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It Goes Without Saying...

The Hiddenness of Supervision in Ministerial Training, and the Hiddenness of Gender in Supervision.

Supervision Supervised

As long as church structures need ministers, they need to be trained to the role and task. Many engaged in the business of ministerial training in the English context recognise the importance of placement learning in that process of education, but the supervision of placement learning has been and tends to remain a hidden area of practice. Whether it be the training of curates by parish priests, or the work experience gained in hospitals and prisons by those doing a required six-week placement as part of a training course, little attention has traditionally been given to those who provide the supervision of learning. It has usually been assumed that being able to do the job, at least adequately, is qualification enough to offer expertise, hints and tips to those preparing for similar ministry.

More recently, however, as learning through placement work, and different integrated educational philosophies become more central in ministerial training courses, the demands on those who supervise the learning in context become greater and require more clarity of focus. The supervisor needs to be competent as a skilled educator, able to reflect upon practice, to integrate theological and biblical insights in relevant ways, and indeed to demonstrate ways in which ministerial practice has an impact upon the traditional epistemologies of academic study. This article is written by two women who have both experienced the complexities of supervising students on placement and of providing training for those who supervise. We describe a course which has now been offered in England for three years, where people engaged in supervision can, during five residential sessions over a year, come together to learn more about their own practice in small group work centred upon verbatim accounts of supervisory encounters.

One of us, Frances, completed the course when it ran in its first year, and now works as a tutor to the course (with John Foskett¹), who has had much experience running such courses based at the Maudsley Hospital in London), and the other, Hazel, a hospital chaplain in Manchester, is currently a course participant. Along with a common desire to see supervision given a higher profile within the whole arena of practical theology, we also both share a feminist perspective which makes us at times acutely aware of the gendered nature of supervision, and of the dearth of literature which explores the issues involved. The relationship between supervisor and student, or group of students, holds many different webs of power and accountabilities which emerge as pastoral encounters are analysed, or roles and institutions are considered – and as that relationship itself becomes the place where some of these complexities are played out. The context of supervision itself often parallels the “field” experience², and not surprisingly both contexts can reveal many of the silences and patterns of relationship which betray the difficulty of “transgender empathy”³. To reflect in greater depth upon these patterns and silences, we shall recall two sessions on the course – one when Hazel presented a verbatim account of the supervision of a group of four male students, and the other an evaluatory session at the end of the course on which Frances participated. In both situations Hazel and Frances were the only women, and found themselves caught in situations which spoke to each of them of the complexities and differences that being women raised, complexities which took them from the particular towards a consideration of the social, cultural and power dimensions of gender relationships in supervision.

Clinical Pastoral Education and its Living Human Documents

Before we turn to a close analysis of these sessions, something needs to be said about the course itself, its methods and history. For many years the Maudsley Hospital has run courses for those who supervise students learning on placement, using the skills and practices of the Clinical Pastoral Education movement⁴. C.P.E. has continued to find its natural context in the hospi-

¹ See J. Foskett and D. Lyall: *Helping the Helpers*, London: SPCK, 1988, which provides the set-book for this course.

² *ibid.* p.30.

³ R. Bons-Storm: *The Incredible Woman. Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Nashville, Th.: Abingdon Press, 1996, p. 142 ff.

⁴ See Alison Stokes: *Ministry After Freud*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985, for a good account of the beginnings of the CPE movement.

tal setting⁵, and these courses have also tended to attract people from para-medical professions. In 1994 another form of this course was launched, designed for people engaged as supervisors in ministerial and theological education, as tutors in theological colleges or on courses, supervising ministers and training priests with assistant clergy, or hospital chaplains with ministerial students on placement. Interest had been shown in such a course by people who could not attend the weekly sessions in London. So a course was devised by John Foskett and Mark Sutherland, chaplains at the Maudsley Hospital to run over five residential sessions of 24 hours at different venues around the country over a period of a year. The residential sessions begin and end with an hour of entry and ending, and then each participant, in a small group of 4 or 5, with a tutor, presents a verbatim report of a supervision they have held from their own context of training a student. These verbatim reports are handled in various ways by the course participants: the presenting member may decide on role play, or use participants as characters referred to, but not actually present in the verbatim, or body sculpture may be used in a silent interpretation of the verbatim. Each participant is encouraged to comment upon the verbatims of other members, and so the group learns collaboratively. During each residential there are two reflection sessions of one hour each, when tutors and participants present material for discussion, and there is also a “practice” session which is the opportunity to explore different methods of learning, of theological reflection, of evaluation. To ensure that learning continues in the times between residentials, each participant is required to send a further verbatim report, and a “theory” paper, to one other member in rotation, and to the tutor, for comment.

Behind the C.P.E. methods of the course lies the father-figure of Anton Boisen, and his experience in the 1950s of a breakdown and hospitalisation. As a result he insisted that those learning to be ministers should study not just books, but also “the living human document”, the real person who is present in any pastoral encounter. This expression has been taken up by many practitioners and practical theologians, perhaps especially by Charles V. Gerkin⁶,

⁵ See M.Glaz: “Clinical Pastoral Education and Supervision: Emerging Issues and Changing Patterns” in P.D.Couture and R.J.Hunter: *Pastoral Care and Social Conflict*, Nashville Tn.: Abingdon Press, 1995, p. 180-192. This article, despite its title, does not address the issues of supervision as such and reveals again the hospital context as normative for CPE.

⁶ C.V.Gerkin: *The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode*. Nashville Tn.: Abingdon Press, 1984; *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986; *Prophetic Pastoral Care: A*

who, in his work, has emphasised the narrative nature of the pastoral engagement. His hermeneutical approach involves not only the story told and heard, but also the ways in which the client and counsellor together interpret the situation in the hope that the encounter might carry the plot out of crisis towards some sort of resolution.

To understand the pastoral encounter as textual in nature – as a “living human document” – captured by the use of verbatim accounts enables a further translation, to an educational context. The verbatim takes on a new and different life as it is discussed between the student and supervisor. Whether it is transcribed from a recording or written down from memory soon after the encounter, the process in itself provides interesting elements for analysis: for things are forgotten, or remembered especially, revealing different stories and gaps – all fruitful material for the supervision session. The verbatim becomes the text – the living human document – which initially belongs as the encounter between client and counsellor, and then in supervision, it is elaborated and overlaid by different interpretations. On the course itself, it is considered from the many perspectives of the participants as each interweaves their own text. The hermeneutic engagement develops and grows in complexity.

Feminist Critique

The metaphor of “living human document” has not been without its critics, however, especially as it has been used by Charles Gerkin. He has been criticised in various ways by leading feminist theologians, most notably Elaine Graham, Bonnie J Miller-McLemore and Riet Bons-Storm. Each of these critiques helps Hazel and Frances to reflect further upon their experiences on the supervision course, for whilst the emphasis upon “living human document” provides much which is useful to the task of understanding and providing skilled supervision, it also leaves too much unsaid about the gendered nature of the practice of supervision.

Miller-McLemore’s contention is not so much with Gerkin himself as with the well-worn phrase “living human document” which she believes focuses upon the individual in the pastoral encounter, and not upon the systems of power and domination at play in the context of pastoral care. She prefers the

Christian Vision of Life Together. Nashville Tn: Abingdon Press, 1991. See also the collection of essays published in honour of Gerkin’s work edited by P.D.Couture and R.J.Hunter: *Pastoral Care and Social Conflict*, Nashville Tn: Abingdon Press, 1995.

image of “the living human web”, as this “suggests itself as a better term for the appropriate subject for investigation, interpretation and transformation” than the image of a document to be read and interpreted⁷. There are other stories which interweave in any situation – nothing is immediately and conclusively comprehensible. She writes:

“We cannot predict what difference other stories and traditions will make to general formulations of the field or in pastoral practice. When we admit that knowledge is seldom universal or uniform, and truth is contextual and tentative, we discover a host of methodological, pedagogical, and practical problems...

We do know that we can no longer ignore [someone’s] identity and cultural location. A “living human web” cannot simply be “read” and interpreted like a “document.” Those within the web who have not yet spoken must speak for themselves. Gender, feminist, and black studies all verify the knowledge of the underprivileged, the outcast, the underclass, and the silenced. If knowledge depends upon power, then power must be given to the silenced.”⁸

Graham focuses more particularly on how dominant traditions can be used in pastoral care to perpetrate the silencing of the powerless. She rejects the way Gerkin uses the Christian Story – a grand narrative which she says in his hands is “...absolute and definitive, refusing new situations to reformulate the central symbols of the tradition.”⁹ To understand the narratives of the pastoral encounter against the backdrop of such a grand story is to accept the dominance of a tradition which has categorised and subjugated groups other to itself. The Christian Story dear to Gerkin does not permit him to turn a “hermeneutical suspicion” upon the institutions and situations with sufficient depth of radical analysis. The result, concludes Graham, is that he fails to understand and portray adequately the social and cultural forces which, by their patriarchal power, render women, people of colour, gay and lesbian people and Others silent and invisible, not only in society as a whole, but also within pastoral care. The story of this abuse of power is too easily subsumed by Gerkin into the Christian Story, enabling him to speak with a voice which dominates and silences other perspectives.

⁷ B.J.Miller-McLemore: “The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century” in J.Stevenson Moessner: *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, p. 16.

⁸ Ibid. p. 21.

⁹ E.Graham: *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*. London and New York: Mowbray, 1996, p. 16.

Bons-Storm, on two occasions in her book *The Incredible Woman* criticises Gerkin for the dominance of his voice, and how he ignores sociocultural narratives. This is particularly obvious in his accounts of cases where he has given pastoral counselling to women. Bons-Storm comments on his attention to women in his work, and not only to their pastoral needs:

“In the span of three of his books (1979, 1984, and 1986) he gives seventeen cases of women needing pastoral counseling, alongside eight cases of men. This is typical for books about pastoral care: the cases are mostly about women. Obviously women either have more problems, or need more help than men do, or they are more ready to go to a pastor with their problems. Writing about the women, in ten of the seventeen cases Gerkin mentions something about their outer appearance:...”

Bons-Storm goes on to list Gerkin’s descriptions:

“dressed in frilly pink bed jacket, her nails freshly polished, ...her hair set and colored ...blue-white” (1979,84), “attractive wife of an upwardly mobile, hard-driving man” (1979, 151), “fortyish, slightly plump but attractive” (1984, 125) etc. and she also notes that “[n]one of the eight cases of males describes the man’s outer appearance. Instead Gerkin defines them by emphasising their jobs...”

For Bons-Storm this reveals Gerkin’s lack of attention to the dominant socio-cultural narratives:

“What he looks upon as positive in a woman and in a man concurs with what the sociocultural narrative says about their proper roles. By common consensus, a woman is “proper” is she is dominant neither as wife to husband nor as mother to father.”¹⁰

Bons-Storm contrasts “proper” behaviour with those who rebel against the rationality and power of the dominant discourses of culture. The self who rebels, who seeks to find her “subject quality” in the face of disbelief and the closed ears of an incredulous dominant pastoral discourse, is the person who begins to find a voice and develop a sustaining speech community. This emerging self often first speaks with a voice of anger¹¹, and gains confidence to utter the “unstory”¹² – the story which too often goes without saying in situations and pastoral encounters.

¹⁰ R.Bons-Storm: *The Incredible Woman. Listening to Women’s Silences in Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Nashville Tn: Abingdon Press, 1996, p. 66-68.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 80.

¹² Ibid. p. 27.

A Case of Supervision

The course on supervision we describe is vulnerable to many of the criticisms implicit in the above. It succumbs to the dominance of sociocultural narratives in many ways. Yet it has also proved valuable in the space it has offered where different strategies can be played out, where difficulties can be struggled with as a supervisor seeks to hold the strands of the web and give attention to the many different and layered narratives present in a verbatim, listening for the socio-political complexities as well as the silences of oppression. The value of the course has been the times when it has provided a space and these have often been times when nothing is too tightly defined, and supervision itself is loosely understood. Inevitably the course has had a structure and a normative discourse of interpretation, but it has proved most valuable when it has not foreclosed on gaps and silences for the sake of a neat text which is “proper” supervision.

Both Frances and Hazel found themselves bringing verbatims to the course which focused upon current issues and problems in their work, for example, tackling boundaries of professional role and sexual attraction between themselves and colleagues and students, conflict, grief and uncertainty and lack of confidence being a woman in the largely male institution of the church.. These issues often highlighted the difficulties of “transgender empathy” as other male participants and tutors were unequal to the task of working through the gender reversals and imaginative embodiments necessary to provide satisfactory answers to the questions and problems raised.

Hazel presented a verbatim in which she had supervised a group of ministerial students, all male, in the company of a male co-supervisor whose week it was to sit in the background. One of the students had brought a verbatim to this group about an encounter he had had whilst having his hair cut. Hazel found herself in difficulties trying to respond to the student and the verbatim in a way which would enable the group to reflect upon the issue of the hiddenness of sexual attraction. The student, Dave, after a role play of the verbatim and other imagined conversations, especially between the hairdresser and her ex-boyfriend, said that he could imagine the ex-boyfriend calling the hairdresser a slut. Hazel asked him...

H1 How do you imagine that? Is there something about her?

D1 No, I don't know. It's just the kind of thing that some men say about women.

Hazel reflected in supervision: The conversation had been “out there”. I was looking for a question or a comment that would bring it back into the group.

Dave's reply takes it right back out again. I want him to reflect on his personal reaction to her. I wonder why the resistance is there.

I have been conscious for a while of being the only female in the group. I wonder why sexuality hasn't surfaced in the group, except in naming the woman a "slut". Even then, the naming is not owned within the group. It belongs to the ex-boyfriend, the group has imagined.

Dave would be regarded by many as extremely good looking. As I look around the group, I'd choose to cut his hair, if I had a choice. I have a recent memory of the pleasure of having my scalp massaged, hair washed and cut. Therapeutic, sensuous. Also going through my thoughts is the story of the nameless woman who washed Jesus' feet with her hair. And then there's Delilah cutting Samson's hair, rendering him powerless...

H2 Dave, I'm wondering if having this woman cut your hair was a pleasurable experience for you and if there might have been any attraction there, either way.

Hazel's reflection: These are not the words I was looking for. I'm trying to get at the role that sexuality played. The response was predictably denial...

D2 I don't like having my hair cut. I don't like people fiddling with it. I didn't feel attracted to her at all.

H3 And the other way around?

D3 It never occurred to me.

H4 And this hairdresser has no name, only "slut"...

D4 There's something there. If I had asked her name, how would that have been interpreted? She might have thought it was a "come on".

(There are mutters of agreement. Somebody makes a joke about a telephone number. Laughter.)

D5 I did wonder about going back and asking if she wanted to talk through her problems a bit more, but I think that really would have been misunderstood.

(More mutters of agreement. There's a little conversation among the male students about what constitutes a "come-on")

Hazel's reflection: I feel uneasy about what I am thinking and feeling. I am thinking that these ministers-in-the-making are doing their best to ignore something important. I feel left out and marginalized with no voice and no words to initiate exploration of fruitful areas left untouched in this supervision...

Subsequently, in the course supervision session, she explored the ways in which this group had colluded to deny the realities of their desires, including her own silence about hers. The supervision session itself found some difficulty in addressing the issues involved. We decided to be more physical ourselves. Hazel named the person who she would most want to have cut her hair in our group, and we role-played the encounter again from H2, with Hazel herself trying to understand Dave's resistance to the possibility that he might become sexually aroused, or be the object himself of the desires of others, as the member of our group massaged her hair. What were his fears? we wondered. How might he recognise his own feelings of desire and those of others he encountered? What words might he use to verbalise them with honesty and without denigrating others in his embarrassment?

Still Hidden Gender Issues

The session left many questions still to ponder. We had shared in Hazel's silence, finding it difficult to be clear about any one right way to proceed when issues of sexuality are so close under the surface. Later in the pub Hazel and Frances talked further. The intervening time gave us the opportunity to reflect, the atmosphere was different, the two of us found it easier to explore further on the basis of existing trust. Hazel had found it useful to name her attraction for Dave: it became a visible element in the encounter, rather than a dangerous hidden. Such attraction, we felt, could be useful to the process of supervision. Pastoral encounters on all levels are spiced with different degrees of sexuality and personal affinities and repugnancies, and supervision is no exception. A sense of attraction can add enjoyment and pleasure without detracting from the seriousness of the task, and can be used to illustrate how pervasive sexuality is in all encounters. It begins to hinder useful supervision when the supervisor does not feel easy about naming the attraction, and refuses to see how the empathy she tries to develop becomes a collusive process, reducing important work to a sophisticated form of flirtation, replicating past patterns in both supervisor and supervisee. The supervisor, we thought, needed to be aware of where the limits might be set to be of greatest help to the supervisee. It might be that the supervisee would gain benefit from risky exploration of how he used his sexuality irresponsibly so that he was enabled to recognise the patterns of interaction he used to defend himself. In other circumstances, the limits might need to be drawn very firmly and carefully to enable someone with bruises from the past to analyse how that sexual pain is part of their present encounters. Only a supervisor who was comfort-

able with their own sexuality would be sufficiently self-aware to achieve this with confidence and competence.

We also recognised how difficult it had been to talk about and name the implicit sexuality in the group setting. It had proved impossible in the original group session, just as on the course we had struggled. We two found it easier to talk about in a pair in the pub over a pint and gin and tonic, but more difficult the more people present and the more diffuse the trust. But, we decided, to be confident in speaking out and naming our own responses could be a powerful way of enabling others to do likewise. There'd be no harm in Hazel's doing so in the group of students at a later date when ever similar encounters arose. And Hazel felt that at the final evaluating session she would be able to be more clear and firm about what she had observed, and describe it to the group of students in a way which would be taken seriously by them as important for each of them to consider as they prepared for ministry. Hazel thought that if she was again in a situation where similar issues arose, she would better be able to name her own responses and help others more reticent to explore their resistance to recognise the pervasiveness of sexual attraction in ministerial encounters.

When Frances did the course as participant, she did so with four others, all men, and two male tutors. That experience paralleled closely the experience of working with male colleagues in the church. She found herself leaving many frustrations about work and role unvoiced, knowing from past experience that issues important to her were often trivialised or dismissed in male company in the expectation that she would be a good listener to their viewpoints. She was also aware on the course of being on the receiving end of different projections and transferences from the other participants and tutors. The best way of using the course, it seemed, was to use it as an opportunity to play with the projections and transferences, and explore frustrations in a way she could not at work. For example she presented a theory paper on Irigaray and mothering, which seemed to engage with some of the ways the other participants transferred different projected images onto her, murdering her "real" presence as they did so. The experience of presence and absence, of being defined, and also of having an unknown power to define, of not being understood, and of also feeling obliged to enable other participants to understand the experience of (gender) difference, without allowing them to resort to well-used stereotypes and projections, was, at times, intensely frustrating – but also deeply fascinating. There was stuff here to learn about how rebel voices can gain authority – can be heard, and how anger can be used

strategically to transform institutions – using the course as a microcosm. Using the anger and frustration also kept her in touch with the silence of those whose pain goes without saying – and many (not all) of these would-be supervisors were the last people to comprehend that pain.

After some thought, Frances decided to use her evaluative session at the end of the course differently. Instead of fulfilling the expected task of talking through issues and testing them out on the other members, Frances decided to remain silent for the three quarters of an hour. The reactions were varied. One participant said that if she was not prepared to speak for herself, then he would not speak for her, and would also remain silent. One of the tutors wondered what sort of a game she was playing, and thought it was a wasted opportunity. One other participant said how angry he'd felt throughout the course by Frances' behaviour, and this was another example. One or two of the others attempted to give the requested feedback, but found it difficult to discuss someone as if they were not there. The atmosphere was tense and uncomfortable, and also alive and electric. Frances' silence was one of controlled and strategic anger, which deliberately provoked anger from the other course participants in various ways. Perhaps in doing so, they gained some insight into how anger is transferred – usually from men to women in society, reducing women to silence, to depression, to madness. By refusing to participate and use words, the symbols of therapy, in self-evaluation, Frances consciously placed herself in the position of the victim who has others talking over her head, about her, supervising and overseeing her, employing the Male Gaze, but in such a way that that gaze became self-conscious. Like a mirror turning, those that looked were forced to look upon themselves, to become self-reflexive, to supervise themselves.

This article has focused upon supervision because the writers believe that more attention should be given to this important area of practical theology, especially by those who are involved in ministerial training. Within many encounters, especially of a pastoral nature, there are hidden forces at work which are sociocultural and gender-laden, and which often go without saying in a silence which becomes collusive of the dominant discourses of patriarchy. Supervision offers the opportunity to understand in greater depth the complexity of these forces in an educational context. It can provide the opportunity to reflect upon the practice of pastoral care, and because it so often reveals in parallel the hiddenness of dominant sociocultural and gendered forces and processes, supervision can prove an exceedingly fruitful exercise in uncovering the intricacies and complexities of the living human web in which pastoral care and practical theology have their place.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag thematisiert eine pastorale Praxis, die inzwischen Eingang in die Ausbildung von zukünftigen PastoralarbeiterInnen gefunden hat, aber kaum unter der "Gender-Problematik" wahrgenommen wird: Supervisionen in der klinischen Pastoralen. Die Autorinnen beschreiben diese Praxis über exemplarische Sitzungen, um die Geschlechtsspezifität von Reaktion und Gegenreaktion im sensiblen TrainerIn-SchülerIn-Verhältnis zu enthüllen. Eine Blindheit gegenüber den geschlechtsspezifischen Faktoren dieses Verhältnisses, die sich "selbstverständlich" in der Berufssituation fortsetzt.

Sommaire

Cet article a pour thème une praxis qui est désormais devenue partie intégrante de la formation des futur(e)s travailleurs pastoraux/travailleuses pastorales, mais est rarement considérée du point de vue de la "problématique des sexes" (gender problematic): la supervision dans la pastorale clinique. Les auteures explicitent cette pratique par le biais de sessions exemplaires visant à révéler la spécificité liée au sexe des réactions et contre-réactions survenant dans le rapport délicat entre formateur et élève. Une non-reconnaissance de ces facteurs risque en effet de se répercuter "tout naturellement" dans la situation professionnelle.

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Hazel Addy is a United Reformed Church minister presently working as chaplain to Central Manchester Hospitals NHS Trust. She formerly worked as chaplain in Higher Education and as national HIV advisor to the United Reformed Church. She is a mother of two grown up children.