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## **Masculinity, relationships and context: Child sexual abuse and the Catholic Church**

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### **Abstract**

This paper provides background to the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in Ireland and outlines the particular Irish dimensions to the problem. It argues that a systemic perspective offers best promise to conceptualise the problem of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and outlines. In turning to how the problem has been investigated by statutory and church commissioned inquiries and commissions of investigation (Murphy, 2009; Ryan, 2009) it becomes apparent that how the past is investigated and framed is not merely a neutral matter, but one that is complexly interwoven with present politic and changing social conditions. In offering a critique of the Murphy Report into the Handling of Abuse Complaints in the Archdioceses of Dublin (Murphy, 2009), as one example of a statutory commission of investigation in Ireland, some significant legal and methodological issues are raised that give cause for concern regarding some of the findings and judgements made. What cannot be disputed however is the fact that thousands of children were abused by Catholic clergy in Ireland and worldwide. We owe it to them to get to the full truth of what occurred and to prevent its re-occurrence. In considering a way forward for the church, victims of clergy must be placed at the centre of the church's response, other key actors must be brought together in dialogue and the church must deal with the systemic genesis of the problem in a spirit of institutional reform and transformation.

### **Introduction**

My interest in Roman Catholic clergy who had perpetrated child sexual abuse developed when I, along with two colleagues, set up a community-based treatment programme for child sexual offenders in Ireland in 1996, which attracted a large number of Catholic clergy for treatment (see Keenan, 2012). Apart from offering treatment, I was interested in understanding how priests and religious brothers who had sexually abused minors understood those aspects of their lives that had contributed to their sexual offending. Usually people join the ranks of Catholic clergy for a number of reasons, and while there is no evidence to suggest that the main reason for joining is the betterment of the human race, my experience of working with clergy in Ireland for over two decades had led me to believe that the motivation for many was to be of service and to help others. Therefore I wanted to know what had gone so terribly wrong.

The most comprehensive research ever carried out on sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, conducted by researchers in the United States (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2006, 2011), reports that whatever else formed the priests' motivation for joining, gaining access to children to abuse them was not part of it. My own experience confirmed this. The more I met with the clerical men who had abused, the more intrigued I became. Put simply, I was not in the presence of "monsters", nor was I in the presence of individuals who had an "illness". I began to think there must be more to the abuse problem than "simply" individual psychopathology, and I began to inquire into the situational and institutional dimensions of the abuse problem, which became more apparent to me the more I engaged with the Catholic Church. While many organizational factors have emerged that indicate the significance of gender, power and organizational culture in the genesis of this problem and in the response to it, no research has ever suggested that the church attracts a particular "type" of individual that will be subsequently abusive. My research suggests on the contrary that the problem develops systemically and that seminary experience and the ways in which clerical masculinity is fostered and adopted is significant in how this problem comes to be.

As has now become evident from the wave of disclosures of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy throughout the Western world, as well as the actual offending there was another dimension to the abuse problem: the handling of abuse complaints by the church hierarchy. The lack of adequate response to abuse complaints by the church leaders has become apparent in almost every country in the world in which sexual abuse by clergy has come to light. In considering the international situation I am of the view that the actual abuse problem and the response to it by the church leadership are not two unrelated problems, but in fact that they are interlinked. Put simply, both sets of men were part of the same institutional culture. While within this culture not all priests were abusive (indeed as the data suggests, they are a small minority of clergy with 4 – 9 % of Catholic clergy having abuse allegations made against them (see Keenan, 2012, pp 5-9)), the pattern of response by the church hierarchy showed remarkably similar patterns. The extent to which the institutional and organizational culture of the Catholic Church played a role in the sexual abuse situation had to be empirically addressed and that has been the focus of much of my work while not neglecting the role of individual action and choice.

However, in this paper I begin by suggesting that an individualist perspective is a limited one in helping to understand the clerical perpetrator and instead I propose a masculinity relational perspective as a more elaborate conceptualization of the problem. I suggest that those clerical men who adopted a way of "doing" clerical masculinity that was built on an idea of celibate perfection were more likely to become the child abuse perpetrators. Drawing on Goffman's (1996) typology of adaptation strategies for managing life in total institutions (such as the Catholic seminary) I suggest a way to theorise why some priests became sexually abusive, while others did not that is not based on individual psychopathology. I then turn to inquiries and commissions of investigation into the church's handling of abuse complaints in Ireland and argue that how a problem is framed will (and in the case of the Commission of Investigation into the Handling of Abuse Complaints in the Archdioceses of Dublin (The Murphy Report) (Murphy, 2009)), did influence the commission's findings. I offer a critique of The Murphy Report (Murphy, 2009), to raise some important scholarly considerations.

### **Sexual abuse in the Catholic Church: Moving away from individual perspectives**

Although there are exceptions (such as Adriaenssens, 2010; Deetman, 2011; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2006, 2011) much work on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church focuses on the assumed psychopathology of the perpetrator and much popular writing and Government commissioned work focuses on the failures of named individuals who were in positions of authority in their mis-handling of abuse complaints (Murphy, 2009). There is a need to move from individualistic perspectives to a relational perspective, which incorporates cultural, theological and organizational factors in our attempts to explain and understand the sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in all its dimensions. I believe that it is possible to identify a number of features of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church that have a determining influence, not only on how the priests came to abuse, but on how the church leaders responded as they did. Factors such as the continuum of the sexual underworld of “normal” clergy; an inadequate theology of sexuality and the absence of a relational sexual ethics for clergy; the churches theology of scandal; clericalism, and deficits in a moral education that is overly intellectualised must all be considered (see Keenan, 2012 for a full discussion). In this paper I focus on two other significant dimensions to understanding the clerical offender: the interplay of power and powerlessness and the construction of clerical masculinity

#### **The interplay of power and powerlessness**

The interplay of power and powerlessness can be seen as core to the genesis of the problem of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy and the manner in which the church leaders responded to abuse complaints. In the public sphere, clergy appear independent in the exercise of their duties and powerful in the mind of the public. However, despite experiencing the trappings of such a dominant power position in the public realm, many clerical perpetrators in my work in Ireland revealed significant experiences of personal powerlessness, lack of autonomy, and frustration in their private lives and in their relationships with superiors. Masked anger and disconnection from the institution to which they had given their lives was the result, with “comfort” being sought from “outside”. Yet, this response was not inevitable and other clergy coped by constructing adaptive clerical masculine identities that allowed them to accept their human frailties, form relationships with adults, including sexual relationships and neutralise feelings of guilt and shame, as discussed below.

Bishops also experienced powerlessness vis-à-vis the powerful Roman Curia, who took a defensive interpretation towards Canon Law in its protection of the rights of accused priests, leaving bishops floundering and at times fearing Rome, which offered little positive direction in the face of a growing problem (see Keenan, 2012). I also found that until the 1990s bishops did not openly share the problems of sexual abuse b their clergy with each other, for reasons of not letting their diocese down by disclosing such revelations. They thus handled the problem alone, unintentionally keeping themselves from potential sources of support. Power within the Catholic Church was taught and seen to be in one direction only - upwards. Priests feared the bishops and bishops feared Rome. However, neither bishop nor priest feared the laity; certainly not children. This approach to power relations enabled the problem to continue and to go undetected in Irish society for far too long. This approach is also related to the authority and

governance structures of the Catholic Church and to the image of manly priesthood and subsequent relational networks that it fostered.

### **Perfect celibate clerical masculinity**

In undertaking an in-depth qualitative study with Catholic clergy who had sexually offended against minors based on an analysis of 30 hours of group recorded interviews and individual interviews with them, the analysis of questionnaires completed by non-offending clergy and a clinical background of treating Catholic clergy for over twenty years, I developed four categories to help understand clergymen's approach to celibate masculinity, distinctions in which I began to theorize as contributing to subsequent sexual offending. These approaches are Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity, Compassionate Celibate Clerical Masculinity, Incongruous Celibate Clerical Masculinity and Holy Celibate Clerical Masculinity (for fuller discussion on these distinctions see Keenan, 2012, pp. 243-251). My analytical work suggests that the clerical perpetrators emerged from the group of men who built their clerical masculine identity on a notion of perfect celibacy (Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity) and it is to this group that I now turn.

Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity is a construct that understands the identity of the priest or religious brother as being based on the priestly or religious role, with gender or maleness acting merely as a secondary consideration. My research suggests that the majority of priests and religious who sexually abuse minors live out of a clerical masculinity that is construed in this manner. Within such a construct, the individual sees himself as a priest first and only secondly as a man. According to this perfect clerical template, clerical masculinity is based on purity and chastity. Celibacy is seen as a gift from God, available to all if one prays sufficiently. Sex and sexual expression are seen as a set of "acts," and sexual sins are based on lists of rules and regulations regarding these sex "acts." Sexual desire and emotional intimacy are seen as less relevant for priests and religious brothers than for other individuals. Women and girls are seen as a threat to the celibate commitment. Intimacy with men is also construed as threat, in particular because of underlying Church policy on homosexuality, which can link male intimacy with homophobic ideation. Clergy are seen as set apart and set above. Being set apart and set above is a burden that is worn heavily, yet also confers institutional power in society; men who construct clerical masculinity along these lines are aware of this and benefit from it. Human perfection is the aim in serving God, and failing to achieve perfection is interpreted as personal failure and must be covered up.

My research with clerical perpetrators who attempted to live priesthood or religious brotherhood according to the norms of Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity suggests that they fell into two subgroups whose behavior, although different, emerged from the same core ideas and cognitions. Members of the more introverted subgroup believed in self-denial and self-abasement, and the priest's personal happiness was not seen as relevant. Fulfillment came from doing God's work. Although they knew they were doing wrong in abusing children, these men believed children and adolescents would not be "harmed" by sexual acts, or at least not "too much", unless the "acts" were especially "intrusive." These men had a list of behaviors at which they would draw the line regarding their sexual "intrusions". Members of the other smaller and more extroverted subgroup centered on the self. Here, personal happiness and ambition were

important. These men committed more intrusive sexually abusive acts by believing that children could and did give consent. Clericalism helped the men in both subgroups to assume that children would never tell what clergy did to them.

In terms of lifestyle and environment, the men who embodied a model of Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity avoided and effectively denied their sexuality and sexual desire. They tried to become “holy and detached” and “sexless.” He avoided relationships with women and friendships with men. They had few close friendships within the clergy and no close adult friendships outside of clerical life. They felt lonely and unfulfilled. They concealed emotional distress and turned their attention to God and the needs of others. They worked too hard and strived for excellence and perfection in their public ministries. They lacked supervision and support – something that was also common to many other clergy. They were rule-keepers, whose rigid adherence to rules and regulations was devoid of internal reflection and emotional engagement. They adopted a subservient position in relationships, particularly towards Church leadership.

Members of the introverted subgroup lived overtly quiet and compliant lives, whereas those in the extroverted subgroup acted in passive-aggressive ways, becoming gregarious and even provocative towards those in authority. However, for both subgroups of men who attempted to live a Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity, an outwardly compliant demeanor or an overtly passive-aggressive positioning masked an underlying unhappiness and discontent, which was not expressed. Life took off on twin tracks. These men compartmentalized the internal struggle and kept it separated from their public personae. They learned to live in “no man’s land,” a place where gendered identity was to be avoided.

At a psychological level, the man who embodied Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity as a way of “doing” priesthood intellectualized his emotion. He denied anger and resentment. He felt lonely and emotionally isolated. He felt disconnected from the brotherhood of priests. However, he felt connected to and interested in those to whom he ministered. Members of the introverted subgroup internalized shame and personal failure in living a life of internal conflict and struggle. These men lived with a form of depression and a weariness of life as they became “soul dead.” They often develop an emotional connection with children and adolescents, who in some instances became like “friends.” Sexual abuse of the children took place in this context. Those in the extroverted subgroup had a different way of relating to children and young people. For these men, children and adolescents were kept at an emotional distance, but became a means to a sexual end.

It is my contention that children and young people were chosen for sexual and emotional expression by the participants in my research because they believed that all routes to healthy adult sexual and emotional expression were closed. In addition, their highly gendered organization failed to prepare them for the power positions they would occupy as adult men and as ordained ministers of the Catholic Church. Despite their idealized and unrealistic aspirations of themselves and their ministries, sooner or later, when their interior selves and their public commitments came into sharp conflict, their way of living propelled their sexual abuse of minors. What is important here is the first occasion on which the sexual abuse took place. My research suggests that this often

occurred not in premeditated ways but in ways that were unintended, almost at times “by accident.” However, after the first abusive occasion, while many clerical men never abused again, for the participants in my research who did, the sexual experience had its own momentum and was reinforced dramatically in a number of ways. The “buzz,” the cure for loneliness, and the new interest that sex and sexual expression provided in the life of the otherwise “dead” man, took over as he began the journey of trying to accommodate in his thinking and his conscience this new-found secret world that would keep him “alive,” although conflicted. This secret world had to be balanced with the fact that all the clerical perpetrators knew they were doing wrong.

### **Surviving clerical perfection: Distinguishing abusive from non-abusive Catholic clergy**

While popular culture and some professional discourses would have us believe that the disease of pedophilia singularly distinguishes clergy who abuse minors from those who do not, my research does not support this conclusion. In fact, it is my experience that many clerical men who sexually abuse minors do not fit the psychiatric classification of paedophilia at all. Research conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice (2004, 2006) in the United States concurs arguing that whatever else is propelling sexual abuse by Catholic clergy it is not pedophilia (Smith, Rengifo and Vollman, 2008, p. 580). I wish to offer another way of understanding those factors that distinguish those clerics who abused minors from those who did not. In this I attempt to understand how some Catholic clergy “bought into” the model of Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity that was idealized in seminaries and how others resisted this pull in favour of adopting other more socially acceptable, if not fully Church acceptable, models of living as clerical men in which they met their sexual and emotional needs in socially acceptable (if not Church acceptable) ways.

To answer this question I turn to Goffman’s (1996) concept of total institutions in which I conceptualize seminaries as total and totalizing institutions. In doing so, following Goffman (1996, p. 22), I see Catholic seminaries, their role in socializing clergy, and the governance structures of the Catholic Church as a form of social hybrid—part residential community, part formal social organization—that acts as a “forcing house for changing persons,” each as “a natural experiment on what can be done to the self.” My suggestion is that the degree to which the individual responded to or resisted the institution’s attempts to undermine and change the self, determined the extent to which the man developed and maintained a sense of authentic or real self and identity, independent of the clerical role. This in turn influences the ideas he developed about himself, sex, power, children, ministry, the kind of lifestyle and environment that was acceptable to him, and his requirements for taking care of his psychological and emotional well-being.

My research suggests that those men who became the abuse perpetrators were rule-keepers by and large, who were molded by their seminary and experiences of clerical life to embody a Perfect Clerical Celibate Masculine identity; losing their personal selves and integrity in the process. In contrast, other seminarians and clerical men found ways to keep some distance, some elbow room, between themselves and that with which the institution and its promoters assumed they should be identified (Goffman, 1996). These latter men erected defenses against the institution’s power to mold the self,

and in this sense these men became “stance-taking entities,” individuals who took up a position “somewhere between identification with an organization and opposition to it” (p. 280), always ready at the slightest pressure to regain the balance by shifting their involvement in either direction, either more towards the self or towards the institution’s requirements. The clerical men who became the abuse perpetrators did not (or could not) resist the pull of the model of priesthood that was in the hegemonic position in the Catholic Church, even in small ways, and the mortification of self and personal identity that it required. Instead, their sense of selfhood arose through the status that the role provided, while their personal identities, which were merely “in formation” by virtue of their age and in some cases personal vulnerability, resulting from their own histories of childhood abuse, shame, and struggle with sexual orientation, were lost or hidden in the new achievement.

Goffman (1996) offers a typology that suggests four lines of adaptation to manage the tension between the “home world” and the “institutional world” when one enters a total institution, such as a Catholic seminary or religious life. These represent ways of managing the tensions between individual identity and institutional identity. In religious institutions the self is under scrutiny, and Goffman’s four lines of adaptation are useful in helping us understand how seminarians and young clerics manage the tensions between their evolving selves, identities, dreams, and hopes and the foundational institutional identity for priesthood or religious brotherhood (the Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity) that is presented.

Adaptation strategies include “situational withdrawal,” whereby the person disengages from all interactions with the institutional personnel except for the most basic of required interactions (Goffman, 1996). Generally this does not work for seminarians, as they would be asked to leave, but it does for some clergy following ordination and sacred consecration, as they completely withdraw from the life world of the Church, in spirit if not in body, finding support largely outside of official Church structures. A second adaptation strategy involves adopting an “intransigent line,” whereby the individual openly challenges the rules and regulations. Seminarians who are intransigent are often asked to leave, and following ordination or sacred consecration intransigent clerics are barely tolerated. A third adaptation strategy is “colonization,” whereby the individual adapts to “a stable, relatively contented existence” (p. 62) using the home world and that which is known and familiar as a point of reference to support the attractiveness of the new world or institutional norms and expectations. By adopting this strategy, any tension between the two worlds is significantly reduced with the link between the home identity and the institutional identity kept in smooth harmony.

The fourth adaptation strategy open to the young cleric or seminarian is that of “conversion,” whereby the newcomer appears to adopt the official view of himself and tries to act out the role of the perfect recruit. These men become perfect seminarians and priests, converted to the institutional role and identity, losing connection with individual identity that is often merely taking shape (sometimes by virtue of age and life experience). The difference between the colonized individual and the converted one is that while the colonized individual builds as much of a free community for himself as possible and keeps links with his “former world” using the limited facilities available,



the convert takes a more disciplined moralistic line, presenting himself as someone whose institutional enthusiasm is always in evidence.

It is this latter group of men who become what they think the institution wants and rigidly apply the institutional rules, losing contact with self and integrity in the goal of becoming perfect priests and religious brothers. In so doing they win approval from superiors and bishops and later the communities they serve, but at great personal cost to their psychosocial and sexual health and personal integrity. My research suggests that these are the men who are most at risk for becoming abuse perpetrators, and it is out of this pool of men that the clerical perpetrators emerge.

For other seminarians, contact with the home world, level of maturity, age, experience, or just pure luck in having a wise mentor inside or outside, provides immunization against the bleak world of the institution and its demands for the mortification of the self. They adapt to the institutional demands for self-mortification in clever and mature ways, developing alternative models of priesthood, either by sheer luck, pure intellect, or sheer cunning, or for reasons to do with psychological and emotional resilience. These men either adapt the rules of Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity to suit their own requirements or they develop alternative models of clerical masculinity (see Keenan, 2012 for full discussion), which helps them deal with the complexities of priestly and religious life in more fluid and less rigid ways.

In contrast, for those men who embody Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity as the template for priesthood and religious life, whether for reasons of sheer naïvety, sheer idealism, or psychological and emotional vulnerability, the protective factors that will mediate the home world and the institutional demands, are not easily available or are not activated until it is too late. By the time they eventually come to realize that Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity proposes a way of living that is impossible to achieve, the failure to achieve such an impossible life has been internalized as personal failure and a shame-based priestly existence, out of which the sexual abuse of minors arises.

My research suggests that the particular form of clerical masculinity that was embodied by an individual cleric enabled and constrained him in how he lived, and it provided a template for what sexual behaviours or intimate relationships could be rationalized and enacted, and with what degree of guilt or regret. That some clerics turned to children and young people, that others turn to vulnerable women, religious women, “consenting” adults, internet technologies, or indeed to spirituality and God, to meet their emotional and sexual needs, speaks to the variants of clerical masculinity that underpinned each man’s embodiment of clerical life and his way of performing priesthood or religious brotherhood.

### **Framing the response: Inquiries and commissions of investigation into the Church**

In response to the evolving disclosures of the abuse of children by Catholic clergy and the public outcry that followed, both church and state in Ireland and in other jurisdictions initiated commissions to inquire into the problem and into the handling of abuse complaints by the church hierarchy. Over the past three decades a strong body of national church commissioned works have been produced, largely by academics appointed by the church to address the scope of the problem and its causes and context

(Adriaenssens, 2010; Bennett et al., 2004; Deetman, 2011; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2006, 2011). In 2014 the Vatican announced the first Vatican commission into the abuse problem. As the terms of reference of the commission have yet to be defined, it is unclear what aspects of the problem this commission will address.

National and federal governments internationally have also commissioned inquiries and investigations into the church's handling of abuse complaints, mainly chaired by legal professionals and judges, and have produced large volumes of reports shedding light on this aspect of the problem (see for example Murphy, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Office of the Grand Jury, Philadelphia, 2005). While the results of these statutory inquiries have received universal and largely uncritical attention internationally, the relationship between the statutory investigations and the actual results of these inquiries is not unproblematic. In Ireland, for example, the statutory commissions are not seen as even-handed in their approach to many witnesses, leading to some questionable findings (Sweeney, 2013a, 2013b; McDonagh, 2013; Keenan, 2013). The dominant narrative of cover-up by the Catholic Church of the abuse of minors has therefore taken hold internationally without serious critical analysis of the work of the inquiries and commissions of investigation. It may be that global public revulsion that the lives of innocent children have been so badly traumatised by the actions of a number of priests and religious and the poor response of the church hierarchy to them, has served to restrain such essential critical evaluation. It is to this issue that I now turn by focusing on one commission of investigation in Ireland to raise some questions about the role of hindsight, foresight and the politics of historical judgement.

The Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation was established in 2006 to inquire into the response of church and state authorities to a representative sample of complaints and suspicions of child sexual abuse by priests in the Archdiocese of Dublin between the years 1975 and 2004. It was chaired by a judge with the assistance of two other legal panel members, and became known as the "Murphy Commission". Its eventual Report, in two parts totalling 814 pages, was made public in November 2009 and became known as the "Murphy Report" (Murphy, 2009).

In the days following the publication of the Murphy Report I had an uneasy feeling about the line that was being taken in the Irish media and by the institutional church in relation to the Report's findings. I was concerned about the Archbishop of Dublin's veiled suggestion that the bishops "named" in the Murphy Report consider their position. I was also less than happy with Pope Benedict's letter to the Catholics of Ireland (Pastoral Letter, 2010) in which the "named" bishops were effectively blamed for their actions, as though they acted against Vatican policy. My concern was that in supporting the simplistic "cover-up" line that was dominant in public discourse, that the Archbishop and the Vatican were distancing themselves from the events that had occurred, as though the "named" bishops had acted in a manner that was deviant and out of keeping with the dominant organizational church ethos. My previous research and professional involvement with the Catholic Church in relation to the abuse issue had led me to believe that this was not in fact the case (Keenan, 2012). I was also concerned about the manner in which the report named and shamed individual bishops, when I was aware that the terms of reference of the commission was to inquire into the systemic issues and the response of church and state authorities to the abuses that had occurred.

Amongst other things I also had disquiet about the commission's approach to a "representative sample" of cases in the Dublin Archdiocese for study, as little of the methodology for developing same was evident in the report. In undertaking an in-depth analysis of the Murphy Report with a group of colleagues (see Sweeney, 2013a, 2013b; Keenan, 2013, McDonagh, 2013) my concerns were indeed confirmed.

Sweeney (2013a), from a legal perspective, argued "that standards of proof were not always respected by the commission" and that the commission resolved all or any differences of recollection between lay and clerical witnesses "by finding against the individual cleric without stated reasons for such findings" (p. 383). Both Sweeney and myself found that although the clerics who appeared before the commission were invited to appear as witnesses, from the tone and content of the report and from the experience of some senior clerics who appeared before it, the commission had embarked on an adversarial approach towards them (Sweeney, 2013a; Keenan, 2013). Sweeney argued that in the course of its investigation, the Murphy Commission went well beyond its mandate by building up and making a "case" against individual bishops and senior clerics whom it "named" and "shamed" instead of being "concerned only with the institutional response to complaints, suspicions and knowledge of child sexual abuse" (Report, Par. 1.7). Once the commission had decided to "name, blame and shame" individual senior clerics, it had an obligation to allow them an opportunity to have their individual cases presented and considered as fully and fairly as possible, especially if they were at risk of being exposed to public shame and disgrace (Sweeney, 2013a). In going outside its task in this manner, Sweeney (2013a, p. 383) argued that "well accepted minimum rights of natural and constitutional justice were not observed and an individual's constitutional right to his good name was not protected."

The report dismissed out of hand any reasons, explanations or mitigating circumstances put forward by those clerics whom it named and shamed and the commission only referred to such arguments and submissions as were made by the clerics who testified before it "in order to try to dismantle them" (Sweeney, 2013a p. 385). No attempt was made to consider the circumstances facing each senior cleric at the particular time a complaint was made, nor were the matters located in the historical and sociological context of their times. The benefits of hindsight were not borne in mind when assessing behaviour that mostly took place twenty to thirty years ago. "In its eagerness to censure individual clerics, the report can be said to have looked at the events of twenty to thirty years ago through the prism of today's glasses" (Sweeney, 2013a, p. 384). For Sweeney, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that "the practices and procedures of the Murphy Commission departed far from the remit given to it under the terms of the [Commission of Investigation] 2004 Act, and, in carrying out its duties, it fell far short of meeting the concerns of ... natural and constitutional justice" (p. 387).

In relation to "the representative sample" McDonagh (2013, p. 464) found that there are clear signs in the Murphy Report that the commission did not use a representative sample as it had stated in the report but rather used a biased sample from the available files in the Dublin Archdiocese that they were reviewing (see McDonagh 2013 for full details of this discussion). The report gave no indication as to the reason for this decision and it appeared to McDonagh that the commission was oblivious to the fact that the purpose of representative sampling is to allow statements of fact to be made,

not just about the sample but within known sampling error, about the whole population. The commission did not relate at all to the social science dimension of what was asked of it, and McDonagh argued that this error must inevitably affect the work and judgments of the commission and its findings (p. 464).

Perhaps the misuse of a biased sample, that is inappropriately called a representative sample, helps to explain the gap between what the senior diocesan officials hold to be their truth and what the Murphy Report suggests is “the” truth in relation to various findings of fact in the handling of abuse complaints (Keenan, 2013). It is worrying therefore that “reliable aggregate data, normally the rich fruit of representative sampling in social research, are nowhere to be found in the report and - not unrelated - the choices of sampling units are very questionable as the units suited to the task” (McDonagh, 2013, p. 467).

Some of the problem with the representative sampling in the Murphy Commission lie in the fact that the commission was totally comprised of legal personnel who failed to open up to the power of the social science approaches “to provide factual aggregate statements, implicit in the request for the use of representative samples in its terms of reference” (McDonagh, 2013, p. 466). It is therefore shocking how much weight is given to what can only amount to legal opinion, leading to strong judgments in the report, while at the same time claiming to be a scientific study, based on a representative sample.

In her analysis of the workings of a number of commissions and inquiries into organizational disasters, Vaughan (2006) found that the composition and process of each commission is significant when it comes to the final outcome of its work. She also found that how the analysis is to be framed is significant to the outcome of the inquiry and the framing of the problem is often set early in discussion with one or two people before the full commission is assembled. These internal debates may also never be made public.

The time frame given to commissions to carry out their work is also significant as this indicates how extensive the inquiry can be and whether short cuts have to be taken. Vaughan (2006) found that many reports of commissions and inquiries are governed by hindsight, with the commission reconstructing what happened in historical time with full contemporary knowledge of the tragic outcome. Further, many important witnesses and conversations are neither recorded nor available, and historical actions take on a contemporary relevance and interpretation. In all commissions of investigation this bias has the potential to lead to explanatory narratives that must be very carefully nuanced and articulated, lest actions of key actors leading up to the crisis take on an intentionality and direction in retrospect that they did not have at the time.

In relation to the Murphy Report it can be said that such hindsight-foresight is in evidence and that it produced a rational choice and regulatory failure causal model that became reduced to a dominant narrative of cover-up of the abuse of minors by church leaders. Nowhere was sufficient attention given to the fact the Church cannot be held solely responsible for the emergence and persistence of clerical sexual abuse. External factors also played a role; for example clericalism on the part of the Irish laity who

believed that the church personnel could do no wrong; garda deference towards the towards the Church which engendered a reluctance to pursue allegations against its representatives; and society's ambivalence about the fate of children, especially those in state care, due to their perceived status as second class citizens (Holohan, 2011).

An alternative interpretive frame, such as a comparative sociological frame, in which sexual abuse in other organizational contexts were compared and contrasted, would have produced a different causal model, such as an organizational-system failure rather than one that focused on individual failure and "named" and "shamed" individual bishops. The individualistic narrative that the Murphy Report effectively produced and the lack of critical analysis that it received may have also served to salve Irish society's conscience by downplaying its complicity in committing children to child care institutions where some were subsequently abused, mostly those on the margins of society (see O'Sullivan and O'Donnell (2012) on the history of coercive confinement). In coming to this conclusion it becomes evident that the composition of commissions of investigation is important, and how a problem is framed is not a neutral matter but is political in effect. Such a knowing also suggests the importance of constructing commissions of investigation that are multi-disciplinary and comprehensively resourced when one is inquiring into matters of public importance.

### **Conclusions**

Despite popular accounts, I do not see sexual abuse by Catholic clergy as a problem of "flawed" individuals or of overwhelming sexual drive. While individual psychopathology and psychological factors cannot be excluded from any comprehensive analysis of the problem, I see the problem as a complex one, involving structural as well as agency dimensions and comprising a number of subject positions that are enacted within a web of theological, sociological, psychological, and historical considerations. From this perspective, sexual abuse within the Catholic Church is seen as a breakdown in relationship of the worst kind, within a gendered context of power relations, organizational culture, theological deliberation, and social conditions.

When detailed knowledge of the Church administration, the institution of the Catholic Church, and the Irish social context are linked to the personal narratives of some offenders, as undertaken in my study of this problem, and each reflect back on the other, what becomes evident is that the individual, the organizational and the institutional dimensions of the problem are actually influencing each other and are bound together in particular dynamic relations. It can be seen that there are obvious and noticeable links between what happens on the grand scale of things and on the local level. Such observations might lead us to the conclusion that the interplay of personal agency and social structure must always be kept simultaneously in view in trying to make sense of all social problems.

When one analyses the scholarly research on sexual abuse of minors within the Catholic Church what also emerges is that it is at times when the public is most agitated by the perceived wrongdoings of one sector of society that any statutory investigation and a responsible media have to be seen to carry out its work in a calm, impartial and dispassionate manner. It is at times when a society is experiencing what can be seen as a cultural trauma (Alexander, 2004) that the work of commissions of investigation and

statutory inquiries have to be especially careful in how they go about their work. The pull of the dominant narrative and vested interests must be resisted. The importance of establishing accessible regulatory oversight and accountability mechanisms for all commissions and inquiries therefore cannot be under-estimated.

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