

Independent Investigation at Restored Voices Collective

Final Report & Recommendations

July 2026

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I. Introduction

Restored Voices Collective (RVC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a supportive community for women who are survivors of adult clergy sexual abuse. To support its members, the organization has facilitated virtual small groups, monthly meetings, guest speaker events, and a private social media group. Founded in January 2022, RVC formally retained Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE) in September 2025 to conduct an Independent Investigation and Analysis. This engagement was initiated following reports within the RVC community regarding alleged misconduct by Dr. David Pooler, who at that time was a member of RVC's Advisory Board. Pursuant to the Engagement Agreement, GRACE was tasked with investigating and analyzing whether the reported behaviors constituted verbal or virtual sexual misconduct, emotional misconduct, or professional boundary violations.

II. Scope and Methodology

GRACE's assessment was limited to the scope defined in the Engagement Agreement and was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviews, surveys, and qualitative content analysis of collected relevant documents. The following section provides a summary of the scope and methodology.

A. Scope

Pursuant to the Engagement Agreement, GRACE was retained to "investigate the behavior of David Pooler, that is directly or indirectly related to RVC, and assess the credibility of allegations that the behavior constitutes verbal or virtual sexual misconduct, emotional misconduct, or professional boundary violations."

GRACE was also tasked to "assess RVC's knowledge of the allegations against David Pooler and how the culture of RVC impacted the response to allegations, including how the response compares to best practices and SAMHSA's Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice. In addition, GRACE will evaluate relevant policies and processes, and make recommendations to improve the policies and culture of RVC. GRACE's investigation will focus exclusively on RVC's knowledge, response, policy, and culture as they specifically relate to the allegations against David Pooler."

The findings of GRACE's investigation will be analyzed using the methodology discussed in Section II(B) Methodology, below. The investigation was strictly limited to the above scope of the Engagement Agreement.

B. Methodology

GRACE conducted 18 virtual interviews with witnesses, reviewed 39 documents and several social media posts, and received and reviewed 41 survey responses. Accordingly, the material presented in this report should not be considered a comprehensive articulation of relevant information.

GRACE sought to offer wide opportunities for witnesses to be involved in the investigation while also respecting the boundaries and agency of potential witnesses to decline participation. GRACE interviewers sought to apply trauma-informed principles to each interview and exchange to promote safety, trustworthiness, transparency, and agency. All interviews were recorded (with prior consent) and transcribed. Recordings, transcripts, and related correspondence were stored in a secure database.

Given RVC's context as a community of survivors focused on adult clergy sexual abuse, heightened confidentiality dynamics applied to the investigation, which are relevant to the framing, content, and level of detail within this Report.

III. Findings and Analysis

The following section presents a summary of the findings of this investigation and is organized in a manner consistent with the scope of this investigation.

Warning: this section of the report describes explicit speech and may be activating for those who have endured abuse, harassment, or other trauma. Readers who may have difficulties reading the content should exercise care and may wish to speak with a professional prior to reading the report.

Dr. David Pooler is a Professor at Baylor University's Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, where he serves as director of the Adult Clergy Sexual Abuse: Advocacy and Research Collaborative (ACSARC). Pooler is a licensed clinical social worker with a professional background in community mental health [1]. In his current clinical practice, Pooler works with religious trauma and spiritual abuse survivors, utilizing EMDR and other techniques. He is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with a first licensure date in 2013, and a supervisor designation in Texas. He has interfaced with survivors for over 15 years and is widely recognized for his research on adult clergy sexual abuse (ACSA) [2]. Within the survivor community, Pooler has occupied a position of high stature and was frequently invited to speak at prominent events, such as the Restore Conference [3]. Witnesses reported that he was "highly respected and revered," with many expressing "a lot of gratitude" for his contributions to the field of adult clergy sexual abuse [4].

Of significant relevance to this investigation, Dr. Pooler became a member of the RVC Advisory Board in early 2025. [144] Multiple witnesses initially met Pooler through his intersections with RVC.

Several witnesses provided positive accounts of their interactions with Pooler, often characterizing him as a "champion" or a "savior" for survivors, while sometimes noting the inherent danger of bestowing such a status [5]. W17 described Pooler as "amazing" and "extremely kind and professional on all levels," noting that his work helped her "tremendously" [6]. W13 credited him as a "helpful guide" in her healing journey, while W7 characterized Pooler's professional insight as a "gift" to the community that provided credibility to survivors' experiences [7]. Additionally, W22 represented Pooler's influence as "incredibly healing" and that he provided a supportive professional environment that fostered personal agency and development [8].

On September 6, 2025, an anonymous post was published within the Restored Voices Collective Facebook community, precipitating this investigation. The full text of the post stated:

I know this will be extremely difficult to read, especially given how respected Dr. David Pooler is in our community. I'm sharing this because I care deeply about protecting fellow survivors.

Despite his reputation, I experienced inappropriate conduct from him that left me feeling violated, humiliated, and showed a complete disregard for my welfare as a survivor of clergy abuse. I know this directly contradicts what many believe about him, and I understand how jarring this will be to hear. I've struggled with speaking up precisely because of his standing in this community.

I struggled for many months before deciding to post here, but decided to because I believe survivors deserve to know when someone who positions themselves as our advocate has engaged in harmful behavior. I also am speaking out because I believe I am not the only one. If you've interacted with him and felt something was off, please trust those instincts completely.

Sometimes people who publicly claim to be advocates can privately exploit the very people they claim to protect. Honestly this entire thing reminded me of the entire ACSA situation I went through, but in an even more twisted way. I trusted him completely because of his public image and reputation, and learned this lesson the hard way. This has been deeply re-traumatizing when all I was trying to do was heal. I am so thankful for this group and I thank you for reading this. I'm sorry to have to post something like this, but I really don't want anyone else to be hurt by this person. [9]

The anonymous post was subsequently removed by the poster, but later reposted. GRACE does not view the temporary removal of the post as a true recantation; however, acknowledges that similar underlying motives may have been present, such as the profound fear of retaliation and intimidation frequently observed when victims attempt to navigate the aftermath of disclosing abuse. [183]

The following sections summarize the evidence gathered regarding allegations against Dr. David Pooler, organized by the behavioral categories contained within the scope.

A. Verbal or Virtual Sexual Misconduct

GRACE defines Verbal or Virtual Sexual Misconduct as any verbal or virtual acts of a sexual nature that are 1) unwelcome, 2) performed without consent, 3) committed by one in a position of authority upon a subordinate, or 4) committed by an adult upon someone who is under the age of 18 or is otherwise incapable of meaningful consent. Examples include, but are not limited to, derogatory or indecent communications about a person's body; slurs, anecdotes, jokes, games, innuendos, or electronic communications of a sexual or intimate nature; verbal or virtual advances, propositions, or invitations of a sexual or intimate nature; or suggestive or obscene communications.

1. Reported Misconduct Toward W19

W19 first learned about RVC while experiencing adult clergy sexual abuse (ACSA), and contacted Pooler after he participated in a meeting at RVC. W19 characterized Pooler as being "integral" to her process of disclosing adult clergy sexual abuse (ACSA). W19 shared details about her ACSA experience and the abusive pastor. Pooler "spoke to me at length to help me understand what I was experiencing was ACSA." Pooler's guidance was "extremely appreciated," and he was deeply respected by W19; as one person close to W19 articulated, "if Dr. Pooler ever did anything, there would be nobody left to trust." W19 noted that Pooler was instrumental in saving her marriage, helped her see that the adult clergy sexual abuse was not her fault, and called her abusive pastor "an asshole." [24]

During a subsequent encounter at the Restore Conference, W19 sought Pooler's professional perspective regarding an uncomfortable interaction with another individual. "A lot of drinking had happened" late that evening when she approached Pooler for guidance. Pooler allegedly responded to W19 either with the phrase "[they] wanted to fuck you," or with the phrase "[they] wanted to have sex with you." W19 characterized this verbal interaction as highly distressing and re-traumatizing "either way," noting that it mirrored the behavior of her former abuser. She represented that her pastor had frequently told her that men only wanted to be with her because "they wanted to fuck me." [25] One witness relayed a secondhand statement that Pooler told W19 "[they want] to fuck you. You're a very attractive woman." [26] A second witness relayed W19's subsequent

emotional state (“very upset”) and disclosures that Pooler had been “sitting very close to [W19], touching,” and “told her she was sexy,” which was “wildly inappropriate.” [50]

Pooler's conduct toward W19 was particularly noteworthy given his established awareness of her history of abuse; consequently, his reported use of language that mirrored the former abuser's verbal patterns proved highly distressing. W19 stated that this interaction caused her to immediately abandon professional plans with proximity to Pooler. She explained, “I knew the path this could lead to. I thought he may have some sort of feelings or something. I didn’t want to think that way, because my respect for him was so high. It would be too hard to acknowledge that someone of that stature could hurt me.” [149]

Furthermore, W19 was warned by another individual to avoid Pooler in a professional context. The warning was prompted by Pooler’s reported encouragement to the individual to recruit W19 to apply for a professional opportunity; in response, the individual cautioned that they had a “bad experience” that would also “be a bad experience for [W19].” [150] W24 relayed to GRACE that “Pooler was noticeably preoccupied with [W19] and directed [W24] to meet with [W19] and encourage her to pursue a professional opportunity where Pooler would hold direct supervisory authority over her.” [159]

2. Reported Misconduct Toward W24

a. Summary of Allegations

W24 is a member of the RVC community. [145] Pooler held formal supervisory authority over W24 during her studies at Baylor University, including supervising W24’s research, and was aware that W24 was a survivor of clergy sexual abuse. [156] In addition to the below allegations, W24 provided statements relevant to Section III.C, Professional Boundary Violations. W24 characterized the relevant behavior contained in both Sections as occurring “over an extended period.” [180]

Concerns were raised by W24 regarding a “locker room type of humor,” where Pooler would reportedly read about a victim’s graphic description of sexual abuse, “and then he would laugh... like a frat boy.” W24 relayed to GRACE that she was “deeply disturbed” by this, viewing Pooler’s reported “ability to laugh at graphic accounts of sexual abuse” as completely antithetical to his “public positioning as an advocate.” W24 alleged that Pooler “engaged in behaviors where he would attempt to assert dominance over” her, and repeatedly stated “I’m the expert,” which she described as dismissive of her input. [23, 160, 180]

Based on Pooler’s reported “pattern of behavior,” W24 reported that she asked for meetings “with an institutional authority” in November 2023 and August 2024 “to discuss a change in supervisor,” but she relayed to GRACE that she was instructed to continue working with Pooler because no other faculty member specialized in clergy abuse research. [180]

W24 described meetings in March 2025, in which W24 and Pooler reviewed Pooler's research questions intended for a study of clergy sexual abuse survivors, including "questions regarding masturbation habits and frequency of sexual activity" in a professional context. W24 expressed concern that the questions were "unnecessary, invasive," and capable of retraumatizing survivors. [157, 181]

W24 relayed to GRACE that Pooler replied that he would "put on his therapist hat" and "directed sexually invasive questions" towards W24, inquiring whether W24's "distress stemmed from her own sexual behaviors and experiences." W24 recalled challenging Pooler, but stated that he "invoked his authority" and said her "distress was 'exactly what I want to activate in victims.'" [158] W24 relayed to GRACE that she experienced a physical reaction to these interactions with Pooler that required emergency medical care, and provided corroborative medical records to GRACE. [182]

W24 indicated that following these events, she reported her "concerns through appropriate institutional channels" through direct communication and written correspondence and ceased direct contact with Pooler." W24 relayed to GRACE that she requested and received a supervisor change, that "those with institutional authority characterized Pooler's actions as 'unacceptable'" to her, and that she was told by one institutional actor that they "would not sweep this under the rug." [160] W24 stated that she "eventually filed a Title IX report regarding Pooler to Baylor University." [179, 182]

b. Response by David Pooler

Documentation provided to GRACE reflected Pooler's praise of W24's academic efforts and success. Themes included W24's significant achievements, exceptional work quality, rigorous research, thoughtfulness, passion, strong advocacy, humility, kindness, and impressive performance dating back to an admission committee. [157]

- "[W24] has been amazing, she is now a full on policy advocate!"
- "I have experienced [W24] to be open, curious, and kind and able to work well independently without major oversight and am confident that [W24]'s work will add value [to a research context addressing abuse]."
- "She is clearly committed to intellectual and personal growth as evidenced by [redacted]."
- "Her curiosity and energy are noteworthy, and I am both excited for her and supportive of her pursuit of [redacted] and I enthusiastically recommend [W24] for the opportunity. Working with and mentoring [W24] has inspired me, and I am confident that [W24] can and will make the most of an opportunity for [redacted research context]." [157]

As part of its investigation, GRACE conducted an interview with Dr. David Pooler. [10] During this interview, Pooler spontaneously raised the prior professional connection with W24.

Pooler indicated that he had sought to mentor and socialize W24 in a professional environment. He stated that a colleague had expressed reservations about whether W24 had "done enough work" on their own history. (As this colleague declined to interview with GRACE, this statement could not be corroborated.) Pooler felt that W24 presented as "very healthy and boundaried," stating he was "completely naive" and "flattered" that "gosh, someone really wants to work with me," leading him to dismiss the earlier concerns. He represented that he was clear with W24 that he would not treat her with "kid gloves" because of her survivor status, telling her she would need to be a "grown-up" and "mature" as he socialized her for the professional context. [11] W24 relayed to GRACE that "no such conversation occurred." [161] Relevant witness testimony pertaining to W24 and other purported characterizations by Pooler is discussed in Section III.A.2.c., Additional Evidence, and Section IV.B., DARVO.

Pooler and other sources confirmed that [152] he and W24 had a March 24, 2025 meeting to discuss questions in the course of their official roles. Pooler relayed that during this meeting, W24 flagged specific issues, stating she was "triggered" about content relevant to the research questions. Pooler represented that while he viewed her discomfort as "good information," he did not immediately alter his approach, as he was unsure if the reaction was specific to W24 or representative of survivors at large. He stated that he opted to instead seek counsel from a trusted clinical social worker that evening to perform what he considered "due diligence," and the social worker flagged the same issues. Pooler indicated that he also communicated with a survivor who flagged the same issues as W24. As a result of the additional feedback, Pooler adjusted the research questions. [146] Pooler acknowledged W24's "legitimate criticisms of earlier [research efforts and methodologies]... She noticed things... I thought were appropriate." [12]

Pooler provided GRACE with redacted copies of emails he purportedly sent to W24. The first email is dated March 25, 2025, the day following the conversation with W24, discussing follow-up and logistics.

In a second email dated March 26, 2025, Pooler states, in part, "I saw you declined the [redacted] meeting tomorrow. Are you okay? I know our conversation about [redacted] was difficult and I know you said [redacted] was triggering. I don't want to make assumptions about how you are doing or why you declined it, so if you need anything from me let me know." [148]

Pooler represented that he was unaware W24 had moved toward "no contact" until he was called into a meeting with his supervisors, where he explained his process. Pooler relayed that his supervisor told W24 that they could "raise Title IX, if you feel you've been harmed in some way," but that W24 chose not to. [13] Further analysis of this framing is discussed in Section III.D., Determination of Credibility of Allegations.

Pooler reported that he intentionally shared personal "injuries" and "wounded" experiences with W24 "that most people don't get to see." He stated that this level of

transparency was a choice to help W24 understand the emotional toll and reality of the professional context. Pooler shared that he was asked by a supervisor whether he “overshared” personal information. [14]

Pooler stated that there was no sexual conversation “other than the experience in research.” According to Pooler, his “motives and intent were to be helpful. I understand motive and intent is not the same as impact. She was clearly impacted by me. [There] may have been better ways to work together. Maybe I didn’t create an environment where she could share.” He represented that his “obligation was to lay out protocols. In hindsight, I wish I would have explored more.” [16]

Pooler’s characterizations of W24 shifted from positive to negative when discussing the end of their professional intersections. Pooler alleged that after their professional intersection ended, W24 had “come in pretty forcefully” with her criticisms and actions: “I hate to use the word vindictive. I experienced [W24] as vindictive.” He stated he “was expecting a higher level of maturity [within the professional context].” Despite reporting that W24 communicated she was “triggered” about content relevant to the survey questions, thereby effectively confirming that a boundary was set by W24, Pooler stated, [W24] never shared, ‘I have a boundary, etc.’ I assumed everything’s ok.” Pooler relayed hearing that W24 “had done work behind the scenes,” asked for Pooler to be pulled from a conference, and wanted Pooler to lose his job. Pooler described having “no idea” of the “injuries to this level” until he was disinvited from a conference and was reportedly told that W24 was “really hurt,” “devastated,” and “cannot be near you or see you.” [15] Pooler’s statements pertaining to W24’s professional maturity and motivations are inconsistent with his other statements, made during his interview and within documentation evidence provided by W24, and the statements of others, as discussed further in Section III.A.2.c., Additional Evidence. As analyzed in Section IV.B., DARVO, Pooler’s negative characterizations of W24 are consistent with a common manipulation tactic utilized by offenders to deny wrongdoing, attack the credibility of the victim, and frame themselves as the victim, thereby reversing the roles to evade accountability and undermine the reporter’s legitimate concerns.

c. Additional Evidence

W2 reported receiving a disclosure from W24 on a later date about the same interactions with Pooler, and noted her nonverbal “biological response” that supported the validity of W24’s account [61].

W10 relayed receiving an account that W24 had “strange encounters and experiences” with Pooler for an “extended time,” and that Pooler had “weak boundaries,” “had been really inappropriate with [W24],” and “talked sexually with [W24].” [75]

At a time when one witness had no knowledge of any allegations regarding Pooler, Pooler reportedly proactively asked the witness if they had seen or spoken to W24 recently. [51]

The witness relayed how Pooler volunteered that he was no longer acting as W24's mentor and stated that she had been assigned a female mentor, which Pooler felt was "what she needs." [52] The witness characterized Pooler's specific inquiries about W24 as "odd." [53] When the witness informed Pooler that they intended to attend an event that involved W24, Pooler relayed that he would not attend because he needed to work on a speech. [54] According to the witness, both they and another person present found the refusal "odd." [55] The witness represented that Pooler changed the subject immediately after determining that they possessed no information regarding W24. [56] The following day, the witness stated that W24 "breathed a sigh of relief" upon learning Pooler would not be present, an interaction which the witness also characterized as "odd." [57]

Witnesses who directly interacted with W24 provided observations regarding her general credibility and honesty. [58] W14 described W24 as "absolutely credible," noting her "calm, clear-headed," and "matter-of-fact demeanor." [59] W6 noted that W24 was "very careful in what she was sharing" and displayed "hesitancy," which W6 interpreted as an effort to communicate accurately and thoughtfully. [60] W2 expressed a "high view of this person" and stated she had "no concerns over credibility or honesty." [61]

Section Endnotes

[1] SEC-III-EN-1-SRC-01 [2] SEC-III-EN-2-SRC-01 [3] SEC-III-EN-3-SRC-01 [4] SEC-III-EN-4-SRC-01 [5] SEC-III-EN-5-SRC-01 [6] SEC-III-EN-6-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-6-SRC-02 [7] SEC-III-EN-7-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-7-SRC-02 [8] SEC-III-EN-8-SRC-01 [9] SEC-III-EN-9-SRC-01 [10] SEC-III-EN-10-SRC-01 [11] SEC-III-EN-11-SRC-01 [12] SEC-III-EN-12-SRC-01 [13] SEC-III-EN-13-SRC-01 [14] SEC-III-EN-14-SRC-01 [15] SEC-III-EN-15-SRC-01 [16] SEC-III-EN-16-SRC-01 [18] SEC-III-EN-18-SRC-01 [19] SEC-III-EN-19-SRC-01 [20] SEC-III-EN-20-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-20-SRC-02, SEC-III-EN-20-SRC-03 [21] SEC-III-EN-21-SRC-01 [22] SEC-III-EN-22-SRC-01; SEC-III-EN-22-SRC-02 [23] SEC-III-EN-23-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-23-SRC-02 [24] SEC-III-EN-24-SRC-01 [25] SEC-III-EN-25-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-25-SRC-02 [26] SEC-III-EN-26-SRC-01 [27] SEC-III-EN-27-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-27-SRC-02 [50] SEC-III-EN-50-SRC-01 [51] SEC-III-EN-51-SRC-01 [52] SEC-III-EN-52-SRC-01 [53] SEC-III-EN-53-SRC-01 [54] SEC-III-EN-54-SRC-01 [55] SEC-III-EN-55-SRC-01 [56] SEC-III-EN-56-SRC-01 [57] SEC-III-EN-57-SRC-01 [58] SEC-III-EN-58-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-58-SRC-02, SEC-III-EN-58-SRC-03 [59] SEC-III-EN-59-SRC-01 [60] SEC-III-EN-60-SRC-01 [61] SEC-III-EN-61-SRC-01 [75] SEC-III-EN-75-SRC-01 [144] SEC-III-EN-144-SRC-01 [145] SEC-III-EN-145-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-145-SRC-02 [146] SEC-III-EN-146-SRC-01 [147] SEC-III-EN-147-SRC-01 [148] SEC-III-EN-148-SRC-01 [149] SEC-III-EN-149-SRC-01 [150] SEC-III-EN-150-SRC-01 [152] SEC-III-EN-152-SRC-01 [153] SEC-III-EN-153-SRC-01 [156] SEC-III-EN-156-SRC-01; SEC-III-EN-156-SRC-02; SEC-III-EN-156-SRC-03 [157] SEC-III-EN-157-SRC-01 [158] SEC-III-EN-158-SRC-01, SEC-III-EN-158-SRC-02 [159] SEC-III-EN-159-SRC-01 [160] SEC-III-EN-160-SRC-01 [161] SEC-III-EN-161-SRC-01 [179] SEC-III-EN-179-SRC-01 [180] SEC-III-EN-180-SRC-01 [181] SEC-III-EN-181-SRC-01 [182] SEC-III-EN-182-SRC-01 [183] Bonomi, A. E., Gangamma, R.,

Locke, C. R., Katafiasz, H., & Martin, D. (2011). "Meet me at the hill where we used to park": Interpersonal processes associated with victim recantation. *Social Science & Medicine*, 73, 1054–1061. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.07.005>

B. Emotional Misconduct

Emotional misconduct is defined as a pattern whereby a person in a position of authority and/or trust uses that position to control or manipulate others through behaviors such as shaming, dismissing, bullying, threatening, intimidating, humiliating, degrading, or insulting. Emotional misconduct may include spiritual abuse.

While emotional misconduct falls within the specific scope of this investigation, observations regarding David Pooler's alleged conduct are more appropriately discussed within the context of professional boundary violations

C. Professional Boundary Violations

GRACE defines professional boundary violations as verbal or physical actions that breach ethical, professional, or interpersonal boundaries within institutional or faith-based settings. These violations may involve acts such as aggression, intimidation, harassment, or excessive physical contact.

1. Reported Misconduct Toward W6

Reports of professional boundary violations include physical contact involving W6, who was professionally acquainted with Pooler through their shared involvement in the adult clergy sexual abuse (ACSA) advocacy space and their respective roles within the RVC community. [28]

Prior to the reported incident, Pooler was allegedly aware of W6's trauma history and triggers. [34] Specifically, W6 relayed that Pooler knew that her former abuser utilized back-rubbing as a form of physical touch or grooming. [35] W6 relayed that Pooler gained this knowledge through her participation in a professional webinar where she discussed these behaviors. [36] She further alleged that Pooler was aware of these facts through his attendance at a public speech by W6 and other professional conversations. [37] W6 stated that the abuser's behavior was discussed in one-on-one and group settings following presentations at conferences, when Pooler was present. [38]

Despite this awareness, W6 represented that while she was seated and speaking with others during a break at a conference, Pooler approached her from behind and began rubbing her back. [29] W6 reported that she "tensed up" and "jerked" before turning around to identify Pooler as the individual touching her. [31] W6 looked at Pooler, he reportedly stopped the contact, and no verbal exchange occurred between the parties regarding the incident. [33]

W6 noted that she initially "brushed it off" and made excuses for Pooler's action, which she identified as mirroring the psychological patterns she experienced during prior abuse. [39] She later characterized the interaction as a "red flag." [40] W6 expressed distress that such contact would come from a professional who was informed on adult clergy sexual abuse (ACSA) and aware of her specific story and triggers. [41]

The timing of W6's disclosure—an experience shared after another individual came forward—aligns with known disclosure patterns. [48] Multiple witnesses conveyed consistent secondhand narratives by W6 of the back-rubbing incident. [49] W10 observed Pooler touching and spending "a lot of time with" W6, who subsequently reflected to W10 that the touch from Pooler made her "uncomfortable." [85] Witnesses described W6 as a person with integrity who "cares about being accurate." [49]

2. Additional Concerns Regarding Professional Boundaries

a. Physical Boundaries

Some witnesses reported general physical boundary concerns regarding Pooler's interactions with survivors. One witness represented that when Pooler meets someone he knows to be a survivor, he "always goes in for a hug... he always hugs survivors, he doesn't ask." [78] The witness noted that she often felt "obligated" to accept this physical contact because of Pooler's professional stature and position. [79] She further represented, "It's like he feels entitled because we've shared intimate things with him," and that it is "easy to take advantage of us even though we know better." [80] Other witnesses viewed Pooler as demonstrating care around physical boundaries, such as the therapy client who described Pooler as non-confrontational, avoiding any "pressure for physical contact," and empowering the witness to be "in control of the meeting." [113]

W7 is a member of the RVC community. [62] W7 and their spouse originally reached out to Pooler for assistance in communicating with their church regarding an institutional response to clergy abuse. [63] Although the church was unwilling to work with Pooler and he did not offer services as a therapist, he reportedly remained helpful to W7 and their spouse. [64] W7 later met Pooler in person at the Restore Conference. [65]

During a particularly emotional session at the conference, W7 observed Pooler seemingly overtaken by emotion; when W7 asked if he was okay, Pooler did not respond. [66] Later, Pooler stepped directly in front of where W7 was sitting against a wall, physically blocking her while he spoke to another man. [67] W7 described feeling awkward and "trapped," wondering, "Does he not see me?" [68] W7 was unsure if Pooler was aware of his positioning due to his emotional processing, and she found the situation "strange" because Pooler and the other man, who were in advocacy roles at the conference, were blocking a victim to console one another. [69] W7 noted that Pooler spoke to another woman regarding their experience at the conference and was helpful to her. W6 provided corroborating information regarding this conference interaction. [71]

Additional physical boundary concerns were reported regarding Pooler's conduct during emotional conference sessions. [81] One witness observed Pooler participating in a "high emotional point" at the Restore Conference where survivors were crying, praying, and physically consoling one another. [82] The witness stated that while the attendees were mostly female survivors, Pooler and other males were "all touching female survivors during this time." [83] The same witness characterized Pooler's participation in this religiously-centered emotional and physical conduct as "weird," stating that Pooler had previously represented to her that he "doesn't see himself as a Christian anymore." [84]

b. Social Boundaries

W10, a professional also working in the field of ACSA research, was "taken aback" to witness Pooler drinking and socializing with survivors at a bar area during the Restore Conference. [76] Witness testimony surrounding the allegations regarding W19, discussed above, demonstrated similar concerns. W10 observed a "lot of hard alcohol" with "multiple bottles being passed around" among attendees, expressing concern given Pooler's perceived clinical role and the potential of clinical relationships with survivors present, though W10 could not confirm this. [77]

W24 reported that Pooler "routinely used his supervisory relationship" with her to "share complaints about his colleagues, workplace grievances, and details about his personal life" that W24 stated she had "no reason to know." W24 reported that Pooler "would disclose the names of clergy sexual abuse victims who had contacted him for help." W24 also stated that Pooler told her that he had accepted individuals who contacted him regarding his university research and reached out for help, as clients within his private clinical practice. [154] Pooler's response regarding reported misconduct against W24 is contained in Section III.A.2.b.

Witnesses expressed concerns regarding the power dynamics and hierarchy Pooler purportedly maintained. [85] W10 felt that Pooler "likes to create hierarchy in relationships" and represented that he was treated like a "celebrity" among survivors. [86] W10 expressed that Pooler "seemed to enjoy the attention" and was viewed as "God-like" because he was a rare male advocate who cared about their experiences, while W7 observed that he was seen as a "gift" to the ACSA community. [87] W24 stated that Pooler "constantly referred to himself as an expert on clergy sexual abuse" to her. W24 reported that Pooler conducted paid expert witness testimony, received a "Director title," and initiated the formation of the Adult Clergy Sexual Abuse Research and Advocacy Collaborative at Baylor University [181] W10 expressed concern that Pooler's high stature as an "expert in this space" could allow him to "get away with more," emphasizing that he should be acutely aware of such power dynamics. [88] W16 reported an interaction where Pooler was repeatedly "quizzing" her about her degree, which made her feel as though she was being "measured for credibility." [90] She noted that this interaction made her feel "defensive" and gave her the impression that Pooler was actively looking for ways to "discredit" or "rank" her. [91]

c. Social Media and Ethical Boundaries

Witnesses reported concerns of boundary-blurring relationships, consistent with information in Section III.A.2, "Reported Misconduct Toward W24." For example, W4 represented that after she emailed Pooler asking about graduate programs, he promptly scheduled a video call and highly recommended the academic program where he taught. [92] During the same call, Pooler "enthusiastically" offered to become her private counselor, proposing to accommodate her commute with extended sessions at a rate W4 characterized as "too affordable to even make sense." [93] W4 ultimately declined both offers, citing concerns over Pooler making himself "so available so quickly" and the ethical implications of a dual counselor-professor relationship. [94]

Witnesses also expressed concerns regarding Pooler's overlap of personal issues with his clinical and academic roles on social media. [96] W15 reported that after contacting Pooler for academic help, he friend-requested her across multiple social media platforms on the day of their first conversation, which she found "weird." [97] W22 stated that she was receiving therapy from Pooler while simultaneously being friends with him on social media. [98] W11 noted the ethical implications of this overlap, stating that when a therapist is friends with clients online, the dynamic of "who's taking care of who?" becomes inappropriately "fuzzy." [99]

While some witnesses did not see issues with Pooler's social media presence, others characterized some posts as self-disparaging, "presenting himself as a victim." [100] W15 recalled posts where Pooler seemed to be having an "emotional breakdown," while W10 observed him "bemoaning about his life and the larger world and his pain" during the summer of 2025, interpreting the behavior as "fishing for attention or care." [101] W14 noted posts where Pooler discussed a "behavioral addiction" and being an "alcoholic." [102] A review of Pooler's Facebook page identified posts detailing struggles with depression, "multiple addictions (to behaviors and substances)," a "6 year brawl" with his "ego," and claims that his 50s were written by his own "pain and sadness." [103] W15 observed that in the past year, Pooler's posts had begun to shift to become "more professional, less personal." [104]

When questioned about these overlapping online relationships, Pooler represented to investigators that he thought he was connected with "one therapy client on Facebook" and "maybe" was connected with W24, but stated that he did not "recall who friended who." [105] Pooler alleged that he has not "really noticed boundary-blurring" and felt that his therapy boundaries "are tight, they work." Whether he "would become friends on Facebook, depends on the client-some [he] wouldn't do it," but regardless, "all boundaries are strong and intact." [106]

As noted at the outset of this Report, Dr. David Pooler is a Professor of Social Work and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with a supervisor designation in Texas and a clinical counseling practice. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics states that social workers “should avoid communication with clients using technology (such as social networking sites... for personal or non-work-related purposes. Social workers should be aware that posting personal information on professional Web sites or other media might cause boundary confusion, inappropriate dual relationships, or harm to clients.” [107]

Furthermore, the Texas Board of Social Worker Examiners “Guidelines for Using Social Media” require practitioners to “use separate professional and personal web pages and profiles for social media to clearly distinguish between the two kinds of virtual presence.” Social workers must “politely turn down requests from clients to connect on personal social networking sites.” A social worker may accept requests on a professional account, “provided that the account is used for professional purposes only.” This caution is warranted since electronically disclosed personal information “may affect the client-social worker relationship.” [108]

The Therapy Exploitation Link Line (TELL), an advocacy network for victims of therapeutic abuse, lists warning signs of boundary breakdowns within therapeutic relationships. According to this framework, the breakdown of clinical boundaries is often a subtle and gradual process, referred to as a “slippery slope,” which can make violations difficult to immediately detect or understand. TELL notes that many behaviors characterizing a potentially problematic dynamic may occasionally appear in healthy therapeutic relationships. For instance, a professional might appropriately use personal experiences to illustrate a clinical point or offer reduced fees to accommodate a client’s budget. However, the framework emphasizes that the frequency and intensity of such behaviors ultimately mark the difference between safe and unsafe boundaries. [135] Overlap between TELL’s warning signs and allegations regarding Pooler’s conduct discussed above possibly includes the following:

- “The therapist talks about his/her personal problems...” [136]
- “The therapist makes sexual or suggestive jokes.” [137]
- “The therapist asks questions about your sex life when you are talking about an unrelated issue.” [138]
- “The therapist suggests seeing you outside the office or professional setting... The therapist promises to be your caretaker and/or to protect you from others.” One witness relayed Pooler mentioning taking someone with her to disclose to other individuals, and offered to attend “if she needed it to be him.” The witness reportedly paid “Dr. Pooler for a therapy session when he went with me to disclose my abuse.” [139] Whether this meeting would be part of a formal reporting process or otherwise, the dynamics of accompanying a client outside of the therapy session should ideally be at the request of the client.

- “The therapist offers to cut fees, see you for extended sessions with or without fee...” One witness shared that Pooler offered to accommodate their commute with extended sessions at a rate they characterized as “too affordable to even make sense.” [140]
- The therapist touches, ...hugs, or otherwise makes overt physical contact with you. [143]

Following his investigative interview, Pooler sent a January 16, 2026, email acknowledging that he needed a professional page, stating that implementing social media boundaries “never really crossed my mind, ever.” [109] Pooler also posted on his personal page post-interview, announcing that he was creating “clearer and more ethical boundaries,” “between my public, professional work and my private, personal life” out of “respect for survivors,” directing individuals to a newly created professional page [110]. After this announcement, a prominent witness contended that Pooler applied these new boundaries selectively, removing certain connections while maintaining ties with other similarly situated advocates and professionals. [111] As a result, the witness expressed concern that Pooler’s public pivot to ethical boundaries was a “pretense” to quietly sever specific relationships rather than a genuine professional shift. [112]

d. Response by David Pooler

During his interview, Pooler stated that he did not recall initiating hugs or touching survivors at conferences, representing that he was not “going around hugging and touching people.” [42] In subsequent correspondence with the investigation team, Pooler referenced an increased awareness after conversations with trusted individuals about “the boundaries I have had in place on social media and in place at Restore [Conference].” [43] Notably, the Restore Conference was the setting for multiple allegations and concerns described above. Pooler represented that the Restore Conference was the first he had attended or spoken at, “where the audience was mostly survivors.” [45]

Pooler noted that the majority of his presentations were “at academic conferences” and that “casually hanging out with attendees in a hotel lobby and having human conversations is quite normative.” [46] He further conveyed that having “super tight professional boundaries” by not attending a social “after-party” would have been helpful and necessary. [44] While maintaining that his reflection was “not an excuse,” Pooler stated that he was “really reflecting on why I was not internally alerted to some of the dangers of why doing that at [the conference] could be really problematic.” [47]

In responding to allegations and their implications, Pooler at times adopted a self-sacrificial posture. [118] For example, when discussing W24, he portrayed his actions as accommodating, representing that he intentionally paused his own initiatives to “get out of the way” of her professional efforts. [119] In discussing his future in the ACSA advocacy space following the investigation, Pooler relayed, “As a result of where things are today, I’m going to change [my] approach of always responding to survivors,” concluding that “it

appears that I've injured people in ways that I don't understand." [120] He suggested that one way to prevent further harm is "to not interact," questioning, "Should this be women, helping women? Even just being a man could be challenging." [121] Expanding on this posture, Pooler represented that he is "fully prepared" to "purposefully exit" the survivor space altogether "for survivors' sake" if his continued presence is deemed unhelpful. [125]

During his interview, Pooler provided thorough definitions of abusive conduct that, at times, appeared to reflect the boundary violations he was accused of committing. [122] When asked to define grooming behaviors, Pooler accurately included "normalizing sexual talk," the "use of touch, close proximity," and "a lot of hugging." [123] He noted that grooming involves "anything that confuses people, where they're not sure if they can trust their judgment as to whether this is appropriate or not." [124] This definition paralleled the experiences reported by witnesses like W6 and W19, who expressed profound distress and confusion over physical boundary-crossing and explicit language. Further, W24 reported that within the context of their supervisor-subordinate dynamic, Pooler disclosed staff complaints, workplace grievances, and personal details that W24 noted she had "no reason to know" and demonstrated "the very pattern of boundary erosion that is characteristic of clergy sexual abuse." [181] Pooler also provided detailed definitions for other manipulation dynamics. [126]

D. Determination of Credibility of Allegations

Some investigative findings regarding Dr. David Pooler present a complex landscape of interpersonal dynamics, characterized by the inherent risks of dual roles. As a clinician, researcher, advisory board member, therapist, and advocate, Pooler frequently operated across overlapping spheres of influence where professional and personal boundaries were blurred. As Pooler himself correctly articulated during his interview, "The one with more power is the one responsible to set boundaries." When individuals with advanced clinical training and institutional authority fail to clearly establish and maintain these lines, the resulting lack of clarity compromises not only organizational transparency but, critically, the psychological and even physical safety of the community.

While Pooler conceded some of his boundary-blurring behaviors—specifically acknowledging the problematic nature of his social media engagement with survivors—the reported harm inflicted extends beyond these admitted lapses in professional judgment. The accounts span a wide spectrum: some interactions reflect the highly nuanced entanglements of dual relationships, while others represent clear-cut, deeply harmful violations, such as the use of a physical act or explicit language mirroring the specific tactics of survivors' prior abusers. Ultimately, some interactions present as complex precisely because the individual holding the greatest clinical expertise and power failed to safeguard relational parameters.

The information provided to GRACE indicates that the allegations of verbal or virtual sexual misconduct against David Pooler are credible. Collective witness accounts describe a pattern of behavior corroborated by contemporaneous disclosures and consistent themes of boundary-blurring and inappropriate sexual discourse across different settings. While several witnesses reported appropriate boundaries in their professional interactions with Dr. Pooler, these accounts do not overcome the corroborated reports of explicit, sexual, and suggestive language used in other contexts.

Despite his position as a trusted mentor, allegations that Pooler engaged in explicit sexual language and indecent communications are credible. Under the established definition, these acts were fundamentally "unwelcome," as demonstrated by verbal patterns that mirrored those of an abuser known to Pooler. Finally, it is noted that reporting individuals do not have an apparent motive to fabricate, and credibly articulate affection and gratitude toward Pooler prior to the reported misconduct. Reflecting this sentiment, one individual who reported a harmful experience stated, "We so appreciated and revered him. This is so hard." [155]

GRACE also determines that allegations of professional boundary violations against Dr. David Pooler are credible. While not every reported concern or individual interaction necessarily presents a conclusive violation in isolation, a broader, concerning pattern of boundary-blurring behavior clearly emerges. This pattern was credibly, consistently, and insightfully expressed by multiple independent survivors of adult clergy sexual abuse across various settings.

In evaluating the evidence, GRACE finds it difficult to reconcile Pooler's ACSA expertise and thorough clinical understanding of power dynamics, trauma triggers, and manipulation tactics with the persona of unawareness he presented regarding his own reported interpersonal boundary violations. It is also difficult to square the thoughtful, empathetic, observant, and diligently boundary-observing professional described by several positive witnesses, with the credible narratives of physical boundary violations, verbal sexual misconduct, and re-infliction of trauma triggers described in this Report.

This disconnect is further highlighted by Pooler's response to the allegations. For instance, when W22 inquired if the RVC investigation stemmed from a misunderstood situation, Pooler appeared to minimize his awareness, representing that he could not think of any such incident. He reportedly told W22, "Don't hear me saying that I'm innocent," while maintaining that he had no idea what was being alleged. [114] While Pooler articulated a similar confusion to investigators, during his interview, he also quickly raised W24 without any prompting from GRACE. [115] The spontaneous emphasis on W24 undermines Pooler's claims of total ignorance and suggests the possibility of a deeper awareness of misconduct. [116] Pooler's emails to W24 within a day of the March 2025 meeting also undercut this framing.

As discussed in Section C. 2. Additional Concerns Regarding Professional Boundaries, Pooler acknowledged that grooming behaviors include "normalizing sexual talk," the "use of touch, close proximity," "a lot of hugging," and "anything that confuses people, where they're not sure if they can trust their judgment as to whether this is appropriate or not." [123,124] Further, Pooler acknowledged that he intentionally shared personal "injuries" and "wounded" experiences with W24 "that most people don't get to see." [14] Winters and Jelic, leading experts on the topic of grooming, have published research that emphasizes that perpetrators actively leverage power imbalances to slowly normalize boundary-crossing behaviors, thereby confusing the victim and manufacturing a false sense of forced intimacy. Pooler's tendency to overshare inappropriate personal and workplace details exemplifies this tactic, as it subtly isolates the target professionally while fostering misplaced trust and dependency. By blurring these lines and normalizing inappropriate proximity or language, the perpetrator deliberately induces the exact cognitive dissonance and self-doubt that Pooler himself described. According to Winters and Jelic, inducing this confusion is a primary strategy used by abusers to keep victims off-balance, causing them to misinterpret inappropriate behavior and preventing them from recognizing or reporting the exploitation. [184]

Additionally, Pooler's narrative regarding the intervention by his supervisors appears to lack credibility; if the conflict with W24 was merely a disagreement over research methodology, the supervisors' reported offer to W24 to pursue a Title IX investigation would have been a highly disproportionate and illogical institutional response. [117] The alleged context of invasive impropriety and boundary-crossing is also enhanced by the reported medical documentation of W24's contemporaneous physical reaction, as well as the nature of W19's experiences.

Ultimately, the convergence of corroborating witness statements and other evidence, Pooler's post-interview admissions regarding his lack of online and conference boundaries, and the contradictions inherent in his clinical expertise and reported personal conduct, all substantiate the credibility of the allegations.

E. DARVO

DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) is a tactic employed by offenders in positions of power to deflect accountability by shifting blame onto their accusers. [164] The process begins with denial, where the offender refutes the allegations or minimizes the harm to protect their reputation. This is followed by an attack on the whistleblower's credibility, character, or motives, effectively transforming the truth-teller into a "villain" to distract from the original misconduct. The tactic generally culminates in the reversal of victim and offender, a maneuver in which the perpetrator portrays themselves as the true target of harmful behavior. This tactic not only silences victims through gaslighting and social isolation but also manipulates the surrounding community into sympathizing with

the offender, thereby preserving the existing power structure and preventing genuine institutional reform.

In evaluating the applicability of this framework to the current matter, Pooler's responses present a multi-layered posture due to a mix of outright denials and partial or inconsistent admissions. For example, Pooler explicitly denied having sexual conversations with W24 outside of official work and claimed he was "not going around hugging and touching people" at conferences [16, 42]. Witnesses credibly contradicted both of these assertions. Although W24's allegations of verbal sexual misconduct occurred within a professional research setting, Pooler's reported questioning of W24's personal sexual experiences were not reasonably related to their official work.

Conversely, Pooler also made partial or inconsistent admissions. While he reportedly cautioned one witness, "Don't hear me saying that I'm innocent," conceded that his online and conference boundaries were problematic, and admitted to being Facebook friends with one therapy client, he also stated his therapy boundaries were "tight" and "strong and intact." [172, 106] As a licensed clinical social worker, Pooler should have been aware that maintaining friendships with clients, even in a social media setting, constitutes an ethical violation. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics requires social workers to avoid personal relationships with clients on social media to prevent boundary confusion and harm. [185] Likewise, Texas regulations prohibit dual relationships that "impair professional judgment or risk exploiting a client." [186] Pooler maintained a long-standing practice of sharing personal vulnerabilities, emotional struggles, and histories of addiction on his personal social media page. Given Pooler's treatment of social media as a personal connection tool, the resulting dual relationships with therapy clients should have been known to Pooler prior to this investigation.

In correspondence subsequent to his interview with the investigation team, Pooler announced that he was immediately enacting a reorganization to separate his personal and professional digital profiles. He concurrently published a public statement on his personal account, describing this shift as a voluntary, protective measure designed to institute ethical boundaries out of respect for survivors and to create necessary role clarity within the advocacy space. [175]

Concerns were expressed to GRACE that the execution of these social media modifications appeared highly selective, potentially undercutting the narrative of a generalized, trauma-informed structural reform. [176] These concerns revolved around the observation that while Pooler publicly asserted an intent to remove professional acquaintances and survivors from his personal page, observed disconnections appeared to be concentrated among specific individuals within his immediate network. Community members interpreted this pattern as a pretext, wherein a broad policy shift was utilized as a cover to selectively sever ties with potential sources of scrutiny. Furthermore, it was observed that Pooler apparently retained active digital connections with various prominent national advocates,

high-profile authors, and public professional figures with whom he possessed no apparent close personal relationship [176]. The reported disparity suggested that the public implementation of ethical boundary reform may have functioned as a defensive maneuver.

While Pooler's admissions may deviate, in some cases, from an absolute denial, they do not necessarily reflect an embrace of accountability. Instead, these statements can be understood either as inculpatory or as a preemptive defensive strategy—acknowledging generalized, boundary-related errors while simultaneously maintaining ignorance regarding core allegations of misconduct. This tension between admitting to abstract boundary issues while denying awareness of any specific harmful incidents functions as a nuanced form of minimization.

This defensive complexity is further reflected in Pooler's evaluation of the specific allegations regarding W24. On the one hand, Pooler demonstrated a degree of acknowledgment atypical of a standard defensive response by explicitly stating that his personal motives did not mitigate his interpersonal impact, recognizing that the reporting individual was clearly impacted, devastated, and deeply hurt by their interactions. [173] On the other hand, this acknowledgment of her injuries was contemporaneous with an attack on W24's credibility and motives. Within the same explanatory framework, Pooler characterized the reporting individual's administrative actions by stating, "I hate to use the word vindictive. I experienced [W24] as vindictive." He conveyed that others had concerns regarding W24's overall professional maturity, and noted behind-the-scenes efforts by W24 purportedly intended to strip him of conference opportunities and employment [173].

Concurrently, behaviors aligned with the final phase of the dynamic—the reversal of victim and offender roles—emerged across Pooler's communications. During his interview, Pooler noted his own emotional distress and professional setbacks, asserting that the fallout from disclosures had knocked him off his feet, left him anxious and fearful, and placed his career completely on hold. Within this interview context, he adopted a self-sacrificial narrative, portraying his potential professional withdrawal from advocacy as a voluntary concession made for the sake of survivors because he had apparently caused injuries he did not fully understand [174].

Viewed as a whole, Pooler's overarching responses, attacks on credibility, and role-reversals present align with a manifestation of DARVO tactics.

Section Endnotes

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IV. Analysis of RVC Response and Culture

Pursuant to the scope of this investigation, GRACE was tasked with assessing Restored Voices Collective's (RVC) knowledge of the allegations against David Pooler and analyzing how the organization's culture, policies, and processes impacted its response.

During the investigation, RVC leadership demonstrated significant efforts to exercise diligence and care regarding the allegations against Pooler. [128] During their interviews, the leaders' demeanor and approach evidenced a genuine concern for the reporting individuals and RVC membership. [129] Furthermore, their efforts in catalyzing the independent investigation itself serve as a tangible reflection of their stated desire to support survivors. [130] This proactive measure is particularly notable given RVC's small size and the significant financial expense of an independent investigation—a step that many larger organizations with significantly more resources often fail to take. W14 emphasized that leadership cares "a lot about protecting [their] members," noting that despite the complexities of navigating the allegations, they "wanted to take this seriously." [131] One leader stated that members "don't need to blindly trust" leadership and instead deserve concrete answers. [133] Additionally, confidentiality was observed to be a high priority for RVC leadership, a commitment consistently reflected in routine investigative interactions where protecting RVC membership and maintaining privacy operated as a clear and lived value.

Furthermore, it is significant that RVC leadership recognized Dr. Pooler's substantial influence within the community as a clear justification for launching an independent inquiry, despite the fact that he was an Advisory Board member. Leadership viewed his formal affiliation with RVC and his deep relational reach among members as carrying a heightened organizational responsibility, determining that the reports necessitated a formal response regardless of his lack of a traditional employment relationship. This proactive willingness to investigate based on localized power and proximity to survivors represents a rigorous institutional approach to community safety, establishing a distinct standard when compared to larger organizations that often leverage formalistic structural boundaries to minimize an individual's true relational reach, thereby fabricating pretexts for avoiding institutional responsibility.

RVC leadership's commitment to organizational safety is further illustrated by the timeline of their initial response, which underscores an immediate and deliberate pivot toward external expertise. Witness testimony and documentation indicate that, within three days

of a disclosure that the reported subject of the misconduct allegations was Dr. Pooler, leadership established a clear directive to seek external intervention [162]. Within approximately one week of this meeting, an RVC Director initiated formal contact with GRACE via email to seek independent guidance on navigating the reports [163]. Throughout the summer of 2025, leadership maintained steady, iterative consultations with external professionals in an effort to implement a trauma-informed, transparent institutional process.

Concurrently, RVC's operational profile as a small grassroots organization inherently entailed a level of administrative informality that introduced its own challenges. Prior to these disclosures, the organization operated without comprehensive misconduct policies. Additionally, while RVC expressed using intentional language advising members how to raise concerns, the compact leadership structure created a structural vulnerability, as the practical process for navigating a complaint inherently depended on who the target of the concern was. [165] While not uncommon for smaller non-profits built on relational trust, the small staff size and lack of pre-existing infrastructure forced leadership to construct portions of a crisis response framework from the ground up while simultaneously navigating active disclosures.

The broader RVC community expressed highly polarized perspectives to GRACE regarding how leadership navigated the initial disclosures and the process culminating in the independent investigation. While multiple members commended the organization for handling the matter responsibly rather than relying on superficial approaches, others expressed significant frustration, ranging from the tone of organizational messaging to the anonymous group setting of disclosures. [166]

This friction was particularly evident regarding RVC's primary digital platform, where the organization's moderation approach yielded divergent member experiences. Some participants felt this format successfully maintained a "99% safe space," while others experienced the forum as counterproductive or concerning. This internal divergence was further intensified by RVC's perceived openness or lack thereof to differing opinions or external critique, with some members expressing strong support of RVC's approaches, while others reported that the organizational culture was dismissive of critical feedback and unwelcoming to alternative viewpoints. One member shared their perception that the online forum had become "unhinged," making them "less likely to post anything personal." They appreciated the "platform's ability for people to pour out intimate reflections about their trauma, which can be helpful for some, but harmful for others." Concerns were raised noting intensifying argumentation among members, generally "respect[ing] the desire for transparency, but it's a lot of raw emotion." A witness observed that "founding leadership has been vague yet appropriate, but the group itself has been... allowed to spin out of control." [167]

Beyond community moderation, internal feedback articulated structural vulnerabilities regarding RVC's peer facilitation environment. Multiple participants raised concerns that while group facilitators offered meaningful interpersonal support, some lacked formal training or credentialing. Consequently, member perceptions of operational competency were starkly divided; while multiple participants viewed the organization's leadership as consistently well-run, communicative, and helpful, others characterized RVC's approaches to peer support as problematic. [168]

Pooler also communicated concerns to GRACE regarding RVC, specifically that a confidential leadership email sent to him on September 17, which detailed his suspension from the Advisory Board and the independent inquiry, was subsequently leaked to an external reporter [169]. Pooler stated that this incident served as a data point reflective of RVC's broader culture, politics, or practices, suggesting that it indicated either lax practices within the leadership's circle or an intentional choice to notify the media. While RVC did send an email to Pooler on September 17 notifying him of his suspension from the Advisory Board and of this independent investigation, nothing within the email indicated this information would be held confidentially. RVC indicated they did not share the email externally, however, did announce Pooler's suspension from the advisory board and independent investigation with their membership, in accordance with GRACE's recommendation. [170] Additionally, Pooler shared a separate account regarding an unnamed survivor who purportedly had concerns about RVC's environment [171].

Section Endnotes

[128] SEC-IV-EN-128-SRC-01, SEC-IV-EN-128-SRC-02 [129] SEC-IV-EN-129-SRC-01 [130] SEC-IV-EN-130-SRC-01 [131] SEC-IV-EN-131-SRC-01 [133] SEC-IV-EN-133-SRC-01 [134] SEC-IV-EN-134-SRC-01 [162] SEC-IV-EN-162-SRC-01, SEC-IV-EN-162-SRC-02 [163] SEC-IV-EN-163-SRC-01, SEC-IV-EN-163-SRC-02 [165] SEC-IV-EN-165-SRC-01; SEC-IV-EN-165-SRC-02 [166] SEC-IV-EN-166-SRC-01, SEC-IV-EN-166-SRC-02 [167] SEC-IV-EN-167-SRC-01, SEC-IV-EN-167-SRC-02 [168] SEC-IV-EN-168-SRC-01, SEC-IV-EN-168-SRC-02, SEC-IV-EN-168-SRC-03 [169] David Pooler's email to GRACE's staff stated "Someone with access to the email sent to me by the leaders of RVC on September 17th (which stated that I was being removed from my advisory board position and that GRACE was going to do an investigation into allegations against me) was given to a reporter on Wednesday, who then reached out to me with several questions." SEC-IV-EN-169-SRC-01. SEC-IV-EN-169-SRC-02. SEC-IV-EN-169-SRC-03. [170] SEC-IV-EN-170-SRC-01 [171] SEC-IV-EN-171-SRC-01

V. Recommendations

The recommendations outlined in this section are designed to equip RVC with steps to align their practices with the core tenets of trauma-informed care, as formulated by SAMHSA. Specifically, these items are structured around the six foundational pillars of safety,

trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice, and choice, and cultural, historical, and gender considerations.

It should be noted that RVC's very inception, its dedicated support structures, and its core mission represent a highly proactive operationalization of trauma-informed principles for survivors of adult clergy sexual abuse. By intentionally designing an environment focused on navigating the distinct complexities of institutional betrayal trauma, RVC has demonstrated a commendable and rare institutional commitment to providing survivor-led spaces that prioritize long-term recovery and community support.

For an organization to be one of safety, staff members and participants alike feel physically and psychologically secure; the organizational setting is safe and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety. Understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority. [177] Recommendations to enhance safety include the following:

- Review and standardize digital forum moderation boundaries: Implement explicit, structured moderation guidelines for the private social media group. These policies should establish objective thresholds for when community posts are reviewed, hidden, or removed, ensuring that digital boundaries are enforced consistently to avoid concerns of reliance on leadership discretion.
- Deconstruct and address advocacy-based power dynamics: Integrate a systemic organizational awareness that exploitative behaviors can be perpetrated by individuals holding prominent advocacy credentials or public platforms within survivor-centered spaces. While the RVC membership possesses a profound, lived understanding of safety risks and institutional silencing within traditional ecclesiastical structures, this investigation highlights a less recognized vulnerability where actors leverage advocacy spaces to inflict immense harm. GRACE has observed across multiple cases that just as bad actors have historically targeted faith communities due to specific institutional risk factors and the potential to abuse, many of those same risk factors and opportunities for exploitation exist within advocacy spaces as well. Leadership must actively cultivate an organizational culture that extends scrutiny to the advocacy sector itself.
- Dismantle leader idealization and celebrity culture: Cultivate an organizational culture that intentionally discourages the elevation of individual leaders, external experts, or high-profile advocates to an unassailable status. Parallel to the need to deconstruct advocacy power dynamics, RVC should address how celebrity culture operates within this environment. While the membership is familiar with how uncritical reverence and celebrity status are used to protect harmful actors within faith communities, this investigation highlights that the exact same vulnerability can exist unnoticed within the abuse advocacy sector itself. Witness feedback highlighted that the collective desire for a "champion" can lead to the intense idealization of prominent figures [178]. This dynamic is intensified by gender imbalances within the broader abuse advocacy field, where there is a notable

scarcity of male allies. When a male advocate validates survivors, the community's relief can lead to an over-elevation of his standing, which inadvertently lowers natural guardrails and causes participants to lose sight of risk factors. Notably, during a 2025 lecture at the Restore Conference, Pooler himself highlighted the concept of "betrayal blindness"—a phenomenon where individuals ignore warning signs or exhibit a lack of awareness to preserve a relationship with an authority figure. When misconduct allegations first emerged in this matter, this exact blind spot manifested within the community as immediate shock, protective denial, and internal friction, as several members struggled to process that a revered advocate could mirror abusive patterns. RVC should introduce educational framing that directly confronts the hazards of leader idealization outside of ecclesiastical settings, ensuring that the disclosure of misconduct does not destabilize individual and collective psychological safety.

An organization that is trustworthy and transparent is one where organizational operations and decisions are conducted with the goal of building and maintaining trust with members, among staff, and with others involved in the organization through honesty and following through on commitments. Leaders can build trustworthiness in small, reliable actions over time, demonstrating that they are dependable and honest and that their words and deeds are transparent. In service of this, recommendations for the organization include the following:

- Reinforce community trust by continuing to build upon RVC's proactive institutional measures of commissioning this independent investigation and promptly acting to address gaps in its misconduct policies early in the process.
- Restrict and minimize overlapping dual roles: This investigation demonstrated the harm inflicted in part by boundary violations and poor role delineation. Unless professional roles and functions are clearly separated, well-defined, and boundaried, the resulting confusion becomes both a transparency issue and a direct safety hazard. RVC must ensure organizational roles are mutually exclusive to maintain clear operational boundaries. To operationalize this, leadership should identify any existing dual-role entanglements among staff, volunteers, and advisors. RVC should develop a clear strategy to systematically address these overlapping responsibilities and minimize their potential impact.

Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing individual stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing. Recommendations for the organization include the following:

- Explore pathways for peer facilitator development: Consider options to provide accessible, third-party training resources or workshops for volunteers who facilitate support groups. Exploring these educational opportunities can help support

facilitators as they navigate group dynamics, boundary maintenance, and the emotional toll of secondary trauma, enhancing peer support skills in an encouraging, collaborative manner.

- Clarify the role of peer support: Highlight the natural distinction between peer-led mutual aid and formal clinical care within organizational literature, onboarding pathways, and group guidelines. Because some witnesses indicated confusion regarding these parameters, RVC can look for ways to intentionally reinforce these parameters through multiple communication channels and regular community updates. This approach can help gently foster a shared, clear understanding of the peer environment's unique scope and safety boundaries.

Collaboration and mutuality reflect partnership and the leveling of power differences between leadership and the membership and among other future staff at any level of authority, demonstrates that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. Recommendations include the following:

- Incorporate methods for gathering anonymous feedback from the membership, such as annual climate surveys. These evaluations can help leadership regularly gauge participant perceptions of operational transparency, communication, and the overall health of the community.

Empowerment, voice, and choice are prioritized by acting as facilitators rather than controllers of recovery. This principle recognizes that survivors have typically experienced a loss of autonomy and voice. Staff and leaders are supported to nurture individual and community resilience, actively amplifying participant voices even when the feedback is challenging.

- Cultivate responsive paths for member input: To sustainably address concerns about leadership responsiveness without overburdening a small staff, leadership could consider the possibility of designating a trusted volunteer representative to offer members an accessible review pathway if they feel their feedback has been overlooked.
- Offer choice in digital engagement formats: Consider providing varied or tiered spaces within the online platform. Because engaging with trauma narratives can be deeply therapeutic for some but highly activating for others, distinct interaction options allow individuals to safely control their own boundaries and pace of recovery.

Cultural, historical, and gender considerations involve moving past stereotypes to offer responsive processes that recognize historical trauma and the unique backgrounds of those served. For this community, this means understanding the specific dynamics of institutional betrayal and how gender shapes interactions within the abuse advocacy

sector. Recommendations to incorporate cultural, historical, and gender considerations include:

- Consider internal reflections on the gender dynamics highlighted in the safety section, specifically how the scarcity of male advocates can alter community expectations in unhelpful and potentially dangerous ways.

GRACE extends its sincere gratitude to the survivors and community members who shared their experiences and insight throughout this investigation. This report is submitted with deep respect and hope for RVC's ongoing mission to provide a space where women can connect, understand their stories in the context of adult clergy sexual abuse, and reclaim their voices.

Section Endnotes

[177] See SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach (July 2014). [178] SEC-V-EN-178-SRC-01.