

1-1-2005

## **Nexus of silence: the cover-up of deviance in organizations**

Michael Gross

*University of Wollongong*, [mgross@uow.edu.au](mailto:mgross@uow.edu.au)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/commpapers>



Part of the [Business Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Gross, Michael: Nexus of silence: the cover-up of deviance in organizations 2005, 1-12.  
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/commpapers/1051>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

## Nexus of silence: the cover-up of deviance in organizations

### Abstract

In 2002, the Boston Globe newspaper revealed the cover-up by the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston (AOB) of sexual abuse of children by clergy. A grounded theory investigation to answer the question, "how could authorities allow this to happen?", revealed a "nexus of silence" as a central phenomenon associated with decisions to sweep under the carpet and, over decades, cover up pervasive deviance in organizations in contravention of institutional core values. Understanding of this phenomenon may assist managers and governance bodies avoid consequential scandal, loss of reputation and public trust.

### Keywords

Nexus, Silence, Cover, Deviance, Organizations

### Disciplines

Business | Social and Behavioral Sciences

### Publication Details

Gross, M. (2005). Nexus of silence: the cover-up of deviance in organizations. *Asia-Pacific Researchers in Organization Studies (APROS 11)* (pp. 1-12). Victoria, Australia: Victoria University.

**Nexus of Silence: The Cover-up of Deviance in Organizations****Michael Gross**School of Management and Marketing  
University of Wollongong  
Wollongong NSW Australia  
mgross@uow.edu.au**Abstract**

In 2002, the *Boston Globe* newspaper revealed the cover-up by the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston (AOB) of sexual abuse of children by clergy. A grounded theory investigation to answer the question, "how could authorities allow this to happen?", revealed a "nexus of silence" as a central phenomenon associated with decisions to sweep under the carpet and, over decades, cover up pervasive deviance in organizations in contravention of institutional core values. Understanding of this phenomenon may assist managers and governance bodies avoid consequential scandal, loss of reputation and public trust.

Key words: deviance, conflict, silence, ethics, scandal, reputation and trust.

**Introduction**

Scandal has enveloped many organizations and institutions in recent years when the public becomes aware through the media of ineffective action and cover up by trusted authorities. A central task of management is seen to be management of the values on which public trust is based (Griseri, 1998). When deviant activity, contrary to espoused values, is allowed, reputation of and trust in the individuals involved, and the wider organization and even institution, is damaged.

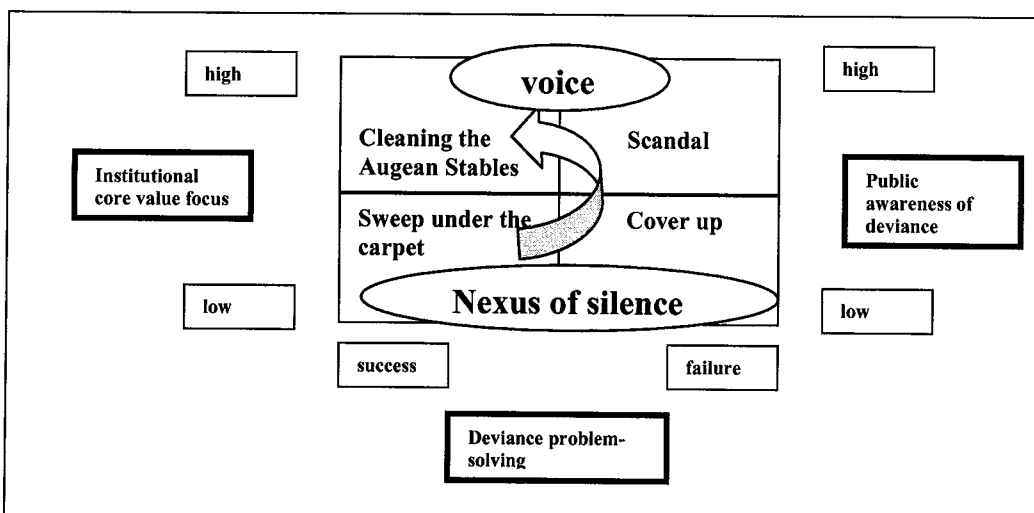
In the United States in January 2002, the *Boston Globe* broke the story of how the Boston Archdiocese of the Catholic Church (AOB) protected priests perpetrating sexual abuse of children over decades. The story triggered a major scandal for the Catholic Church during its "Long Lent of 2002" (Neuhaus, 2004). This revelation of a 'holy water-gate' (Healey-Conlon, 2004), which shocked the institution and society, had been preceded by other accounts of clergy sexual abuse (Shupe, 1995, 1998; Sipe, 1995; Parkinson, 1997; Krebs, 1998). More detailed accounts followed which collectively contributed to a greater understanding of the deviance and its mishandling by the AOB and the institution of the church (Boston Globe Investigative Staff, 2002; Cozzens, 2002; Berry and Renner, 2004; France, 2004). Sexual abuse refers to the sexual exploitation in some form (verbal or physical, consensual or non-consensual) by an adult person of a child (known as pedophilia) or a submissive or vulnerable adult. When perpetrated in professional settings by medical practitioners, counselors, therapists or religious clergy, it involves a sexual boundary violation (Blaszczynski, 1996). As such, it is regarded as a form of deviance, being a violation of both societal and institutional rules and norms likely to be disapproved of or punished (Cohen, 1966; Downes and Rock, 1982).

The *Boston Globe* stories throughout 2002 led the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of the Attorney-General to conduct an official investigation in July 2003. In what he described as a tragedy of unimaginable dimensions, the Massachusetts Attorney-General Thomas F. Reilly reported that AOB files showed that, over six decades under the administrations of three successive Archbishops, 789 victims complained of sexual abuse by 250 members of the clergy. Authorities, only accountable to themselves, protected the reputation of their institution rather than the safety and well-being of children (Reilly, 2003). An Inquiry in 2004 by a National Review Board for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops found that the response of Boston church leaders to sexual abuse by clergy was characterized by moral laxity, excessive leniency, insensitivity for victims, secrecy and neglect (Burke, 2004: 92). As Burke reported, “there were credible allegations that several thousand [4392] priests, comprising four percent of priests in ministry over the last half century, committed acts of sexual abuse of [10667] minors” (2004: 4).

This scandal raises the question – “How can authorities allow this to happen?” A grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and more recently shown to be a pragmatic method for research in management, business, and organizational studies to develop theories based on empirical data (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Remenyi et al, 1998; Locke, 2001; Goulding, 2002), was used to attempt to answer this question. Documents providing evidence of investigations of the deviance and the cover up by the AOB, and books on the scandal and abuse problem provided data. In addition to these written data, insight proved to be a helpful resource for theory development as the researcher was able to “cultivate crucial insights from personal experiences” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 252) and carefully use “... mental and emotional experiences ... in interpreting the emerging story” (Goulding, 2002: 63). From that personal experience and analysis of data, the phenomenon of a “nexus of silence”, which resonates with the researcher, was discovered.

A ‘nexus of silence’ describes communication network dynamics in which numerous stakeholders are unwilling to communicate publicly about deviant behavior inside an organization. In this case, victims of abuse by clergy, their families, clergy peers, legal and medical professionals, church and civil authorities were silent to varying degrees about the deviance of many clergy in the AOB. A ‘nexus of silence’ is seen to be relevant to organizations and wider institutions faced with similar ethical dilemmas. Figure 1, which emerged from the grounded theory approach, illustrates the three aforementioned issues managers face when allegations of member deviance surfaces: focus on institutional core values, success in solving the deviance problem and the extent of public awareness of the deviance and its handling.

**Figure 1**  
**Nexus of silence**



A 'nexus of silence' occurs when managers fail to focus on the institution's core values in addressing a deviance problem and instead become more concerned with avoiding scandal about the deviance and the effects of bad publicity which can result. When deviant behavior occurs in an organization, managers have two paths they can take; first, adhere to core values and solve the problem without concern about public awareness; second, set aside core values in favor of other priorities and attempt to solve the problem without the public becoming aware. Where stakeholders have an interest in keeping the deviance private, the latter pragmatic approach may see a single problem successfully swept under the carpet. Where the deviance is more widespread, managers may cover up as an organization or institutional response. Central to this second approach is the phenomenon of a 'nexus of silence'. Scandal results when the cover up fails and the public become aware. By refocusing on the institution's core values in handling the problem at this stage, managers may succeed in 'cleaning the Aegean stables' (Sinclair, 2000). As part of a doctoral thesis-in-progress, the paper discusses the 'nexus of silence' phenomenon, using the framework in diagram 1, and its role in the scandal that enveloped the Catholic Church in 2002. Literature on silence is briefly summarized, while other literature reviewed has been embedded in the descriptive text. Implications for management, limitations of the study and possible future research directions complete the paper.

## **Silence in Organizations**

Silence in organizations has a relatively substantial body of research, but mainly focused on the internal cultural dynamics of organizations, where wider institutional silence has not been studied. Hirschman (1970) first identified exit, voice and loyalty as choices for individuals in organizations concerning lapses in behavior they observed in others, with silence implied in some choices. Janis (1982) identified silence as contributing to 'groupthink'. Nielsen (1987) viewed silence as associated with several possible responses of subordinate managers to ethical dilemmas in the workplace. Argyris (1990, 1994) found that organizations create defenses as a response to embarrassing problems. Silence as moral muteness (Bird and Waters, 1989) and moral disengagement (Beu and Buckley, 2004) showed managers refrain from talking about ethical issues and asking ethical questions about organizational decisions. Snell (1996) applied Kohlberg's moral judgment theory to suggest that silence occurs when judgments managers make differ embarrassingly from their espoused theories. More relevant to this study, Morrison and Milliken (2000) discussed organizational silence as a collective-level phenomenon where powerful forces cause widespread withholding of information by individuals. Organizations may develop cultures of silence based on shared assumptions that it is inappropriate to bring up one's differences, which become antecedents to acts of individual silence. Their work brought about an increasing focus of research in management on silence, for example, Millekin and Morrison (2003) and Millekin, Morrison and Hewlin (2003) on the behavior of silent employees; Perlow and Williams (2003) and Perlow and Repenning (2004) on managers who decide it is more productive for the organization that they be silent about their differences. There has been little empirical research on silence (Morrison and Milliken, 2000) CHECK so this study makes a contribution in that way.

## **Silence in the Church**

### *The Context of the Deviance and Church Response*

This case concerning silence in the Catholic Church points to the importance of context. As Snook points out, context is "... important ... because particular phenomena occur in dynamic, complex social milieu" (Snook, 2000: 26). The main context factors that influenced widespread silence in the institution of the church were its structure and homogeneity, centralized authority with decentralized control, lack of

accountability, a culture of elitism and tolerance of deviance, concern for scandal avoidance, a legalistic approach to problem solving, and lack of knowledge of pedophilia.

The Catholic Church, a 2000 year old religious hierarchical institution under the leadership and authority of the Pope, is administered geographically worldwide by Bishops at diocesan level, and by Archbishops in major cities who may also be appointed as Cardinals or 'princes of the church'. The Archdiocese of Boston (AOB), comprising 2 million Catholics, administers to over 300 local parishes, each under a parish priest and one or more assistant priests, in 5 regions, each under a bishop, and a range of health, welfare and education agencies. Institutional homogeneity (Scott, 2001: xix; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991: 9) is evident in the use of church (canon) law, and in common policy and practice. The church used a common approach in many dioceses and countries to handling the sexual abuse allegations. Conversely, the church exercised decentralized benevolent control over behavior, where there were "no police powers over clergy" (Boston Globe, quoting Cardinal Law, 25 January 2002: 4). A decline in vocations to the priesthood in this period saw it fail to adequately screen candidates, resulting in many unsuitable persons being admitted, a fact understood within the church in retrospect. The period was also marked by struggle between conservative and progressive forces within the church, the former seeking unquestioning acceptance of church authority, the latter seeking lay participation in decisions in related issues around sexuality (Collins, 2001, 2005; Cozzens, 2004; Reece, 1996).

The Catholic Church, like other religious institutions in the United States during this period, was free from government interference in relation to religious activities under the US Constitution. This ecclesiastical immunity from accountability was first protected by early court decisions (Holy Watergate transcript, 2004: 34) but later eroded, largely due to the outcome of common law decisions about some malpractice in various US institutions (Dane, 2004; Lupu and Tuttle, 2004). Court decisions against the AOB in 2001 saw it forced to release church documents for government and other legal scrutiny, removing the non-accountability umbrella it had sheltered under.

As elites in the church, clergy and religious were treated with deference by many of the laity. Elitism also saw church authorities support and "coddle" accused and proven deviant clergy by use of medical "treatment", sick leave, lend lease to other dioceses or reassignment, rather than laicization (removal of priestly office), despite danger to children. Burke believed that 'clericalism' could be blamed "... for the bishops and other church leaders engaging in massive denial, and [failure] to acknowledge that a priest could be engaged in the horrific acts...."(2004: 105). Cultural beliefs and practices in the church also feature tolerance of deviance where, until recent years, sexual abuse was seen as "a human condition which is to be expected; a sin which can be forgiven" (Deposition of Cardinal Bernard Law, 2002).

While tolerant of deviance, the church was concerned about scandal, defined as "outrage and gossip arising from actions seen as wrong and unacceptable" (Oxford Dictionary: 799), and, in the church, as a "cause of moral stumbling" (Thompson, 1997: 37), and a "cause of ruin and loss of faith" (Soukop, 1997: 223). Indicative of an early concern about possible scandal over deviant sexual practices was a 1962 Vatican document (Holy Office, 1962), leaked to media in 2002 on the church crime of solicitation, spelling out a highly secret process for dealing with accusations of such behaviour, in contrast to a more transparent, open process advised by its founder for dealing with a brother's wrongdoing (Good News Bible, Matthew 18: 15-20). Both Reilly and Burke put scandal as the main concern of the bishops associated with the cover up.

The period was also marked by limited knowledge and discussion of pedophilia in society until the 90s. For pedophilia to be perpetrated by clergy and religious was unthinkable. Massachusetts law reflected the lack of understanding with short statute of limitations times on child abuse claims, and clergy exemption from mandatory reporting of child abuse (Reilly, 2003: 15-16). The unthinkable, not reportable, became undiscussible.

In this context, based on data from France (2004) and Reilly (2003), the first allegations are recorded as having taken place in 1940-1959 (24 cases), which then escalated when Cardinal Cushing was AOB trustee in 1960-1969 (163 cases), and under Cardinal Medeiros in 1970-1984 (389 cases), declining under Cardinal Law from 1984-2000 (119 cases). Silence adopted from the outset by victims, perpetrators, families, peers, bystanders and authorities continued over time as the number of reported cases grew. But as more people became aware, whistle-blowing commenced and complaints turned to allegations, civil suits and occasional criminal proceedings. Despite greater knowledge and increasing signs of widespread abuse, the 'nexus of silence' continued.

#### *First inklings – initial responses to deviance from 1940-1960*

Between 1940 and 1960, the conflict between the AOB and victims was characterized by avoidance behavior. The 'nexus of silence' can be explained in terms of conflict handling theory (Blake and Mouton 1964). Parties handle conflict in five ways: avoiding, accommodating, compromising, collaborating and competing. The 'nexus of silence' is associated with avoiding and accommodating approaches, and to a lesser degree with competing and compromising approaches, while the collaborating approach suggesting many voices are heard is associated with effort to address the problem openly.

How did individuals in early cases make sense of what they were facing? Weick (1998) has explained how we individually generate that which we interpret and act on. Through an ongoing process, we retrospectively make sense, through interaction with others and the cues we receive, of the phenomenon of interest, and intuitively form opinions or make decisions on the basis of the incomplete information. Victims of pedophilia, particularly children, struggled to deal with their abuse until well after the event (Reilly, 2003: 15). Parents and peers, without education on how recidivist perpetrators construct their pedophilia activities behind an image of benevolence and playfulness, despite signs that "something is not right" amid "buzz" in the form of stories, grapevine talk and rumors, often struggled to understand the disjointed information. Child victims, unable to recognize or effectively assert their victimization, rarely report their abuse and generally not until years after (2003: 15). Victims and their families deferred to church authorities who adopted avoidance behavior handling complaints by informal private inquiry (France, 2004). Parties may have experienced ambivalence when managing the problem (Merton, 1976; Baumann, 1991; Smelser, 1998). It is probable that families of victims, peers of clergy, bishops and others with responsibility, who were aware of the abuse, may have been caught between wanting action against the perpetrator, but constrained by the desire to protect the child, the perpetrator, themselves and the organization from scandal.

Evidence suggests that the first cases reported were met with shock and disbelief by church authorities, and reacted to by drawing on cultural practice aimed at avoiding scandal. The authorities reportedly dealt with the cases in an informal, ad-hoc way, without policies, orally but sometimes in writing, using vague language in communications (Reilly, 2003: 5). They removed clergy subject of allegations for treatment in church facilities, later returning them to duty in another location after medical assessment, on the basis of their understanding of the problem. Given that external authorities did not intervene, this avoidance approach was initially successful. But it failed to provide justice to victims, to prevent recidivism by the deviant priest, and see the church adopt policies and practices to prevent more cases. In this period, avoidance basically swept the problem under the carpet.

#### *Cover up – response to escalation of deviance from 1961-2002*

During this next period, when allegations increased and recidivism was evident, church authorities resorted to cover-up. Escalating commitment (Staw, 1981) and over commitment (Randall, 1987) may explain continuation with the chosen course of action around this time to hide the deviance and its

handling in order to protect the institution and AOB from scandal and claims. Church authorities continued with ineffective policies and practices and established an internal bureaucracy for handling sex abuse cases under a 'cone of silence'. A common process was established for managing complaints, medically assessing, treating and supporting offending clergy, reassigning them to other parishes and dioceses, and handling legal claims. This system failed to seek the assistance of or notify external authorities of abuse allegations and admissions (Reilly, 2002: 52-57).

As Argyris (1990: xi) suggests is common, organizational defensive routines to maintain morale, satisfaction and loyalty, at the expense of competence and justice, were enacted to prevent identification and correction of potentially embarrassing or dangerous errors. These routines prevented accountability for or discussion on the problem, and its "undiscussibility [was] undiscussible" (1990: 43). Routines included communication strategies involving use of coded and euphemistic language to minimize the problem, and confidential and secret document filing systems. Pastoral support provided to victims with counseling "[urged] them to keep silent" (Boston Globe - 24 January 2002: 3). Aggrieved families were silenced by promises of effective action, or by ignoring their emotional public allegations against individual clergy or the authority itself or suggesting they were dysfunctional (BGIS, 2002: 25). The Archbishop distanced himself from detailed knowledge of the victims and perpetrators by avoiding direct contact with the perpetrator or personally calling him to account, and by avoiding direct contact by sidestepping face-to-face or telephonic conversations with victims, by delegating the detail to loyal others. In doing so, he was able to plead difficulty in memory recall and denial of detailed knowledge when called to account, so enjoying "ethical distance" between himself and the state of affairs (Mellema, 2003). Cases were dealt with separately rather than accumulatively, fragmenting knowledge of the problem, preventing pervasive deviance being understood as a pattern, thereby preventing a major scandal, at least in the short term. When allegations became legal claims, the church adopted a legalistic approach (Sitkin and Bies, 1994) in which a litigation mentality was used against perceived threats (Stutman and Putman, 1994; Randall and Baker, 1994). Legal strategies included confidentiality agreements tied to out-of-court settlements, and the use of statute of limitations laws to reduce claims. Church lawyers were paid "to limit fiscal liability but create[d] greater anger by compounding clerical abuse with institutional abuse and the priority to secrecy, and authorities disregard[ed] their pastoral role and adopt[ed] an adversarial stance to victims in the face of threat" (Burke, 2004: 8-10). When lawyers representing the victims moved to civil or criminal claims, the AOB established confidential legal settlements, cynics later seeing this normal legal practice as use of "hush money" attached to confidentiality clauses (Robinson, 2003) to secure silence in an "unholy alliance" (BGIS, 2002: 47).

Many institutional stakeholders, including peers, staff of the diocese and medical and legal professionals, were silent. Evidence and experience suggests that internal stakeholders can be 'captured by the culture' and follow its rules and norms, in this case requiring silence. Aware of increasing signs, buzz, rumors, and allegations of deviance, but without evidence from informants and witnesses, stakeholders were discouraged from voicing the church's strong moral values (Bansal and Kandola, 2004). While most clergy and diocesan officials would not know of the deviance, others seemed to adhere to loyalty norms and "codes of silence", as investigations of deviance in sporting teams, police, medical professions and boarding schools have shown. Burke found that, in regard to key stakeholders aware of and assisting with administration of the abuse cases, institutional concerns of their local church were placed above the concerns of the universal church (Burke, 2004: 8-10). As Bishop Oscar Rodriguez, Salesian Cardinal stated in regard to alleged failure in controlling his Salesian order clergy involved in similar deviance, "... for me it would be a tragedy to reduce the role of a pastor to that of a cop. I'd be prepared to go to jail rather than harm one of my priests." (Callinan and Hoare, 2004), and AOB Deputy Bishop Daily remarked - "I am not a policeman; I am a shepherd" (BGIS, 2002: 24). In addition, silence among individuals in a group may have become self-reinforcing once one or more decided to avoid upsetting the relationships among peers (Perlow and Repenning, 2004). Deviant clergy continued to be "coddled" in being referred for medical treatment, generally resulting in being given a clean bill of health after some time, only to



revert to abuse once more with new victims. Burke expressed the view that lack of controls for “fraternal correction” of errant clergy to prevent further deviance, and failure of Bishops to use their authority to protect children from offending clergy, were some causes of the scandal. Even judges were criticized for complicity between 1992 and 1996 (BGIS, 2002: 125), as were the US mainstream press who “were reluctant to cover stories about priests who sexually abused children” (Quote from Healey-Conlon, 2004).

Advice to change the approach and get tough on offenders in 1986 by Father Thomas Doyle, and in 1989 by Bishop Banks, was ignored. Doyle, a canon law professor and Vatican Embassy official in Washington from 1981 to 1986, with two other experts, had initiated a discussion paper addressing the widespread problem and calling for a different approach for the US Bishops Conference in 1985, but it was removed from the agenda (BGIT, 2002: 36). Banks recommended to Cardinal Law that he “clip [a recidivist offender’s] wings” (BGIT, 2002: 221). In addition, Law ignored medical and his own internal committee’s advice not to reassign certain clergy. Several staff who challenged the church’s approach became whistleblowers. As Miceli and Near (1992) have shown, potential whistleblowers are reluctant to speak out because of threats to their own personal, social and economic wellbeing by those who want to maintain silence. Those who did so were punished, as in the case of Doyle for his knowledgeable whistleblowing regarding inaction of Catholic Bishops between 1984 and 1990 (Berry and Renner, 2004; France; 2004). Doyle later became an advocate for victims.

Between 1981 and 1990, the decline in deference and greater knowledge of the abuse resulted in complaints and allegations becoming civil law suits against the church. A legalistic approach (Sitkin and Bies, 1994) taken by the AOB, coupled with efforts to hide the scandal, saw both accommodating and competing approaches taken. Out-of-court and court-directed settlements were often coupled with confidentiality ‘silencing’ clauses. Statute of limitation provisions were used to defend other cases. By the 1990s, lawyers for plaintiffs began targeting the Cardinal and authority figures rather than the diocese as a means of extracting greater compensation for victims, so the accommodation approach was coupled with a competitive approach. While these approaches and criminal actions against some offenders attracted occasional media attention, secrecy about the widespread pattern allowed the church to explain the occasional high profile case as an “aberration” while failing to disclose hundreds of cases known to the AOB (2002: 45). Following two criminal cases, the AOB moved in 1993 to develop and publicize new but deficient policy and procedures, only effectively strengthened in 2003 after the scandal broke.

### *Scandal - the consequences of ineffective responses to deviance 2002-2003*

It takes the intervention of powerful external forces to break a long established ‘nexus of silence’ in a major organization or institution. This occurred by accident in 2001 when a routine court filing by the AOB admitting known recidivism of an alleged offender in a particular civil case was discovered by a Boston Globe reporter, leading to a team investigation as to whether the particular abuse case was an anomaly or part of a pattern (BGIT, 2002: ix). After uncovering a pattern, the story was published and the dam burst. The flood of allegations and stories which resulted saw an end to deference as an irate public demand answers from the church. The scandal which church authorities tried so hard to prevent was magnified when the extent of deviance and cover-up was exposed; the *Boston Globe’s* Investigation alone producing over 900 negative news stories throughout 2002 (Robinson, 2003). Despite efforts by the AOB lawyers to block *Boston Globe* access to documents, a court decision allowed access by lawyers and the public to church documents, later used by lawyers of hundreds of victims seeking explanations and compensation from church authorities (Depositions, 2002-3; 2002: xi). In 2002, facing state intervention, the AOB unsuccessfully sought to block access to its church files and resorted to obfuscation to ensure evidence was unavailable and unhelpful. The intervention of the Attorney-General, Massachusetts, saw an independent and open assessment of the cover up conducted (Reilly, 2002). But even in this period, to resist dissident church member activity around providing voice to victims, “Cardinal Law in April 2002

ordered priests in his diocese not to cooperate with active groups within parishes, but groups countered citing Canon Law” (Boston Globe, 27 November 2002).

Burke later reported that “church leaders failed to appreciate the harm to victims, the seriousness and frequency of the abuse, and so failed to act or to report to civic authorities” (2004: 93-95). Burke concluded that fear of scandal caused the authorities to practice secrecy and concealment about sexual abuse (2004: 8-10) while at the same time giving greater attention to allegations that one of the known deviant clerics was espousing views publicly on sexual behavior contrary to the church (Deposition: Bishop Daily 21 August 2002: 33). The authorities were also criticized for their apathy in allowing the problem to grow over the 50 year period. Apathy resulted in failure of authorities to act energetically, responsibly and effectively. While, in January 2002, Law admitted that his “judgments made in good faith were tragically wrong” (Boston Globe 26 January, 2002), Reilly concluded that the AOB, even in 2002, had still to demonstrate an appropriate sense of urgency for attacking the problem, showing insufficient commitment to determining the systemic causes of clergy sexual abuse, removing offenders and holding them accountable, and full information sharing and cooperation with state law enforcement authorities concerning suspicions or allegations (2002: 16). This apathy was institutional, not confined to the AOB, nor to the Catholic Church as cases in other churches in 2002-2004 would show (Berry and Renner, 2004: 91-105). In 2005, a grand jury found a similar situation of deliberate concealment in Philadelphia from 1967 to 2002 (Cooperman, 2005)

When crisis hits, there is a tendency to apportion blame and enact what might be popular but unhelpful solutions. Inside the church, the US Bishops Conference in June 2002 decided to impose a “zero tolerance” policy on abusers, including clergy, retrospectively, but to exclude bishops despite several being forced to resign over allegations in 2004 (Collins, 2005: 43). Files were examined in every US diocese and many priests removed (2005: 93). On the other hand, in late 2002 and early 2003, Cardinal Law was still obfuscating in his deposition to lawyers representing victims (Depositions, 2002-3). US Cardinals were summoned to Rome and an apology issued by the Pope on Holy Thursday, 2002 (Collins, 2005: 94).

#### *Cleaning the Augean Stables – 2003 to the present*

The consequences of the cover up had to be faced. Deviance had increased and stakeholders experienced the pain and suffering of being betrayed by church authorities who failed to protect the children. The church suffered economic loss from civil damage suits, costing Boston Archdiocese US\$85 million in 2003, with similar amounts in other dioceses in the US and elsewhere, particularly Canada and Ireland. The scandal reopened debates on sex and other political matters on which the church wanted unity, but the betrayal and lost reputation had ended deference to clergy and authorities, even to the great majority of dedicated clergy, and for church authorities and for the church as an institution (Collins, 2005: 91-2).

Transforming an organization caught up in scandal is akin to the Herculean task of ‘cleaning the Aegean stables’ by diverting a river (Sinclair, 2000: 2). Inquiries are often used to commence this process effectively or ineffectively. The Inquiry on the abuse by the Attorney General, Massachusetts (Reilly, 2003) and an Inquiry on the crisis by the US Bishops Conference of Catholic Bishops (Burke, 2004) both released their findings of the publicly. However, the Burke inquiry was not without its political problems, as the church received further criticism when the original Chair, former California Governor Frank Keating resigned after pressure for speaking out at the early stages, suggesting ‘the church hierarchy were like the mafia’ (CBS News, 17 June 2003). He was given whistleblower treatment. The transformation has continued throughout 2002-2004, but may need a more transparent and collaborative approach with external authorities to prevent further deviant behavior and an end to the ‘nexus of silence’. The public jury will stay out on the clean up effort, and withhold judgment on efforts to rebuild the reputation of the

church and trust in its leaders, until such measures show that new incidents of deviance are met effectively by resolute church authorities.

## Discussion

The discovery of a 'nexus of silence' in this case has implications for management wanting to strengthen their moral leadership (Springett, 2004). It occurs in circumstances where deviance of members is swept under the carpet, and the organization leaders revert to cover up of the problem. This case has illustrated three related issues facing managers when allegations of member deviant behavior surfaces shown in Figure 1: the institutional core values; solving the deviance problem; and public awareness of the deviance. A 'nexus of silence' can occur when managers fail to ensure the institution's core values are maintained when addressing deviance in their ranks but focus instead on other priorities and keep the public in the dark. Major scandal can be averted if managers at the outset focus the core values of their institution, and deal with deviance transparently and responsibly. By taking a more pragmatic approach and sweeping the problem under the carpet, managers may be successful in solving the problem if the behavior is a one-off aberration and private resolution of the deviance problem meets the needs of all parties at the time. However, if the deviance is or becomes more widespread, managers may develop an escalating commitment to cover up the problem and its handling. In order to 'clean the Aegean stables', leaders need to focus on core values and adopt a collaborative approach using external assistance in openly addressing the causes of the problem. If this approach is left until after a scandal breaks, the task will include restoring lost reputation and trust (Dowling, 2001). Risk management offers managers preventive and remedial measures in dealing with deviance problems which pose a risk to organizational and institutional reputation and trust (Standards Association, 1999).

The limitation of this grounded theory, based on a substantive single case study, is recognized. A second case study by the author on the cover up of match-fixing in international cricket between 1980 and 2000, reinforces the presence of the phenomenon in organizations, and strengthens the model, but still has limitations as to more general applicability (Gross, PhD dissertation forthcoming).

Directions for future research might focus on the presence of a 'nexus of silence' in other cases of scandal and the manner in which ethical problems are handled at different stages of manifestation, and in developing further models explaining why employees, managers and stakeholders choose to remain silent about unethical and immoral behavior in organizations.

## References

- Argyris, C. 1990 *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Argyris, C. 1994 'Litigation Mentality and Organizational Learning' in *The Legalistic Organization*. S.B. Sitkin and R.J. Bies, (eds), 347-358. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Bansal, P. and Kandola, S. 2004 'Corporate Social Responsibility: Why good people behave badly in organizations.' *Ivey Business Journal Online*. Mar/Apr: 1.
- Bauman, Z. 1991 *Modernity and Ambivalence*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Berry, J. and Renner, G. 2004 *Vows of Silence: The abuse of power in the papacy of John Paul II*. Sydney: Hodder Headline Australia.
- Beu, D.S. and Buckley, M.R. 2004 *This war: How the politically astute achieve crimes of obedience through the use of moral disengagement*. *Leadership Quarterly* 15/4: 551.
- Bible Society, 1988, *The Good News Bible*. Canberra: The Bible Society of Australia.
- Bird, F.B. and Waters, J.A. 1989 *The Moral Muteness of Managers*. *California Management Review* 32/1: 73-88.
- Blake, R.R. Mouton, J.S. 1964 *The New Managerial Grid* Houston: Gulf Publishing Company.

- Blaszczynski, A. 1996 *Clinical Aspects of Sexual Offenders: A Preliminary Information and Discussion Paper*. Professional Standards Research Preliminary Report Sydney: University of NSW.
- Boston Globe Investigative Staff. 2002 *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church*. Boston: Little Brown and Co.
- Boston Globe 2002 *Spotlight Investigation: Abuse in the Catholic Church news reports* viewed on 15 April 2005 at <http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse>
- Burke, A. 2004 *A Report on the Crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States: National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People* Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- Callinan, R. and Hoare, D. 2004 *Shelter for the Shamed*. The Australian 6 July: 15.
- CBS News 2003 'Keating's Parting Shots for Church' viewed on 24 November 2003 at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/06/13>.
- Cohen, A.K. 1966 *Deviance and Control*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Collins, P. 2001 *From Inquisition to Freedom*. Roseville: Simon and Schuster Australia.
- Collins, P. 2005 *God's New Man: The Election of Benedict XVI and the Legacy of John Paul II*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Cooperman, A. 2005 *Grand Jury in Pa. Says Church hid Sex Abuse*, viewed on 23 September 2005 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.
- Cozzens, D. 2002 *Sacred Silence: Denial and the Crisis in the Church*. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.
- Creswell, J.W. 1994 *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. 1998 *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Dane, P. 2004 "Omalous" *Autonomy*. Brigham Young University Law Review Vol. 5: 1715-1772.
- Deposition of Cardinal Bernard Law transcripts (2002) viewed on 15 April 2005 at <http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse>.
- Deposition of Bishop Thomas Daily transcript (2002) viewed 15 April 2005 at <http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse>.
- Dowling, G. 2001 *Creating Corporate Reputations: Identity, Image, and Performance* Oxford: Oxford Press.
- Downes, D. and Rock, P. 1982 *Understanding Deviance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- France, D. 2004 *Our Fathers: The Secret Life of the Catholic Church in an Age of Scandal*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A. 1967 *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Press.
- Griseri, P. 1998 *Managing Values: Ethical Change in Organisations*. London: Macmillan Business.
- Goulding, C. 2002 *Grounded Theory: A practical guide for Management, Business and Market Researchers*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gross, M. PhD forthcoming *Nexus of Silence: A Grounded theory on the Match-fixing Scandal in International Cricket 1980-2001*.
- Healey-Conlon, M. 2004 'Holy Water-Gate: Abuse Cover-up in the Catholic Church' *SBS: Cutting Edge Video-film Transcript*, viewed on 8 September 2005 at <http://www.holywater-gate.com/story>.
- Hirschman, A.O. 1970 *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Holy Office, 1962 *Instruction on the Manner of Proceeding in Cases of Solicitation*. Rome: The Vatican Press.
- Janis, I.L. 1982 *Victims of Groupthink*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Krebs, T. 1998 'Church Structures that Facilitate Pedophilia among Roman Catholic Clergy', in *Wolves within the Fold* A. Shupe (ed) 15-32. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Locke, K. 2001 *Grounded Theory in Management Research*. London: Sage Publications.

- Lupu, I.C. and Tuttle, R.W. 2004 'Sexual Misconduct and Ecclesiastical Immunity' *Brigham Young University Law Review* Vol. 5: 1789-1896.
- Mellema, G. 2003 'Responsibility, taint, and ethical distance in business ethics' *Journal of Business Ethics* 47/2: 125.
- Merton, R.K. 1976 *Sociological Ambivalence and Other Essays*. New York: The Free Press.
- Miceli, M.P. and Near, J.P. 1992 *Blowing the Whistle: The Organizational and Legal Implications for Companies and Employees*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Millekin, F.J. and Morrison, E.W. 2003 'Shades of Silence: Emerging themes and Future Directions for Research on Silence in Organisations' *Journal of Management Studies* 40/6: 1563.
- Millekin, F.J., Morrison, E.W. and Hewlin, P.F. 2003 'An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence: Issues that Employees don't communicate upward and Why' *Journal of Management Studies* 40/6: 1453.
- Morrison, E.W. and Millekin, F.J. 2000 'Organizational Silence: A Barrier to Change and Development in a Pluralistic World' *Academy of Management Journal* 25/4: 706-725.
- Neuhaus, R.J. 2004, 'Scandal Time III: First Things' viewed 23 April 2004 at FirstThings.com.
- Nielsen, R.P. 1987 'What can managers do about unethical management?' *Journal of Business Ethics* 6: 309-320.
- Oxford Dictionary, Thesaurus and Wordpower Guide*, 2001.Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parkinson, P. 1997 *Child Sexual Abuse and the Churches*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Perlow, L.A. and Repenning, N.P. 2004 *The Dynamics of Silencing Conflict*, viewed on 19 August 2005 at <http://web.mit.edu/sloan>.
- Perlow, L.A. and Williams, S. 2003 'Is silence killing your company' *Harvard Business Review* 81/5: 52.
- Powell, W.A. DiMaggio, P.J. 1991 (eds) *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Randall, D.M. 1987 'Commitment and the Organisation: The Organisation Man Revisited' *The Academy of Management Review* 12.3: 460-471.
- Randall, D.M. and Baker, D.D. 1994 'The Threat of Legal Liability and Managerial Decision-Making Learning' in *The Legalistic Organization*. S.B. Sitkin and R.J. Bies (eds) 169-189. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Reilly, T.F. 2003 'The Sexual Abuse of Children in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston' Boston: Office of the Attorney General Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- Remenyi, D., Williams, B., Money, A. and Swartz, E. 1998 *Doing Research in Business and Management: An Introduction to Process and Method*. London: Sage Publications.
- Reese, T.J. 1998 *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Robinson, W.V. 2003 'Shining the Globe's Spotlight on the Catholic Church'. *Niemann Reports* 57/1: 55.
- Scott, W.R. 2001 *Institutions and Organizations* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Shupe, A. 1995 *In the Name of All that's Holy: A Theory of Clergy Malfeasance*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Shupe, A. 1998 (ed) *Wolves within the Fold*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Sinclair, M. 2000 *NGOs in Cuba: Principles for Cooperation*, Working Paper #3, Oxfam America.
- Sipe, A.W.R. 1995 *Sex, Priests, and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis*. London: Cassell.
- Sitkin, S.B. and Bies, R.J. 1994 *The Legalistic Organization* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Smelser, N.J. 1998 'The Rational and the Ambivalent in the Social Sciences' *American Sociological Review* 63/1: 1-15.
- Snell, R.S. 1996 'Complementing Kohlberg: Mapping the Ethical Reasoning Used by Managers for their own Dilemma Cases'. *Human Relations* 49/1: 23-49.
- Snook, S.A. 2000 *Friendly Fire: the Accidental Shootdown of U.S. Black Hawks over Northern Iraq* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Soukup, P.A. 1997 'Church, Media and Scandal' in *Media Scandals*. J. Lull & S. Hinerman, (eds), 222-239. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Springett, N. 2004 'Corporate purpose as the basis of moral leadership of the firm' *Strategic Change* 13: 297-307.
- Standards Australia 1999 *Risk Management: AS/NZS 4360:1999* Strathfield: Standards Association of Australia.
- Staw, B.M. 1981 'The escalation of commitment to a course of action', *Academy of Management Review* vol. 6: 577- 87.
- Stutman, R.K. and Putman, L.L. 1994 The Consequences of Language: A Metaphorical Look at the Legalization of Organizations Learning' in *The Legalistic Organization*. S.B. Sitkin and R.J. Bies, (eds), 281-302. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Thompson, J. B. 1997 'Scandal and Social Theory' in *Media Scandals*. J. Lull and S. Hinerman, (eds), 34-64. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Weick, K.E. 1998 *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.