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Part II

Responding to Accusations of Clergy Malfeasance

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Chapter 6

Charisma, Male Entitlement, and the Abuse of Power

Janet L. Jacobs

Introduction

On July 19, 1995, Keri Jewell, a fourteen-year-old member of the Branch Davidians, testified before Congress on the living conditions at the Mount Carmel compound in Waco, Texas, prior to its destruction in 1993. Keri Jewell's testimony spoke of the rape of young girls by the Branch Davidians' leader, David Koresh; of her own assault in a motel room at the age of ten; and of her mother's apparent complicity in the sexual violations to which she had been subject while living under Koresh's authority.[1] Keri Jewell's painful testimony once again raised the specter of violation and abuse in charismatic religious groups. Like the mass suicides of Jonestown years before, the events at Waco, Texas, brought the issues of power and violence to the forefront of discussions on authoritarian movements. As politicians and scholars debated the role of the government in the assault on the Branch Davidian compound, the sexual abuse of Keri Jewell provided an important reminder of the dangers some charismatic movements pose, especially for women and children.

In order to understand the abuse of power on the part of leaders like David Koresh, it is useful to consider the structural characteristics that define contemporary charismatic movements. To begin with, charismatic groups are characterized by a wide range of religious orientations, including Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu belief systems. Common to all of these groups is the presence of a charismatic leader whose authority derives from God and who requires obedience and

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submission of the religious devotees. Typically, these groups maintain rigid boundaries between the religious community and the outside world. Within the insular life of the movement, the leader maintains control over the followers by demanding strict adherence to a set of ideologies and beliefs (Anthony and Robbins 1995; Hatcher 1989). In the vast majority of new religious movements, these ideologies are guided by principles of male domination that originate in the belief system of the charismatic leader.

In an exploration of the relationship between sexual violence and male-dominated charismatic movements,[2] this chapter will examine the ways gender affects the abuse of power in new religious communities. In particular, I will analyze the structural aspects of authoritarian religious movements that legitimize and support the sexualization of women and children. Beginning with a discussion of charismatic authority and male entitlement, the chapter will interrogate the meaning of incest in patriarchal religious communities and the significance of sanctions and isolation for the maintenance of social control.

Charismatic Authority and Male Entitlement

In the dynamics of abuse that have emerged within contemporary charismatic movements, the actions of the charismatic leader would seem to be the most important factor for the study of sexual coercion and violation. As spiritual and social authority is vested in his person, the religious leader becomes representative of a divine being whose will is that of God and whose actions are above reproach. Max Weber described this form of charismatic authority as follows:

> The genuine prophet, like the genuine military leader and every true leader in this sense, preaches, creates, or demands new obligations. In the pure type of charisma, these are imposed on the authority of revelation by oracles, or of the leader's own will, and are recognized by the members of the religious, military, or party group, because they come from such a source. Recognition is a duty. (Weber 1968: 51)

Within charismatic movements, recognition of the leader's relationship to the divine provides the basis for authoritative control over religious followers. Through the redefinition of social and spiritual reality, the leader creates what Bucher (1983) calls a world of total

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meaning whereby beliefs, practices, and behaviors are interpreted through the worldview of the charismatic authority. A devotee of a Christian fundamentalist movement describes this phenomenon:

> Pastor Jim was feared and revered. He was the leader of the thing. He was responsible for bringing them together. Pastor Jim's word was law. . . . The people followed him completely, worshiped him. He made the decisions and when anyone challenged him, he would say they were in with the devil, the cloak of evil had been pulled over their eyes. (Jacobs 1989: 94)

An analysis of charisma in new religious movements reveals that followers are drawn to religious figures such as Pastor Jim who offer authoritarian leadership within the context of surrogate family ties (Robbins and Anthony 1972; Tipton 1982). In addition, studies of charismatic movements also indicate that over time religious leaders tend to expand their authoritarian control as the adoration of the devotees contributes to the leader's self-perception of omnipotence and godliness. Thus, leaders of such movements tend to make increasing demands on their followers as greater and greater tests of loyalty are required of devotees. The Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians, and other suicide cults tragically demonstrate the extent to which divine attribution can result in the severe abuse of power. The following excerpt from a speech by Jim Jones, the leader of the Peoples Temple, illustrates the way he used religious symbolism to legitimate the act of revolutionary suicide:

> . . . And Paul said that it's all right to give your body to be buried . . . but be sure you've got charity in your heart. Charity means Principle. What is pure love? Communism. . . . In other words, Paul was saying give your body to be burned. Set it afire, if necessary; to convey a revolutionary message, but be sure you've got Communism in your heart. (Reston 1981: 268)

In less violent totalistic groups, corruption and the abuse of power may be manifested in the acquisition of material goods and extravagant lifestyles, as exemplified by Divine Light Mission. Here a former follower describes his view of the changes that took place as Guru Maharaji demanded increasing financial support from his devotees:

> They told us that Maharaji was bringing peace to this planet, but living in this age required airplanes and luxury hotels, the finest clothing and

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> everything which developed into thousands and thousands of people who were working their butts off, seven days a week. I sometimes feel in the beginning he was really sincere. But I think a lot of it just came from being corrupted by the lifestyle. Even his personality decayed. (Jacobs 1989: 103)

As this account suggests, claims to charismatic authority privilege religious leaders, legitimating their right to material indulgence and to unquestioned obedience. Under this system of authoritarian rule, male entitlement to sex becomes one more expression of the leader's special status and of his power to control the lives of others. In his study of Love Israel and the Love Family, Robert Balch describes this "self-aggrandizing" aspect of charismatic leadership:

> Given his exceptional status in the Family, it should not be surprising that Love took advantage of his unusual power and privilege. . . . In Love's case "perks" were small at first: a private room, better clothes and the freedom to come and go as he pleased. But as the Family grew and prospered, Love's lifestyle became increasingly extravagant. He took long vacations, bought several airplanes, and moved into a luxurious house on Queen Anne Hill furnished with beautiful paintings by Family artists and expensive antique furniture. Love enjoyed the best food, the finest wine and a retinue of devoted servants. His household included the most talented musicians and the most attractive women, many of whom had sex with him on a regular basis. (Balch 1995: 171)

Like expensive cars and other luxuries, access to women and children becomes part of the "material culture" to which the leader is entitled. This characteristic of charismatic religious movements derives from the patriarchal culture in which religious groups reside. As charismatic leaders assume the role of patriarchal authority within religious communities, their abuse of power can be situated within the discourse on the commodification and sexual objectification of women in patriarchal society.

One of the first scholars to explore the relationship between male authority and control over female sexuality was the nineteenth-century social theorist Friedrich Engels. In his classic *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Engels suggests that patriarchy, as the structural foundation of society, developed in response to the cultural changes that took place with the advent of agricultural societies. According to Engels, as land and tools came under the control of male

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labor and ownership, so too did women and children. Thus, the shift from hunter-gatherer (communal) to agricultural (private property) social organizations gave rise to the patriarchal family structure in which women and children were designated as the property of men:

> With the patriarchal family, we enter the field of written history. . . . It is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity. . . . As a rule, it is now only the man who can dissolve it [marriage] and put away his wife. The right of conjugal infidelity also remains secure to him . . . and as social life develops, he exercises his right more and more. (Engels 1884: 102–4)

Within this system of male domination, female bodies became commodities for trade, procreation, and pleasure. This shift in the status of women was reflected in the religious culture of the biblical period as laws designating women as property were codified first in the Old Testament and then in accompanying legal interpretations of the Talmud. The regulation of marriage, virginity, and rape in the rabbinic legal codes provides evidence of the institutionalization of the patriarchal family within male-dominated culture. According to these laws, the father has the power to "give" his daughter in marriage and to be compensated if she is raped prior to her betrothal. Judith Romney Wegner thus maintains that the acquisition of a wife was similar to the acquisition of other forms of property:

> The procedure for acquiring a wife (set forth in tractate *Qiddushin* ["Espousals"]) treats marriage as the formal sale and purchase of a woman's sexual function—a commercial transaction in which a man pays for the bride's virginity just as for any other object of value. The wife heads the mishnaic catalogue of transferable property. This, in turn rests squarely on Scripture and follows the list found in the Tenth Commandment (Exod. 20:14) that defines the contents of a man's household as wives, male and female slaves, large and small cattle, and other property. . . . (Wegner 1988: 42)

Such laws substantiate the historical context in which women were defined as objects of exchange in transactions regulated by men. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss offers further evidence for the universality of the exchange of women in both Western and non-Western cultures. His analysis locates the commodification of women within the laws regulating exogamy—that is, the laws that require marriage outside the family group. Such laws, according to Lévi-Strauss, were

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intended to enforce the incest taboo through marriage alliances that exchange group members in a process of "gift giving." Yet, as Lévi-Strauss points out, such exchanges were rarely if ever gender neutral: "The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects of exchange, not as one of the partners" (1949: 115).

The writings of Engels and Lévi-Strauss provide the foundation for the development of feminist theories of male entitlement and the sexual exploitation of women and children. In this regard, Judith Herman explains the relationship between male domination and the sexual control over daughters in traditional patriarchal culture:

> In patriarchal societies, including Western society, the rights of ownership and exchange of women within the family are vested primarily in the father. . . . Only under male supremacy do women become objects of exchange. Only male supremacy determines that men have the right to give women for marriage or concubinage, while women have no comparable rights either in men or in themselves. Only under male supremacy do incest taboos become agreements among men regarding the disposition of women.
>
> The man who has the power to give a woman away also has the power to take her for himself. That power can be contested only by other men, not by the women who are given or taken. (Herman 1981: 60–92)

Herman's analysis of fathers and daughters offers a starting point from which to examine the abuse of power on the part of charismatic religious leaders who participate in the exchange and procurement of women and in the sexual violation of children. Because the structure of charismatic religious movements closely parallels that of the authoritarian patriarchal family, the actions of religious leaders can be compared to those of incestuous fathers as male entitlement defines the social context through which sexual violation occurs.

Sexual Violation and the Meaning of Incest in Charismatic Religious Movements

The study of charismatic movements has revealed that their success in part relies on their ability to create a surrogate family environment

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for devotees who come to identify the charismatic leader with a nurturing paternalistic father figure (Jacobs 1989; Jones 1989). In groups such as the Unification Church, entry into the movement involved specific resocialization processes that were designed to replace the devotee's family of origin with the new religious family of Reverend Moon. Here a former devotee recounts his experience of "Heavenly Deception":

> If the recruiter can paint a selective portrait of himself (based on information given to him by the initiate) which appeals to early childhood experience of the initiate, the recruiter can exert control over the interaction in a pattern similar to the initiate's early relationship to a parent or older sibling.

This practice of appealing to early childhood experiences can achieve remarkable effects. After a weekend with the group, for example, I perceived a visual resemblance between my recruiter and my father. Group life reflects the religious belief that individuals enter a spiritual hierarchy by becoming children, siblings, and eventually parents to other spiritual children as they reach a state of perfect identity with Reverend Moon and God. These roles are constantly opposed to the roles converts have experienced in their "fallen" lives. Biological parents, siblings, and their previous childhood roles are disparagingly compared to the simple, perfect, spiritual order (Edwards 1981: 33–37).

Like Reverend Moon, Jim Jones adopted imagery and language that cast him as the Father or Dad to whom all devotees owed obedience and to whom all could confess their deepest fears and desires. Within this role as spiritual father and teacher, he then assumed the authority to demand sexual services from his followers, to arrange sexual liaisons among devotees, and to "offer" female followers to the Guyanese army in exchange for protection (Jones 1989). Aware that behaviors such as these violated the norms of Judeo-Christian beliefs, Jones rationalized his demands with the higher goals of "revolutionary sex." Citing the teachings of Paul, Jones directed his followers to engage in unconventional and coercive sexual practices for the benefit of the Peoples Temple socialist revolution (Jones 1989). Jones and other Christian-based leaders used religious ideology to convince their followers of the morality of their sexual actions (Balch 1991; Mytrash and Kent 1990). Thus, the spiritual fathers of

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charismatic groups often called upon God to justify their demands for sexual compliance. Studies of incestuous fathers shows similar patterns of coercion and rationalization. In particular, incest survivors who were raised in religious households report that incestuous assaults were frequently accompanied by explanations that linked sexual violence to biblical narratives and to God's will (Driver and Droisen 1989; Imbent and Jorker 1992). One poignant example of this phenomenon is found in an account by a seventeen-year-old survivor who offers this recollection of her father's abuse:

> My mom and him were into church real big. He started talking about stuff, like God gave him everything and stuff out of the Bible. He said he had to teach me about sex and everything. I've always questioned it but he read some scripture from the Bible. It scared me that he was talking to me about this, like he was God. It just scared me. (Jacobs 1994b: 49–50)

Like the incestuous father, the charismatic leader who portrays himself as the spiritual parent uses the authority of God to justify the sexualization of his female followers. This form of boundary violation is found in both Christian-based movements and Eastern groups, and among Western and non-Western charismatic authority figures. In one Hindu-based group, for example, the leader presided over a small community of followers. Within this group of devotees, he maintained control over all aspects of his followers' lives, including decisions on employment as well as interpersonal relationships. As the guiding spiritual parent of the community, the leader established rigid codes of behavior that stressed sexual purity and restraint. Accordingly, women were required to dress modestly and men were warned against speaking or even looking at female devotees, lest they fall prey to sexual temptation. While the leader espoused a theology of sexual abstinence, his own behavior contrasted sharply with the rules he imposed on others. He entered into sexual relations with a number of different women, some of whom were married to other devotees. One of the women from whom he demanded sexual favors spoke of her trust in the leader and the secrecy that surrounded their relationship:

> He was like God to me. I was his disciple and his child. I trusted him completely. He told me that he knew what I needed for my spiritual

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> growth and I believed him. When he said he wanted to have sex with me, I hesitated at first but then he assured me that this was the right path. At the same time he made me promise never to tell anyone about our relationship. (Jacobs 1994a)

This account illustrates the ways in which the sexualization of religious devotees in charismatic movements parallels the sexualization of daughters in incestuous families, as secrecy and concealment become the context within which illicit sexual relations are demanded. Like the incestuous father, the leader is a trusted authority figure to whom the devotee turns for moral and spiritual guidance. And like the incestuous father, the leader uses his authority to gain access to the women under his control and to make sexual demands that violate both the norms of the religious culture and the trust of the devotees.

In her book, *Women and New Religious Movements* (1997), Elizabeth Puttick points to the early practices of the Christian-based Children of God as perhaps the most blatant example of the sexual exploitation of women and children by a religious leader. Under the leadership of David Berg in the 1970s, the group instituted the conversion practice of "flirting fishing," whereby women, including Berg's wife, were required to prostitute themselves for God and for the group. Berg referred to potential converts as "fish," and women assumed the role of bait:

> The fish can't understand crucifixion, they can't understand Jesus. But they can understand the ultimate creation of God, a woman. . . . Everyone of you girls who spreads out your arms and your legs on the bed of those men are just like Jesus, exactly like Jesus! (Puttick 1997)

In the 1970s Berg's approach lent credibility to a movement that provided a Christian rationale for the sexual exploitation of women. During the same time period, other movements, primarily those with an Eastern-based focus, framed the demands for sexual service within the context of sexual meditative practices and the search for enlightenment. As these tantric-based movements developed in Western culture, sexual relations with the leader were frequently expected and in many cases constituted an essential aspect of devotion. Under these circumstances, devotees are required to serve the

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spiritual teacher within a religious culture that assumes compliance while simultaneously forcing women to compete with one another for the sexual attention of the leader. A follower of a Buddhist movement offered this insight into the blurred boundaries of coercion, compliance, and special privilege that characterized her involvement in a tantric community:

> I remember the first time I was chosen to be with [the teacher]. We were at a huge party that the community was giving. I was standing with a group of people and one of the guards tapped me on the shoulder and told me [the teacher] would like to be with me tonight. I looked over at my husband. We all knew what the tap on the shoulder meant for women. He looked kind of unsure and shrugged his shoulders. I felt both flattered and confused but I stayed until everyone else had left. Then I was brought into a small room and told to wash and dress in a particular way. Then I was brought into [the teacher]. What he wanted was oral sex, with me as the passive partner. So I just lay there. Afterwards, I felt in a kind of daze. I felt used and honored at the same time. This was [the teacher] after all, and I knew I should have felt that this was a great privilege for me. But I just didn't really feel anything at all. (Jacobs 1990)

This account demonstrates the confusion a female devotee may experience as her body becomes the vehicle for the leader's spiritual enlightenment, while she herself feels alienated from both the sexual practice and her own spiritual awareness. This approach to sex-based spirituality may have serious consequences for the group, particularly in situations where the leader assumes a position of authority that places no limits on his demands and where there is an absence of accountability. Such was the case when an American-born leader of a tantric movement engaged in unprotected sexual relations with both male and female followers while infected with AIDS. When confronted with the spread of the disease, the leader explained that he thought his special relationship to the divine would shield him as well as others: "Thinking I had some extraordinary means of protection, I went ahead with my business as if something would take care of it for me" (Butler 1990). This case, perhaps more than any other, illuminates the way charismatic authority produces a sense of moral invincibility on the part of religious leaders. Acts of sexual violence and abuse can then be carried out with impunity, as distortions in ideologies of male entitlement/godliness

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empower patriarchal leaders to make demands that result in the sexual violation of female followers.

As revealed by the events surrounding the attack on the Branch Davidians, the abuse of power in charismatic religious communities frequently extends to control over children. The data on sexual abuse and assault suggest that some charismatic leaders engage in the sexual exploitation of children in the service of their own needs or those of the organization (Jacobs 1989). While Keri Jewell's testimony provided the most publicized reports of these abuses in the United States, other groups also espoused sexual relations with children. The best known among these is the Children of God movement discussed earlier. In a set of now famous letters he wrote, Berg encouraged incest and sexual relations with children, using the Bible to justify such abuses. Among others, Berg's daughter accused him of sexual violation. In recent years, following a court case in England, the movement rejected Berg's child-based sexual ideologies (Puttick 1997). Despite this shift in the movement's belief system, the development of the Children of God provides insight into the relationship between male authority and the construction of exploitive religious practices.

In still another instance of child sexual coercion, a past member of an Eastern-based group spoke of tantric practices that involved the exploitation of male and female children:

> The teacher would sodomize young children who didn't even know what he was doing. He would tell them it was for their spiritual growth, that he was helping them toward enlightenment. But it just didn't make any sense for these kids, barely 12 or 13 years old, to have this man treat them that way. (Jacobs 1992)

This description of sexual violence is particularly close to that of incest and illustrates the power of the leader to demand submission not only from the child but from the parent who fails to challenge the leader's authority. The extent to which members remain compliant in charismatic movements can in part be explained by the relationship of charismatic authority to male entitlement. In addition, it is also important to consider other structural characteristics of charismatic groups that support the authoritative control of the leader. In this regard, two other aspects of charismatic religious communities will be considered: the presence of sanctions and the insularity of the group.

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Sanctions

Like fathers in incest families, abusive leaders in religious movements rely on various forms of social control to obtain and sustain compliance from devotees. A variety of sanctions are used to punish individuals who refuse to comply. Coercion, punishment, and fear are among the most significant forms of punitive control used by charismatic leaders. David Koresh, for example, was known to use corporal punishment, as were other leaders of Christian-based groups who espoused the principle of "spare the rod and spoil the child." In many of these instances, physical punishment was justified by Christian doctrine:

> He [the pastor] was a strong disciplinarian. You can beat those kids black and blue, that's all right. They are going to be better for it. And people would do it because Pastor Jim said so. . . . The women were submissive. They take the Bible view of it, plain and simple. And if the children said a naughty word or someone disobeyed, spank them or give them a bloody nose, that's all right. He was the man responsible for organizing it. (Jacobs 1989: 94)

Shunning, shaming, and isolation were also used to punish dissidents and to force devotees to comply with demands for sexual services. In those movements where female devotees were required to use their sexuality to attract other converts, failure to do so would often result in sanctions from the leader and from other group members. One devotee described her experience as follows:

> The philosophy was the more books you sell, the more spiritual you are. . . . The best way to serve was to make money. The most perfect thing to do was to go out and sell books. They told us to use our female tendencies to get people to contribute and therefore to purify them and ourselves. At my best, I was bringing in $400 a day. I became very good at it. But when I couldn't collect money any more, I lost my value to the community. (Jacobs 1989: 66)

Other female devotees reported punishments such as isolation and deprivation when illness prevented them from witnessing on the streets:

> They then decided I couldn't be in a room where I could be seen, I'd have to be in the basement. . . . And in this particular basement, around

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> every corner was a couple. So the place that was left in the basement was concrete floor beside a tank—a water tank. . . . And here they threw a mattress and told me I could stay here till I decided I was well enough to go on the streets. (Mytrash and Kent 1990: 15)

Still other forms of coercion were reported by members of the Love Family. A high-ranking devotee of that group gave an account of her teenage years in the movement, when Love Israel demanded sex from her and threatened to leave her by the side of the road if she refused (Balch 1991). In another case, a female follower of a tantric movement reported that when she declined an "invitation" to be the sexual partner of the leader, she was shunned by the spiritual hierarchy and was denied access to the teacher during religious rites and festivals (Jacobs 1989). These numerous accounts illustrate the use of negative and punitive sanctions in those circumstances where women refuse to comply with requests for sexual favors and demands for sexual liaisons.

Perhaps the most effective form of coercion within charismatic movements is the manipulation of fear. As the embodiment of God, the religious leader assumes the power of divine retribution, a power he uses to ensure conformity and maintain submission. Thus, when followers disobey the rules or challenge the authority of the leader they risk not only social rejection but the wrath of God as well. Because disobedience and criticism are interpreted as failures of faith, devotees who engage in such behaviors are threatened with both worldly punishment and eternal damnation.

This phenomenon is exemplified in the case of a female devotee who was pressured into becoming the secret mistress of her teacher. In discussing her experience, she spoke of the fears that characterized her life in the first few months after leaving the group. Prior to her departure, she had been warned that if she left the leader, she would be deserting God. Despite this threat, she chose to leave the movement. In the aftermath of her departure, she feared that she would be struck by lightning or hurt by an act of God. Other women expressed similar fears of divine retribution. For these women, noncompliance was equated with disobedience and forsaking the divine. Thus, they feared that their actions could result in their death or in the death of those they loved (Jacobs 1989). Within this system of social control, the abuse of power by the religious leader is contextualized by a

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culture of fear and coercion that serves to reinforce and strengthen charismatic authority within the movement.

Isolation, Insularity, and the Role of Religious Hierarchies

Feminist research on family violence has investigated the relationship between the privatization of the family in industrial society and the prevalence of wife-battering and sexual abuse (Schneider 1994). These studies conclude that the isolation of women and children within male-dominated families creates conditions under which violence is more likely to occur. Within incest families in particular, Herman found that "the fathers consolidated their power within the family by isolating their wives and children from the outside world" (Herman 1981: 73). Such forms of isolation are reminiscent of charismatic movements where the abuse of power has been prevalent.

In groups such as the Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians, for example, the leaders took extreme measures to ensure that their followers would be both socially and physically isolated. Through this isolation, the leaders maintained sovereignty over an encapsulated community of believers. Within the compound in Waco, Texas, and in the remote countryside of Guyana, the rights of the devotees could be violated without fear of outside interference as the leaders constructed their own systems of social control in which they were accountable to no one but themselves. Thus, the exploitation of women and children was sanctioned by an ideology of male supremacy that developed within an insular social structure that afforded the devotees little protection.

Even among the less isolated groups who formed ashrams and communes throughout the United States, the organization of members into distinct communities provided an encapsulating environment wherein the worldview of the leader could go unchallenged as he redefined the norms of social relations within the group. When demands for sexual service became part of his worldview, insularity limited the influence of conflicting definitions of social reality that might challenge the leader's "right" to the women and children who came under his authority. Further, as Balch (1991, 1995) points out in his study of the Love Family, charismatic movements frequently develop hierarchical social arrangements that help to sustain the

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leader's power by insulating the leader within the community. In this regard, Balch describes the inner workings of a group of high-ranking devotees, those who were known as elders and priests among Love Family members:

> Members of the inner circle functioned as gate keepers who screened the flow of information between Love and the rest of his followers. . . . The inner circle provided Love with a remarkably effective shield. Even when the Family had fewer than 30 members living in just two houses, many people were unaware that Love was using toulene [a type of drug] virtually every day. About the same time, Love was secretly sexually involved with two or three women in the group, even though members had agreed to become celibate. Later when Love became addicted to cocaine, most rank and file members had no idea that he was free-basing, nor did they realize that Love had members buying and selling cocaine for him. Most inner circle members knew about these indiscretions, but they kept the information to themselves. There were many reasons for their silence: loyalty to Love, hope that he would change, doubts about their own judgment and fear of losing their position. . . . (Balch 1991: 24–25)

The hierarchical structure described by Balch is characteristic of many charismatic movements. Typically, the group will have a three-tier system, with the "ordinary" devotees at the bottom, the leader at the top, and a cadre of elite or high-ranking followers forming an intermediary level of authority. As a separate sphere of control, the elite corps, known variously as elders, guards, or initiators, will sometimes procure women for the leader (as well as for themselves) and will frequently initiate sanctions against those who criticize the leader or question his authority to demand sexual favors. In their role as gatekeepers, these high-status devotees protect the leader from exposure and provide a structural support system that can foster the abuse of power. Thus, they may fail to disclose abuse and/or admonish followers who refuse to be silenced. In the case of the leader who transmitted AIDS, for example, at least two of the elite members of the group knew of his condition for two years prior to disclosure (Butler 1990). In keeping the "secret" of sexual violence, the hierarchy helps to sustain the leader's authority while reinforcing rigid boundaries of group separatism that serve to strengthen the isolation of the movement as well as the insularity of the leader.

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Conclusion

This analysis of charismatic authority and the abuse of power has sought to establish a theoretical framework for assessing the prevalence of sexual violation within diverse charismatic settings. In presenting a structural analysis of authoritarian religious communities, this chapter has focused on the relationship between male domination and the formation of patriarchal institutions that commodify and sexually objectify women and children. In noting the parallels between incestuous fathers and abusive charismatic leaders, the analysis interrogates the structural characteristics of religious movements that provide a social context for the perpetration of sexual as well as other forms of male violence. Within this approach, violence against women and children is explained from an interactive perspective that examines the relationships among charisma, coercion, sanctions, and insularity.

In focusing on the structural dimensions of authoritarian control, this analysis does not address the psychological issues that also influence the development of charismatic movements and particularly their appeal among individuals who are in search of a strong male authority figure. Before drawing this discussion to a close, it is therefore important to consider, albeit briefly, the dynamics of devotion that also inform the perpetration of violence within patriarchal religious communities. Just as leaders exhibit characteristics of incestuous and abusive fathers, followers will frequently be drawn to movements with religious authority figures whose control over devotees replicates the patriarchal structure of their families of origin. In many cases, the families of the converts I studied were characterized by abusive and controlling fathers who were not unlike the charismatic leader. Yet what attracted the convert to the group was not a desire for another abusive parent, but a longing to create affective bonds with a father figure who was strong, loving, and nonabusive.

The tendency on the part of leaders to exploit the emotional vulnerability of these devotees, many of whom had disclosed their family histories to the leader, contributes to the abuse of power within alternative religious communities. Accordingly, the relationship between charismatic authority and sexual violation is defined by a complex set of interactions that involve both the structural dimensions of authoritarian control and the psychosocial dynamics of de-

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votional needs. Taken together, these interrelated aspects of religious commitment and abuse provide a more complete lens through which to assess diverse forms of clergy malfeasance in contemporary society.

NOTES

1. The data on Keri Jewell's testimony were derived from the transcripts of the congressional hearings into the events in Waco, Texas, July 1995.

2. While the majority of charismatic religious groups are headed by males, there are a number of new religious movements that have female leaders. For this study of sexual abuse, only the male-dominated groups are included.

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