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CHAPTER 4

THE ORGANIZATIONAL FAMILY: A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

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REDUCTIONIST MODELS

In my involvement in professional organizations over the past thirty years, I have observed six reductionist models that have explicitly or implicitly guided attempts to prevent or intervene in episodes of misconduct of a sexual nature by professional helpers.

1. Perpetrator Morality Model
2. "Victim" Morality Model
3. Clinical Model
4. Anomie Model
5. Training Model
6. The Environmental Model

After sharing the origins and intervention strategies of each of these reductionist models, I will outline the systems model, which integrates the best of these reductionist models into a whole, so that a framework for such wholeness can be sought and achieved.

In the **Perpetrator Morality Model** the misconduct is viewed as emerging from the evilness of the perpetrating clergy. It is assumed that only a person totally lacking superego controls, in short, a psychopathic predator, could so exploit the sacred trust. Our task is to screen out these evil people and help them from entering the clergy and our churches. Our further task is to find these persons who fooled us and remove them from positions of responsibility in the church.

This model has general appeal because these persons can occasionally be found, and when we label and treat these persons as

sexual psychopaths, it magnifies the distance between ourselves and the perpetrator. It allows us to believe, for example, that, because we see no such exploitive tendencies in ourselves, we are not vulnerable to sexual involvements with parishioners—a belief that probably increases our chances of being involved in just such a relationship. It also allows organizations, such as the church, to believe that they have addressed the problem of misconduct of a sexual nature solely by removing an identified sexual predator.

The second model is closely related to the first but defines the source of evilness not within the alleged perpetrator but within the alleged victim. The **"Victim" Morality Model** denies the reality of the misconduct and casts the problem within the character of the victim. It is believed that the victim/complainant misinterpreted the intentions or actions of the perpetrator or is retaliating with false allegations out of personal animosity. Another version of this model portrays the complainant as seductive and manipulative and one who overwhelms the otherwise ethical clergy.

If this belief permeates the Church, then the Church will be notorious for scapegoating the complainant. Even if the Church has clear policies and grievance procedures related to misconduct of a sexual nature, hearings are often turned into a systematic indictment of the complainant. It becomes a vehicle for revictimization. Like children breaking silence about sexual abuse, the dangers of revictimization are great. The scapegoating and revictimization of persons who have broken silence deepens the silence of other victims and also protects perpetrators from experiencing the consequences of the actions. It is a way to ignore the call to justice and compassion.

In the **Clinical Model**, the origins of misconduct of a sexual nature are defined in terms of psychopathology. The misconduct is viewed as transient aberrations in judgment that have emerged from chronic or transient emotional disturbance. The model is seen in religious leaders—when efforts to escape charges fail—running off to alcoholic or psychiatric treatment centers with the underlying explanation that the abuses of power resulted from a crisis.

The Clinical Model dictates one of two responses to the identified perpetrator. Where such emotional disturbance is validated by clinical assessment and is adjudged to preclude the clergy's ability to perform their ministerial office, the person is either removed from the ministry setting through suspension or surrender of credentials. In other cases, when the clergy's impairment is not so severe or enduring as to preclude professional performance, the person is restricted to only particular types of professional activity and is mandated to continue in some form of treatment. The clinical model applied to the ministry posits that persons must screen out those whose emotional instability precludes their ability to work with vulnerable persons. It also posits that effective programs of early intervention must be in place to intervene at an early stage before the health and safety of the parishioners are involved. There is also an assumption that some perpetrators can be treated and returned to ministerial roles with minimal risks of future exploitive incidents. This model, like some of the others, may contain elements of the true story of misconduct of a sexual nature, but fails to capture the whole story.

There is a variation of the Clinical Model that defines the problem in terms of the complainant's psychopathology. The misconduct is interpreted as delusion, fantasy, a transference problem, or as retribution for "imagined slights by the borderline personality." In some complaints, the initial presentation of the allegation is framed more as a clinical case study of the victim/survivor than an administrative hearing to determine fact regarding an allegation. One problem in this regard is that the most insidious sexual predator is going to select victims that include those persons who have the greatest vulnerability and whose complaint would be most easily discounted.

The fourth reductionist model of sexual exploitation is the **Anomie Model.** This model, which is often found in new emerging disciplines and organizations (or those going through turbulent changes), defines the origin of misconduct of a sexual nature as the absence of clear ethical standards for defining appropriate and inappropriate conduct. The source of the problem is the lack of definition of standards of appropriateness in service relationships. With this model, our task is to generate codes of conduct that define appropriate and inappropriate behavior within these relationships.

When organizations have created standards and continue to have problems with misconduct, it is time to redefine the problem. The **Training Model** defines the origin in terms of the knowledge and skill deficiency of the clergy—it is a problem of inadequate professional socialization. The solution for helping clergy is to provide preparatory and ongoing training in ethical standards and ethical decision making for all clergy and targeted training designed to rehabilitate the clergy who have been involved in poor boundary maintenance in their relationship with parishioners.

The sixth reductionist model, **The Environmental Model** defines the origin as an isolated aberration (abnormality) of chemistry between the perpetrator and the environment at a particular point in time. The model argues that since this event was idiosyncratic and unlikely to ever occur again in a different context, the best strategy is to move the perpetrator to another role, department, church, or geographical location. The same logic could justify transferring the victim's membership to another church. While the church has been visibly criticized for moving pedophile priests from parish to parish, many other organizations have been involved in the same practice.

Reductionist models of explanation and intervention, which are central in the early stages of exploring any problem, must eventually give way to models that can encompass complexity and diversity. All of the models described above tend to define the problem of misconduct of a sexual nature in ways that narrow our view of its origins and restrict our vision of prevention and intervention strategies. Some are based on errors of fact. Others describe an element of the problem but do not encompass the problem. Our task is to integrate the best within these models into a coherent whole. The goal of the systems model outlined below is to provide a framework through which such wholeness can be sought and achieved.

SYSTEMS MODEL

The systems model begins by defining the problem of misconduct of a sexual nature as a breakdown in a relationship. It is a breakdown in the fiduciary (trust) relationship that exists between the clergy/church and parishioner. This breakdown occurs when certain elements necessary to the success of the relationship get lost and certain new elements get injected. What gets lost in the minister-parishioner relationship is respect and integrity; what gets injected into the relationship is the manipulation and abuse of power. The factors and conditions that lead to both the loss and the injection are multiple and synergistic in their interaction. Prevention and intervention strategies must understand and target these multiple influences. *A systems model provides a conceptual map within which the existing data and viewpoints can be linked together and within which understandings of new complexities can be integrated.*

Four propositions can help introduce this systems perspective.

Proposition One Misconduct of a sexual nature can best be viewed as a process rather than an event.

Proposition Two The process of misconduct of a sexual nature is ecologically nested (interrelated) within professional, organizational, community, and cultural environments. These elements of influence can serve to promote or inhibit boundary violations in the clergy-parishioner relationship.

Proposition Three Strategies and programs to address the misconduct must reflect an in-depth understanding of dynamics through which organizations resist and experience change over time.

Proposition Four A change in one part of the system produces accommodating changes in all other parts of the system, raising the potential for unforeseen problems created by an attempt at problem resolution.

Proposition One:
Misconduct of a sexual nature can best be viewed as a process rather than an event.

Sexually exploiting behaviors often exist on a continuum of disrespectful, demeaning, and/or discriminatory behaviors. Misconduct of a sexual nature is often the last stage of what has been a progressive violation of intimacy barriers in the clergy-parishioner relationship. Allegations are often a breaking into light of what has been a progressive deterioration in the integrity of the relationship. The helping

relationship could be displayed on a continuum of intimacy. At one end of this continuum is the complete physical and emotional disengagement; at the other is a high level of emotional and physical intimacy. Somewhere in the middle, depending on the nature of the organization, our role, and the nature of those we serve, a zone of appropriateness will mark the boundaries of appropriate intimacy.

This concept can help us first develop a deeper understanding of the experience of victimization that results from misconduct. The trauma from sexual exploitation results from the entire continuum of boundary violations, not just the overt sexual acts. Where boundary violations have been sustained and accelerating, but stop short of sexual acts, the parishioner may be traumatized, but lack the ability to clearly label his or her exploitation. In family and therapeutic relationships, this is sometimes described as emotional incest. The concept of continuum also suggests that violations that may also be traumatic can occur at the other end. Many case studies of exploitation, in fact, involve violation at both ends of the continuum—sexual exploitation followed by precipitous termination and abandonment of the parishioner. Clergy should be held as accountable for the latter as for the former.

The understanding of this proposition is also critical to effective strategy development. The fact that sexual exploitation is often preceded by a progression of other boundary violations provides a window of opportunity to both identify boundary problems at an early stage and potentially prevent more severe transgressions in the ministerial relationship. Sexual exploitation of parishioners cannot be dealt with in isolation but must be addressed within the broader context of abuses of power that occur at both ends of the intimacy continuum.

Proposition Two:
The process of misconduct of a sexual nature is ecologically nested (interrelated) within professional, organizational, community, and cultural environments. These elements of influence can serve to promote or inhibit boundary violations in the clergy-parishioner relationship.

There are two major implications of this proposition. The first is that the identification of forces at all levels of this ecosystem that promote or fail to inhibit the misconduct must be identified. The second implication is that our prevention and remediation strategies must target multiple sites within the ecosystem. The layers of this ecosystem will be described shortly.

Proposition Three:
Strategies and programs to address the misconduct must reflect an in-depth understanding of dynamics through which organizations resist and experience change over time.

Organizations tend to respond to crises and demands for change with responses that minimize real change. If boundary problems with parishioners, and misconduct of a sexual nature in particular, become an issue generated internally or through the decree of some external body, the organization's first efforts are likely to be superficial and mechanistic. An individual worker is removed. Something extra is added— a policy, a person, a training seminar—none of which is intended or likely by itself to alter the nature of the organizational culture.

In the cases of clergy misconduct of a sexual nature, one church/conference acquires another church/conference ethics policy, then replaces their name and with minimal involvement from anyone sticks it in a policy manual that few will ever read. The complaint procedure and mechanism is quickly manufactured in a similar manner and an outside trainer is brought in to do one-shot training for a group of clergy. The church feels it has responded to the problem of clergy misconduct of a sexual nature. This is not how a church changes; this is how a church avoids change.

This inherent resistance to change in most human systems suggests that efforts to address serious problems often result in superficial rather than systemic change. Our response is to take some singular action or add some appendage to the system rather than change the culture *within* the system. It is easier to remove one sexual predator than to confront an entire organizational (church) culture that has lost its mission and ministry focus or has become toxic and abusive.

Proposition Four:
A change in one part of the system produces accommodating changes in all other parts of

the system, raising the potential for unforeseen problems created by an attempt at problem resolution.

This proposition demands that organizations take extreme care in avoiding strategies that, while designed to protect parishioners, end up re-victimizing or otherwise harming parishioners. In a similar manner, we must avoid policies or procedures that in protecting parishioners fail to also protect the procedural rights (fair process) of clergy.

THE ECOLOGY OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
Microsystems, Mesosystems, Exosytems, and Macrosystems

Systems perspectives can aid in strategy development by helping identify the multiple etiological roots of a problem, by setting a focus of intervention, and by elucidating the potential interaction of strategies at the same time or sequentially implemented within a dynamic system. The problem of misconduct of a sexual nature can, for example, be placed within a ecological framework. An event of misconduct involving a single perpetrator and a single complainant is viewed as occurring within an environment that is itself nested within a larger environment and so forth. This model places the interaction of these two individuals at the center of this ecological onion. There may be things at each layer that contributed to the unfolding of this event and resources and strategies at each layer that may contribute to problem resolution.

The center of this model is ontogeny—the unique developmental histories of the perpetrator and the person(s) being exploited that brought them to this exact point in time. The systems model seeks to identify any characteristics or circumstances that contribute to either role. The purpose of such inquiry is not to psychologically excuse the perpetrator or blame the victim for his or her own victimization. Knowledge of the characteristics of the perpetrator and the victim and situational cues related to when, where, and how the misconduct occurred may help develop policies and structures that decrease the likelihood of such behavior. Perpetrator profiles may help remove persons with predatory proclivities from being appointed or may tell us the circumstances under which they may be high risk for intimacy violations in their ministry. A better understanding of persons targeted for harassment could lead to the discovery of strategies to reduce parishioner vulnerability. If, for example, it is discovered that the lack of knowledge of what is and is not appropriate within a ministerial relationship contributes to parishioner vulnerability, programs of parishioner orientation to such issues become a potential prevention strategy. If it is discovered that particular types of parishioners are being targeted, special systems of prevention, intervention, protection, and support could be designed and implemented.

In addition to examining what each individual brings to the exploitive minister--parishioner relationship, the presence of any special chemistry in the relationship that seems unique to the exploitive event can also be explored. It seems that some clergy are vulnerable to boundary violations with only a particular type of parishioner. A greater understanding of such chemistry could help reduce minister and parishioner vulnerability by influencing how ministers are assigned to work with particular persons. It would also reveal particular types of minister-parishioner combinations that might be worthy of much more frequent and rigorous supervision.

The exploiting event occurs within a physical, professional, and social environment. This second layer of our ecological onion is the **microsystem**—the smallest unit of the organization that surrounds each worker. The microsystem is a church, a ministry setting, a work team, a supervisor, a job description. The point of inquiry in the microsystems is an examination of forces or conditions in this environment that influence positively or negatively the incidence of misconduct of a sexual nature. Conducting this kind of analysis can generate a series of microsystems intervention strategies. The strategies seek to reduce the promoting forces and to strengthen the inhibiting forces. Microsystems strategies include such areas as:

- parishioner education about boundary issues in the ministerial relationship;
- parishioner access to grievance/complaint procedures;
- training programs on ethical and

boundary issues;
- clergy access to clinical supervision of pastoral counseling;
- access to internal resources of ministerial support; and,
- access for the parishioner to external resources of support (advocacy services, personal/legal consultation, counseling, support groups).

Microsystems strategies also target the alleviation of roles stressors that may have contributed to the deterioration in boundaries, e.g., role overload, role-person mismatch, role ambiguity.

Each microsystem is ecologically nested with the **mesosystem**—the total organization that embraces and links all of the organizational units and defines their relationships with one another and the outside world. At the mesosystem level, one can examine how broad organization processes and structures either enhance or inhibit misconduct of a sexual nature. Mesosystem issues include things ranging from the existence, clarity, accessibility, and enforcement of policies and standards governing the ministerial-parishioner relationships to the attitudes, values and behaviors modeled by organizational leaders. Mesosytem strategies to address misconduct of a sexual nature are encompassed within ethics committees, quality improvement committees, and planning processes that seek to consciously shape the service culture of the organization. In the next section, two particular mesosystem issues will be explored in detail— the sexual culture of the organization and the propensity for abuse within closed organizational systems.

The examination of microsystem and mesosytem influences on misconduct recognizes that there is a dynamic relationship between what the minister and the parishioner brings to the organization and what the organization brings to these relationships. In the chemistry of this interaction, the propensity to exploit and the vulnerability to be exploited can be either decreased or increased. This step neither blames the organization nor removes the blame of responsibility from the clergy for his or her actions. It does acknowledge that organizations can play a contributing role by promoting or tolerating conditions that nurture misconduct or by failing to

serve as an active restraining agent to misconduct of a sexual nature.

Each organization (its microsystems and its workers) is nested within a broader geographical, social, political, and economic environment (**exosystem**). There is a complex and continuing relationship between the organization and this immediate environment that influences the internal values and behavior within the organization. It is important for an organization, the church, to have understanding of the degree to which the values, attitudes, and entrenched behaviors within this exosystem will serve to enhance or inhibit misconduct within the ministerial setting. Where enhancing factors exist in great strength, the church may choose to link itself with other organizations in a campaign of community education designed to weaken such forces, or, having an awareness of such external factors, intensify their internal programs to prevent misconduct. Through its political voice and through its trade associations, the church may also contribute to weakening such enhancing factors in the broader culture (macrosystem).

The issue is not which one of these strategies is preferable. The issue is how can these strategies be integrated with existing resources into a coordinated program that targets these multiple levels of intervention.

MESOSYSTEM AND MICROSYSTEM PROBLEMS
Organizational Culture: Boundaries Controlling the Expression of Power, Aggression Sexuality

With this broad overview in place, I will focus on three mesosystem and microsystems problems that have been a focus for my work:

- Shaping non-exploitive organizational sexual cultures
- Creating an organizational code of Professional Practice as the centerpiece of a value-driven, service-oriented organizational culture, and
- Addressing the special problem of sexual exploitation of clients within closed organizational systems.

One dimension of the microsystem and mesosytem environment that influences misconduct of a sexual nature is the culture of the organization and its work units. Every organization can be said to have a culture. Each organization's culture can be described in terms of its history, traditions, heroes and heroines, values, symbols, slogans, rituals, taboos. Some can be described in terms of particular customs related to dress, food, leisure, music, and art. In a similar manner it can also be said that each organization has a sexual culture. The sexual culture defines the customs and etiquette that will guide professional and personal relationships between organizational members and between members and their constituents. The sexual culture of an organization shapes a climate of respect or disrespect that can serve to either inhibit or nurture misconduct.

Strategies to discourage abusive behavior in the church can examine how member values and behaviors are shaped by such cultural elements as:

Language, e.g., customary use of disrespectful, profane, exclusive, or derogatory language; racial epithets; demeaning humor; labels that objectify and depersonalize; or verbal threats and intimidation.

Artifacts and symbols, e.g., paintings, sculptures, books, magazines, posters, articles of clothing, or other objects in the work environment that may contribute to a climate of disrespect.

Ethics and values, e.g., the absence or lack of clarity in values defining proper and improper behavior in minister-parishioner relationship, work practices that devalue particular groups of workers such as gender inequity in salaries, work assignments, or promotions.

Modeling of relationships, e.g., the values and behavior modeled by organizational leaders in clergy-clergy, clergy-parishioner relationships in both formal and informal settings.

In many churches the struggle is to bring the implicit and real culture into compliance with the culture defined in the church's mission and core values. Incongruence between these values provides a breeding ground for misconduct. Well written sexual ethics policies and procedures are rendered meaningless in an environment where organizational leaders are practicing or openly condoning the exact behaviors tabooed by our aspirational values.

Through the conscious examination of our church cultures, we can seek to remove abuse-condoning elements and replace them with elements more conducive to parishioner health, clergy health, and church health.

Organizational Code of Professional Practice

The centerpiece of any response to misconduct of a sexual nature is the clear definition and monitoring of the boundaries of appropriateness and inappropriateness within the ministerial relationship. Our ability to prevent abuses of power and our response to persons who commit such abuses are both contingent upon the clear articulation of these boundaries. *(See Section I, Chapter I on Policies and Procedures)*

A core value that is often embedded in policies and procedures is the presumpive vulnerability and innocence of the client. Many organizations declare unequivocally that the responsibility for setting boundaries in helping relationships is always that of person with the greater ascribed power—the clergyperson. The parishioner's interest in, initiation of, or compliance with sexual intimacy has no relevance and in no way diminishes the clergy's total responsibility for maintaining boundaries of appropriate conduct in the ministerial relationship. Such responsibility is the very essence of the fiduciary relationships—the special duty and obligation taken on by the clergy to protect the interests and well-being of the parishioner.

Developing policies and operating with a highly visible policy are powerful tools for shaping and monitoring values within a strong parishioner-centered organizational culture. Such policies articulate clear standards and a body of aspiration values that can serve as inhibiting influences to boundary violations and misconduct.

Organizational Turbulence and Parishioner/Clergy Vulnerability

Are there any types of organizations or particular stages in the life of an organization that generate a greater incidence of misconduct

of a sexual nature? There are two such circumstances I have noted from my consulting experience. The first is an increased incidence of harassment and exploitation in organizations going through periods of turbulence and rapid change. The second is the great potential for the abuse of power in what I have described as closed incestuous systems. In both contexts, clergy-parishioner boundary violations can be elicited from and be symptomatic of aberrations in group process and organizational health.

Rapid change within an organization disrupts the psychological homeostasis of all members. Members at all levels who have lost their sense of personal and professional value may seek a variety of channels through which to reassert and affirm their value and potency, including increased incidence of voluntary sexual intimacy between members. Incidence of misconduct of a sexual nature during such periods probably has little to do with sex, but is a means of seeking fulfillment for other needs. Attempted sexual contact in clergy-clergy and clergy-parishioner relationships during such turbulent periods may have more to do with power, anger, aggression, physical depletion, loneliness, or desperate needs for self-affirmation than with sexual attraction.

During periods of organizational turbulence there is a weakening of organizational culture and values. The organization loses its power to shape, monitor, and self-correct boundary problems within clergy-parishioner relationships. Weak organizational cultures lose the capacity to define boundaries of appropriateness in ministerial relationships. Weak organizational cultures exert little influence or control on individual practitioners. Rapid member turnover or growth opens up the possibility of emergent subcultures that deviate from the church's historical values. Turbulence within organizational systems, just as in family systems, marks a period of great vulnerability for role boundary violations. Strategies to address boundary violations amid such turbulence must include the active management of change and the strengthening of the organizational culture and the values guiding clergy-parishioner relationships.

Incestuous Systems

Applying family systems theory to organization, I have described the extreme disruption of personal and organizational health associated with sustained organizational "closure." An incestuous dynamic can result from this closure—a stage in the life of an organization marked by increasing members meeting most, if not all, of their personal, professional, social, and sexual needs inside the boundary of the organization. The progressive closure of such organizations over a number of years was marked by such predictable elements as the following:

- the emergence of organizational dogma—a rigid, and unchallengeable belief system;
- the centralization of power and preference for charismatic styles of leadership (the emergence of high priests/priestesses);
- the progressive isolation of the organization and its members from the outside professional and social world;
- the homogenization of the members by age, race, sex, religious doctrine or values via a tendency to isolate and expel that which was different;
- excessive demands for time and emotional energy of members;
- the development of a closed social network by organizational members;
- the intense focusing on the personal and interpersonal problems of members;
- the disruption of church functioning from problems arising in clergy/clergy, clergy/parishioner social and sexual relationships;
- the projection of organizational problems on an outside enemy or scapegoating and extrusion of individual members;
- the escalation of interpersonal and intergroup conflict to include plots, conspiracies, or coups against church leaders;
- the emergence of a punitive, abusive organizational culture; and
- the fall of the "high priest/priestess" and a contagion of member turnover (breakup of the system).

Sustained closure of organizational systems (or subsystems) both disrupts the health of members and undermines the health and survivability of the organization. It is my experience that closed organizational systems have a high incidence of misconduct of a sexual nature and that the intensity and duration of these incidences tend to be greater and more debilitating to victims than incidents in more open systems. The potential for abuses of power in closed systems and the intensity of abuses in such organizations is magnified by:

- the violation of the boundary and balance between one's work life and one's personal life;
- the loss of outside sources of personal, professional, social, and sexual replenishment;
- the progressive depletion (physical and emotional exhaustion) of personal and group health resulting from excessive demands on member time and emotional energy;
- the distortion of organizational values resulting from the loss of external feedback and external mechanisms for reality-testing with the outside social and professional community.

At its worst, misconduct of a sexual nature can be institutionalized as an element of the culture of a closed system. In such circumstances the abusive episodes are large in number, occur over extended periods of time, and involve large numbers of perpetrators and exploited members. This misconduct often emerges out of the same abuses of power within such organizations. The high level of unmet needs and the distortion of values within the closed system makes anyone interacting with this system high risk for exploitation.

In such circumstances, issues of misconduct are inseparable from broader issues of organizational health. Parishioners cannot be protected without intervention into basic problems of structure and process within closed systems. Intervening in such systems requires action targeted at multiple layers of the ecosystem.

THE BROADER VIEW

In summary, when we speak of clergy misconduct of a sexual nature, we are speaking of the abuse of power. We must eventually link our internal organizational efforts with broader movements seeking to confront the whole spectrum of abuses of power, in general, and the institutionalized violence against disempowered persons, in particular. If we only see misconduct of a sexual nature in terms of psychopathology or skill deficiency of the perpetrator, we miss the broader social milieu, which incites or fails to inhibit such behavior. Misconduct of a sexual nature is part of a broader continuum of aggression and violence toward the culturally disempowered, particularly women and children. As we understand sexual exploitation within these broader frameworks, we can link ourselves to parallel resources and movements seeking to enhance the health of our parishioners, our churches, our communities, and our culture.

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