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Researching the Lives of Roman Catholic Clergy who have Sexually Abused Minors

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Two Aspects to Problem of Sexual Abuse within the Catholic Church

Part of a Larger Study – over decade of research

Combines Psychological and Sociological Perspectives

No big claims of Generalisability ..Transferability of Knowledge
Philosophical Orientation to Research

- **Natural Science Approach**
  - Scientific explanations based on causal laws, goal of prediction

- **Interpretative Social Science Approach**
  - Understand social phenomena from the point of view of the meaning that the social agent gives to his actions
The Study

- First-person Accounts
- Critical Analysis of Relevant Literature
- Clinical Observations
- Bring to the surface latent issues that lie behind more individualistic ‘explanations’ of child sexual abuse by the Irish Roman clergy participants in this research
Study Aims

- Way of Conceptualizing Clergy offender beyond the lens of ‘sin’ or ‘deviance’ – Contextual and Relational dimensions of the problem

- To deepen current understanding of the problem and contribute to more informed therapeutic work
The Study: Interpretative Grounded Theory Methodology

1. Simultaneous involvement in the data generation and analysis

2. Creation of analytic codes and categories from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses

3. Use of selective or theoretical sampling—information rich cases for study in depth and for theory construction
Community Based Treatment Programme in Ireland

Clergymen who had the longest record in taking part in the treatment programme

Living through a critical time in their lives .. awaiting legal proceedings .. lost their clerical ministries .. willing to speak

Motivation to give something back

Continued beyond the Treatment
30 hours of group interviews video-recorded, audio-reviewed
10 hours of follow up interviews, and contact through email
400 A4 pages of relevant transcribed text generated
Use of Atlas ti - store data, making for easy retrieval of material and for coding
Individual cases analysed and meta-analysis of whole data set
Constant comparative method
Memo-writing for theory construction
Ethical Considerations

- The Question of Informed Consent
- From Therapy Client to Research Participant
- Potential Compromise of Confidentiality in Reporting Client Narratives
Participants as C0- Collaborators in Research Process

- Constant consultation and reading sections of the research
- Wrote comments, offered ‘Fine Distinctions’
- Increasing Respondent Validity and Additional Measure to ensure the anonymity of participants preserved
Epistemological and Methodological Considerations

- Doing Research as an Insider/Outsider
- Generating Research Data in Group
- Finding a Place to Stand – Ethical and Methodological
Contradiction 1 Maleness—a necessity for priesthood and religious brotherhood; yet male sexual identity could not be even discussed, let alone evident in actual experience.

Contradiction 2 Formation kept the men sexually and relationally immature; yet ordination and profession set them apart as elite, superior to other men.
Contradiction 3 Celibacy presented as a ‘gift’; yet the loss of male sexual expression and fatherhood ignored

Contradiction 4 The immature man emerged from the seminary; yet put in charge of adolescents with whom he could identify, who became his ‘friends’ in the absence of adults
Contradiction 5 Belonged to a brotherhood of men; yet lived lives of emotional isolation

Contradiction 6 Loved by all; yet known by none (idealised, objectified)

Contradiction 7 Public power; yet personal subjugation and submission
Contradiction 8 A master of moral theology; yet unable to make good judgements - right psychological constitution - internal reflection; personal awareness and willingness to put oneself in place of the other (Arendt, 2003)
Clerical Masculinities

- Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity in Hegemonic position- Ideal type
- Manner in which certain of the contradictions are navigated, held or circumvented gives rise to different versions of clerical masculinity.
- Skill required to hold the contradictions
- Inadequacy of seminary training
- Skill, luck, maturity or cunning in adopting to the demands of the institution
Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity

- Priest first and Man second
- Interprets messages of Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity literally and rigidly
- Avoids Relationships with Women
- Avoids ‘Particular Friendships’ with Men
- Default position of avoiding all human intimacy
- Submissive Style of Relating – especially to Superiors
- Performs Obedience- Rule Keeper
- Intellectualises Emotion
- Non-Disclosure of Emotional Distress or Emotional Loneliness
- Isolated in Sexual Struggles with Celibate Commitment
- Influence of Clericalism – Believes Children will not tell
Over Time – The Clerical Men who Became the Abuse Perpetrators

- Lives of Submission gives way to Undisclosed Anger
- Gap widens between the Rhetoric and the Reality
- Confiding Space—God and the Confessional
- Turning to Minors for “Intimacy” and “Friendship”
- “Alive” by “stealing” sex [minors]
- Living a double life – twin tracks
- Life implodes and explodes
High fees for entering an organisation and stiff penalties for exiting, the absence of ‘Voice’ and the fear of ‘Exit’ can inevitably lead to self-deception, denial and secrecy on the part of its members (Hirschman, 1970: 93).
Such was the case for the men in this study

- As the gap widened between the reality of their lives and their attempts to live the ‘Ideal’ in accordance with their interpretation of Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity and what it was to “do” priesthood, a space existed in which it was possible to rationalise even the most unacceptable of behaviour
Conclusion and Future Research

- Sex
- Power
- Obedience
- Clericalism

- Giving way to forms of Clerical Masculinities

- Catholic Church as a Gendered Organization – forms of masculinity available to clerical men – enabling and constraining environmental factors

- Catholic Church as a Closed Organization – factors contribute to abuse by members also contribute to abuse of its members