. What gets in the way of an ethical institutional response in the face of abuse?
3. How might I use my position of leadership to pave a different way forward?



Poll Question 2:

If you noticed leaders mishandling of a case of abuse, do you have the authority in your role to intervene?

Psychological Errors

- Cognitive Dissonance
- Cognitive Distortions
- Assuming False Report

Cognitive Dissonance

An unpleasant tension we experience when faced with evidence that is inconsistent with our beliefs or behaviors.

Option 1

Alter beliefs
and behavior



Option 2

Reject conflicting
evidence

Example

“They immediately rallied to my defense... They said, ‘We know this young man... He has been in our community all of his life. We know his parents, his grandparents, his aunts, his uncles. This is not something he would do. This is not something that goes along with behavior that we see in him day in and day out,’ and that was true because I was very careful that they did not see that behavior day in and day out.”

~ Dr. Anna Salter, *Predators* (2003)



Cognitive Distortions

1. All or Nothing Thinking
2. Labeling



Herman, J. (1997) *Trauma and Recovery*

After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies:

- it never happened;
- the victim lies;
- the victim exaggerates;
- the victim brought it upon herself; and
- in any case it is time to forget the past and move on.

The more powerful the perpetrators, the greater their prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely their arguments prevail.



Assumptions of False Reporting

In the aftermath of a sexual assault.

Victims try to make everything appear normal after a rape. Self-blame is common, and while the event is occurring, in the presence of the perceived threat, victims often freeze... one of the first reactions for many people is to try and undo it, to try to pretend like it didn't happen... it's common in the aftermath of a rape to see the victim have 'quite extensive interaction with the person who's alleged to have committed the assault' as an 'attempt to try to undo it...you know, if I interact with this person normally, then I can tell myself that...what I feared just happened to me didn't really happen...Self-blame becomes an irrational strategy for regaining a sense of control, because to accept that what happened was beyond one's control is 'far scarier' than blaming oneself.

~ Dr. David Lisak



Legal Errors

- Lack of Transparency
- Governmental Involvement
- Fear of Lawsuits

Lack of Transparency

The activities of our leaders must never remain secret. They must be spelled out so that the community can hold them accountable... to take the position that it is the sole authority and that its approach is the only valid one is both arrogant and dangerous...

The “If-you-only-knew-what-we-knew” refrain is a call for complacency and powerlessness. Leaders who hide behind the “Trust-us” syndrome should never be trusted.

~Rabbi Avi Weiss, *Spiritual Activism*, p. 98



Governmental Involvement

- Private institution = privilege
- If you wait for proof of abuse, you have waited too long
- Too often, conflate evidentiary with institutional procedures.
- Our moral responsibilities do not end simply because the court cannot proceed.
- If we turn a blind eye every time an action is not prosecutable, we will miss the vast majority of cases

“The law holds it better that 10 guilty persons escape,
than that 1 innocent suffer.”

~William Blackstone, 18th-century English jurist



Fear of Lawsuits

“The defendants in ... sex abuse cases can do the smart thing, protect themselves, and do the right thing, take care of the victims, at the same time. Doing the smart thing and doing the right thing is the same thing. Generally, I would tell them to completely take care of the victim first, and they will find that it goes better for them after that. ”

~Clark K. (2009) William Mitchell Law Review



Theological Errors

- Repentance
- Gossip/Slander
- Clergy & Leadership Roles

A Voice is Heard in Ramah: The Critical Importance of Theological Engagement with the Topic of Child Maltreatment as a Means of Providing Spiritual Relief to Survivors

Victor I. Vieth, JD, MA

Abstract

A growing number of scholars contend that theological engagement with the topic of child abuse is critical to reduce the maltreatment of children in their homes and houses of worship. Theological engagement is also necessary in addressing the spiritual impact of child abuse and can help mitigate the physical and emotional impact of trauma. This article defines theological engagement, details research showing the misuse of sacred texts in the abuse of children and offers a concrete illustration of replacing toxic theology with trauma-informed theology.

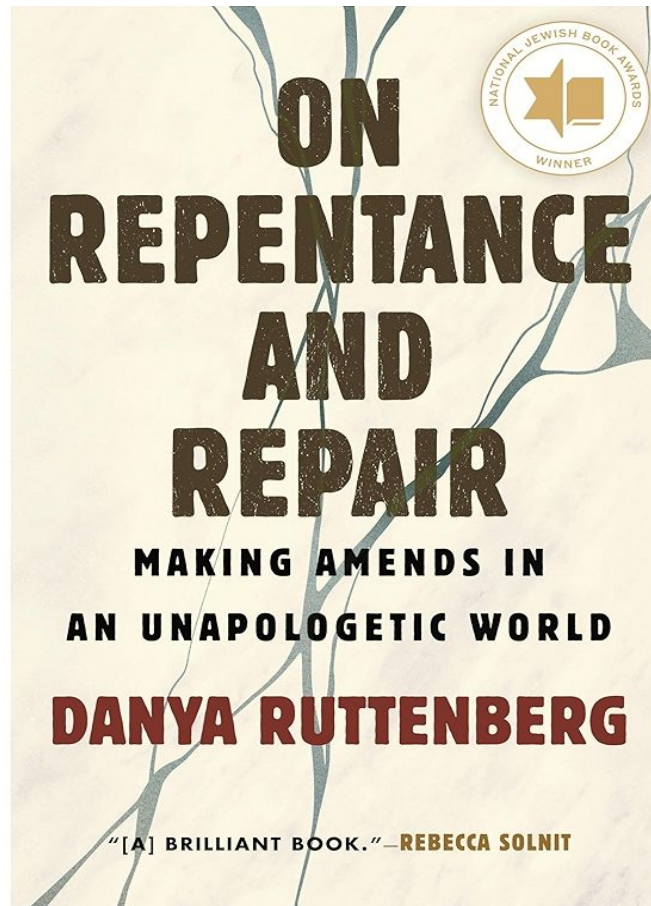
Keywords: *theological engagement, theological distortions, spiritual impact of abuse, seminary reform*

*"This is what the LORD says: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'"
– Jeremiah 31:15 (NIV 2011)*

The need for theological engagement with the topic of child abuse is increasingly finding its way into the academic literature. This is because theological distortions are often employed by offenders to justify

utilized by offenders in Jewish, Islamic and Christian communities. The good news is that a deeper, more enriching theology is already contained within the four corners of the sacred texts of many of the world's

Teshuvah



But it's not my
role!

Or is it???



Slander or Safety?

הִידֹעַ יָדַע כִּי בַעֲלִיס מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹן שָׁלַח אֶת־
יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן־נְתַנְיָה לְהַכְתֹּךְ נָפֶשׁ

Do you know that King Baalis of Ammon has
sent Ishmael son of Netania to kill you?

~Jeremiah 40

A Framework to Get It Right

Respect and Suspect

אָמַר רַבָּא הָאִי לִישָׁנָא בִּישָׁא אַע"פ דְּלִקְבֹּלִי לֹא מִבְּעִי
מִיחָשׁ לִיה מִבְּעִי.

Rava said: This type of malicious speech, *lashon hara*, although one should not accept it as truth, one is nevertheless required to be concerned about the harm that might result from ignoring it.

~Niddah 61a

Unreliable or an indicator of abuse?



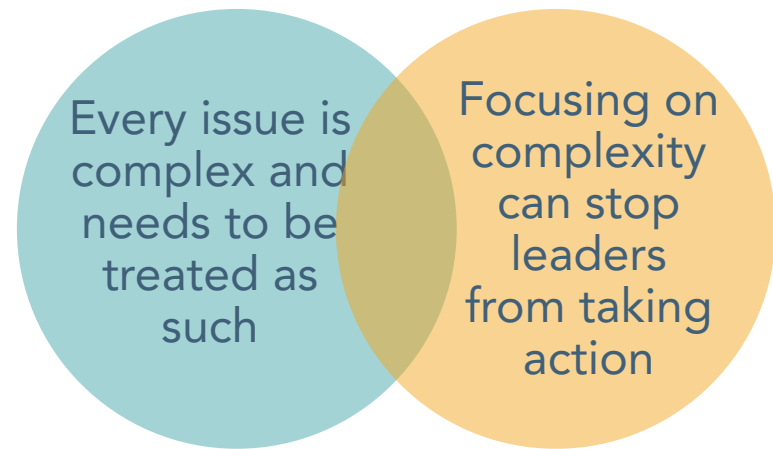
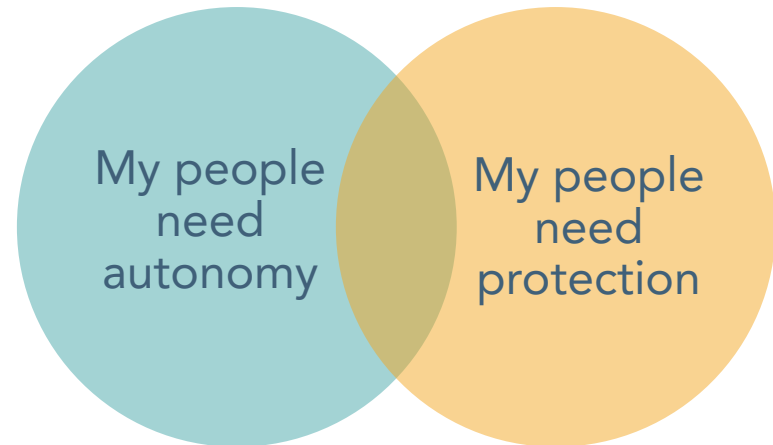
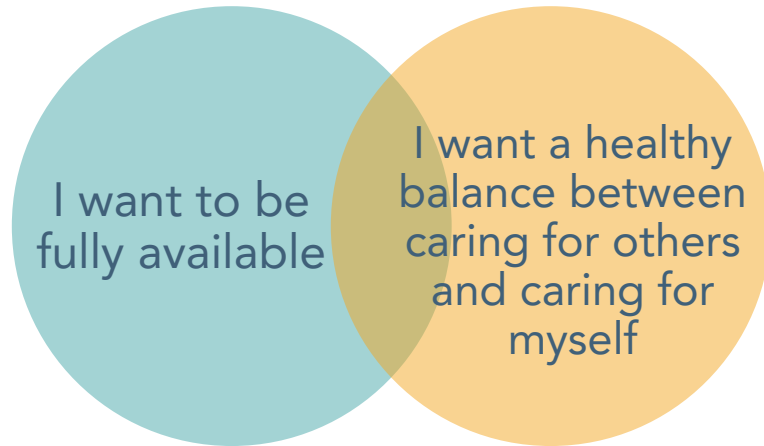
Poll Question 3:

Of the three common errors we discussed today, which have you encountered most?

Getting it Right



Holding Both



Create Your Own

