

The Power Dynamics of Sexual Abuse

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My name is Loyd R Heimbruch. Some people on Wings know me, others may know who I am. Some people may not know my name, but they may know me as "Andrew's Dad".

Andrew was born with a disability. He has Down Syndrome and Autism. He is mostly non-verbal, but he does understand when spoken to, and he can read. He can speak two to four word simple sentences if he is motivated to do so.

When Andrew was in elementary school, he was open enrolled to a neighboring school district for their special education program. His transportation was on the school's van for children with disabilities.

One day when Andrew was in 5th grade, he was dropped off later than usual. He immediately went to the back yard, took off all of his clothes, and sat on his swing set. He had never done anything like this before (and he hasn't done it since). So Priscilla and I talked about it, and we were suspicious. Andrew could not tell us why he took off his clothes, could not tell us why the van was late, and could not tell us what happened that day. So the next day we took him to a pediatrician we knew that specialized in CSA cases. The exam was inconclusive. We talked to the school and arrangements were made immediately for him to ride the regular school bus with the other children. This was an appropriate modification to accommodate the situation.

Andrew is now 27 years old. Since he was a young child, he would stay with me in the men's dorms at conventions. When he needed an afternoon nap I couldn't leave him unattended in the men's dorm, because of DTA (Don't Trust Anybody). So Priscilla would take him to the women's dorm to sleep where he could safely be left unattended and checked on occasionally. Or she could stay with him, as there was a speaker in there. There wasn't a speaker in the men's dorms.

As he became an adolescent, and then a young adult, we continued to use the same procedures because this was safest for him. He is a vulnerable adult, and we cannot place him in a situation where he could be harmed. Most of the ladies at convention understood this. Andrew understands that his "equipment" is just like his Dad's, but he has no clue why. He understands that men and women are different, but he has no idea why. The ladies pretty much understood this (because it was obvious). One year someone complained. However, we couldn't do it any differently, so we began preparing to leave

convention. Just before we were going to start packing, Priscilla was informed that if he stayed in a particular area away from others she could have him in the Women's dorms. So it worked out, but it was an unsettling experience for us.

Well, the thing is that a vulnerable adult has the exact same issues regarding SA as a child has regarding CSA. For all practical purposes, he has an adult body with a child's brain, and very limited communication skills.

The core of the issue is that any relationship that Andrew has with anyone is a relationship where one person has the advantage. And it isn't him. It is not possible for him to have a relationship with others that is a balanced, equal relationship. The person on the other side has the power. If something inappropriate happens, it most certainly is not his fault. He cannot prevent it. It is completely and entirely on the other party. He wouldn't be able to talk about it. He wouldn't feel guilty. But he would feel violated. This is only one example of an unequal relationship. Other unequal relationships are:

- Adult - Child
- Older Experienced Adult - Young Naive Adult
- Adult - Vulnerable Adult
- Supervisor - Employee
- Male in the Work - Female in the Work
- Male Overseer - Any Other Worker
- Any Worker – Any Non-Worker in the Fellowship
- And others that I'm not going to get into here.

The key here is who has the power. If one person is perceived as having more power (whether they actually have it or not), then anything that occurs of a sexual behavior is entirely the responsibility of the one who has the power. The victim is blameless and guiltless, just like my son Andrew.

I do not for a moment believe that there can be a consensual relationship between a brother and sister worker. There is no such thing. The men have the authority and all of the power. The power imbalance is so great that it is impossible to consider them as

equals. Having an inappropriate relationship with a sister worker is an abuse of power, unless they both leave the work and get married.

Even if the woman initiates it, it is still all on him. Because he has the power. If this happens where the man is CEO of a corporation, he's gone. Even if the woman initiated it, because he is the one in authority. He stands to lose everything. His job, his marriage, his family, and worst of all his integrity. It may be very difficult to resume his career in a similar position. A person needs to keep their body under subjection (I Corinthians 9:27). Otherwise, he should become a castaway. That's what it says. Do people just check in their brain at the door when opportunity is there? Much better to use the brain that the Lord gave us and use the door as a way of escape.

I was mentioning to Mrs. Wonderful the other day about some of my experiences when various women tried to initiate something. Some before we were married, some after. It is absolutely necessary to keep my integrity.

This is even more important for clergy, as they have the additional responsibility of being in a position of trust. They are the shepherds of souls, that are thought of as being willing to lay down their lives for the sheep. If they harm the sheep instead of protecting them, there will be a heavy price to pay. The Good Shepherd is simply not going to put up with it.

Speak the Truth in Love, with temperance. Be ye angry, and sin not. The truth will overcome.

Love in Christ

Loyd R Heimbruch