

A Day in the Life of a Sex Offender Therapist

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Learning Objectives

- Participants will be able to identify the difference between vicarious trauma and countertransference when working with victims and sex offenders
- Participants will list three signs of various trauma and countertransference
- Participants will compile strategies for self care in working with sex offenders and share with the group.
- Participants will be able to apply factors related to offenders grooming behaviors to their work with offenders and victims
- Participants will identify at least three personality characteristics that are common in offenders and important factors to consider when working with them.

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There are Layers to this...

- Us and our stuff
- Us and our stuff, and the clients
- Us and our stuff, the clients, and the horrific stories
- Us and our stuff, the clients, the horrific stories, and us knowing each other
- All this stuff...what do we do about it?

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Who am I?

- Grew up primarily in State College
- Family of season football ticket holders for Penn State Football



https://www.espn.com/sports/briefs/story/_id/2288721 <https://houston.culturemap.com/news/sports/11-11-11-carrying-a-child-indecent-off-the-field-in-celebration-charges-against-jerry-sandusky-2011>

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Sandusky Files Federal Appeal Seeking New Trial



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By Geoff Rughon
(StateCollege.com) 4/14/22 6:46 pm

Jerry Sandusky is asking a federal court to vacate his decade-old conviction on child sexual abuse charges and order a new trial.

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Who am I?

- Details of Sandusky's offending happened in 2011
- Grad school
- Curiosity/Understanding of how this could happen in HAPPY VALLEY
- Many people reacted differently to this situation

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Who am I?

- Grew up in the late 80s and 90s.
- Verbal aggression/yelling and physical intimidation. Taught to be submissive, back down. Image at home and community were different.
- Humor was used as a way to connect-if you were funny you didn't get yelled at.
- Masters in social work-taught to meet clients where they're at, unconditional positive regard, empathy means often not challenging people; reinforces childhood dynamics.
- Sex offenders were strangers in white vans kidnapping children.
- Women were taught to be ambitious but at the price of sexual advancements and misconduct-the price we pay.

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Looking Within

- Beliefs
 - Joe Paterno's "Success with Honor"
 - Positive outlook
 - Most/all people have something good to offer the world
 - I live in a just world and community
- Challenging ourselves
 - Dealing with loss aversion
- Trying to understand something we will not understand

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Looking Within

- Challenging our own needs
 - Need to feel good/like we're making difference, "helping"
 - Safety
 - Affiliation
 - Control
 - Influence

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Empathy for Offenders

- Knowing what it is like in someone else's shoes
- Has to be done in a different way
- Has to come with accountability and challenging
- More about curiosity and acceptance
- Most are unable to know what it is like to rape someone - THAT'S GOOD
- Deciphering between distress and remorse
- Values
 - Honesty and responsibility/accountability

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Relationships with Offenders

- Offender dynamics will play out on YOU - like a NOP
- The many MASKS
 - Blending in - doing well
 - Hiding resentments/anger/outward aggression
 - Agreeable
 - Appearing "normal"
 - Shocking to believe they did what we know about their history - NOP mentality
- Will tug at areas that typically get people sympathy in treatment-specifically trauma, broken families, placement into foster care as a child, lack of parental figures, LGBTQ issues.

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What is real? The MANY Masks

- Abuser and Savior are the same person
- Dialectics
 - Two conflicting things can be true at the same time
- Being aware of our own distorted thinking
 - Dichotomous Thinking AKA Black-And-White Thinking
 - Labeling
 - They are all monsters!
 - Blaming the victim/Make excuses
 - Way easier to blame that to accept the harm someone has done
- Challenge confirmation bias

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Detecting Lying

National District Attorneys
Association Bulletin (1988)

TABLE A
Comparing the Histories of Polygraphed and Non-Polygraphed Offenders

	Self-Reporting 1978-1983 N = 98	Polygraphed with Immunity 1983-1988 N = 129
Average number of victims reported pre-treatment	1.2	1.3
Average number of victims reported at sexual history	1.5	9.0
Percent who reported being sexually abused as a child	67%	29%
Percent reporting sexually abusing others as a child	21%	71%

TABLE B
Comparing the Histories of Adult and Juvenile Non-Polygraphed Offenders

	Juvenile-No Polygraph N = 42	Adult-No Polygraph N = 98
Average number of victims reported	4.8	1.5
Percent who reported being sexually abused as a child	36%	77%

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Detecting Lying

National District Attorneys
Association Bulletin (1994)

TABLE C
Comparing the Histories of Polygraphed and Non-Polygraphed Offenders 1988-1994

	Self-Reporting N = 76	Polygraphed with Immunity N = 152
Average number of victims reported	2.5	13.6
Gender of the victims		
Female	83%	53%
Male	17%	47%
Percent who reported being sexually abused as a child	65%	32%
Percent reporting sexually abusing others as a child	22%	68%

TABLE D
Comparing the Histories of Outpatient Juvenile Polygraphed Offenders with Non-Polygraphed Adult Offenders

	Self-Reporting N = 48	Polygraphed/Immunized N = 87
Average number of victims reported	2.1	4.3
Percent who reported being sexually abused as a child	52%	44%

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Detecting Lying

TABLE E
Comparing the Histories of Juvenile Offenders in Residential Care Before and After Polygraph Testing

	Pre-Polygraph	Post-Polygraph
Average number of victims reported	2.1	11.6
Reported being sexually abused as a child	83%	17%

TABLE F
Comparing the Histories of Adult Offenders Before and After Polygraph 1994-1999

	Pre-Polygraph	Post-Polygraph
Average number of victims reported	2.9	11.6
Percent reporting being sexually abused as a child	61%	30%
Percent reporting sexually abusing others as a child	27%	76%

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Detecting Lying: Why is this relevant?

Ernie

- At 27, charged with Indecent Assault and Battery
 - Attributed "emotional turmoil," being impulsive, opportunistic, alcohol, needs work on his anxiety
- At 30, charged with Violation of Privacy and two counts of Simple Assault
 - Attributed depression, girlfriend's mother having aggressive Alzheimer's disease, girlfriend's brother dying of an overdose, girlfriend's stepfather dying
- What we now know
 - Voyeurism, Frotteurism, Rape, Stalking
 - Arousal to girls as young as 10 years old
 - Over 100 victims, including his girlfriend
 - Extensive pornography viewing

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Accepting the "Real" Reasons for Offending

ME: Why do you want to be in my treatment program?

HIM: I want to find out why I did it.

ME: I can tell you that right now. You did it because you wanted to!

HIM: Huh?

ME: Sure, that's all there is to it. It was because you wanted to and for no other reason. I'll bet you're pretty confused right now, because you were expecting some kind of fancy psychological explanation. You probably thought I was a sort of doctor who could treat you for some sickness. You probably thought you must be sick to want to do something so disgusting. Did you ever think you might be sick?

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Accepting the "Real" Reasons for Offending

HIM: Yes.

ME: So I have good news for you. You're not sick at all. Not one bit.

HIM: But then how COULD I do that? If I'm not sick, why did I do it?

ME: I told you - you did it because you thought it would feel good. And it did feel good, so you did it again and again. You only cared about yourself - not about what you might be doing to your victim or the cost to society or about your family or about your victim's family or anyone. Somehow, you pushed all that out of your mind, just so you could have your way with your victim.

Kokish, 1997

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Managing Distractions

- Mental Health Issues
 - Depression, Anxiety, Trauma
- Blaming the Victim
 - Partner, spouse, parents, children
- Speaking on irrelevant topics
 - Grief, problems at work, not being able to access the internet
- Being Sorry
 - For what they did OR getting caught?

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Case Example

Regarding my serious relationship problems. I knew we had to work on what Sarah had said to you and my reactions. In today's counseling I was upset by your numerous references to sexual intentions with Sarah. You said, she said, I wanted her to hold my penis while I was peeing and you added that I had an erection. Well I tried to imagine how she would do that. I found it very difficult to happen, the logistics of me standing in front of the toilet and her being close enough to me to hold my penis with one hand and to control the direction of the pee stream into the toilet very problematic physically and mentally. I also found it very disturbing that you could add that I had an erection at this time. I am an old man and I have never tried to pee while having an erection.

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Case Example

If you have any notes that she said I had an erection, I am deeply concerned that an eight year old girl (third grade) knows what an erection is. It was about ten years ago when she first came to confront me about what I had done. She said I wanted her to hold my penis. That was it! Now forty five years later the reciting of it has grown into an involved sordid, sexual and repeated incident. The term 'way out of proportion' is literally and figuratively appropriate. I feel the situation has made a serious big step backwards away from resolution with her. I am very upset. I really want you to talk to her and for you to be able to tell me what she really believes happened. Where was her sister all these times and why would her mother allow it to continue weekend after weekend. All of this is way too much for me to accept.

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Men/Women's Issues Working with SOs

- Baum & Moyal (2018)
 - Emotional exhaustion
 - Men may struggle more than women with sex offenders
- Purvanova and Muros' (2010)
 - Meta-analysis that women in "female-type" occupations (such as psychology, counseling, and social work) are somewhat more emotionally exhausted than their male counterparts. One possible explanation for the difference is that working with sex offenders required the therapist to act not only with "female-like" empathy but also with "male-like" firmness and authority
- Cost of caring different with perpetrators vs. victims

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Men's/Women's Issues Working with SOs

It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering.

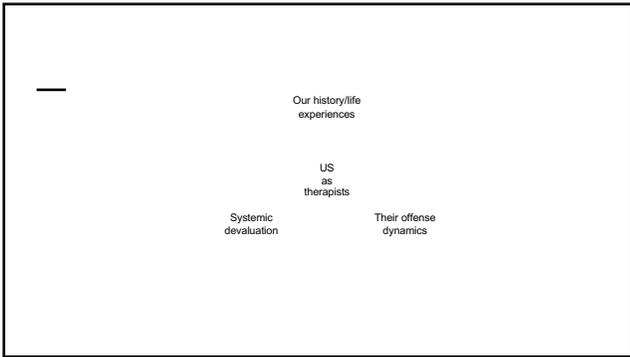
-Judith Lewis Herman

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Women's Issues working with sex offenders and victims

- It's "easy" to be angry with them-transfer anger that the victim has/hearing their stories onto something tangible-the sex offenders in group.
- Listening to them, believing what they say can be extremely difficult. Not only a sense of disbelief but sheer pessimism (they're always lying).
- Feel like you're constantly being objectified-the target of their arousal and the target of their hatred at the same time.
- Feeling constantly devalued-not knowing a woman therapists name, interrupting, scoffing, saying nothing when a woman therapists speaks

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Men's Issues Working with SOs

- Way et al. (2007)
 - Male clinicians have more difficulty than their female counterparts in distancing themselves psychologically from male clients who perpetrated sexual abuse.
- Shelby et al. (2001)
 - Tend to protect wives and children from the fears and cynicism that come from working with these individuals

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Men's Issues Working with SOs

- Taking a "journey" together
- Men SOs thinking I understand them because I am a man
- Having to explain "healthy masturbation" or healthy sex
- Attempts at getting alignment with devaluing women or victims
- Managing image

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Issues of Status

- Being a doctor
 - Spent 7 years in grad school
 - Did countless assignments
 - Numerous in-field training
 - Still not good enough!
- Being a social worker
 - Is that your role?
 - Can you effectively treat a sex offender?
 - You're a woman so you can't understand men's issues.

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Lack of Support Working with Sex Offenders

- Can't speak about experiences openly
 - Not everyone would understand
- Self care goes deeper than a coping skill (reading, yoga whatever)
 - Have to process your own history, biases, experiences.
- Vicarious trauma and burnout
 - Hear the daily stories of the victims and the struggles.
 - Hear the account of the crime from the offender-their lack of remorse, empathy, victim blaming, lack of accountability.
- Need to share with your co-facilitators so they can the areas you struggle in and where they can support you.

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Benefits of working with this population?

- When you process and share with supportive co-workers you learn that vulnerability isn't bad.
- Take what I learn and use it to provide education and challenge the victims I work with-whether it be children, teens or adults.
- Take what I learn and apply it to working with children who have engaged in sexual acting out behavior.
- Education-including court system, case workers, other providers, families

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What Ive learned about Sex from Sex Offenders

- Can be an extreme association with pornography-that's how men should act and that's what women like.
- Women often "get themselves into these situations. They know what they are doing."
- Will go to extreme lengths to hide things
- Sometimes "hide in plain sight"

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Funny Things From Treatment

- Edging
- Baby Penis
- Do you fuck dogs?
- Collecting bras/underwear

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Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

Elie Wiesel

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Takeaways

- Be courageous
- Take care of yourselves
- Set boundaries
- Be supportive
- Stay in your lane

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