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CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE in the family

A Review of Trends in the Literature
with an addendum on
The Incest Taboo - Some Theories

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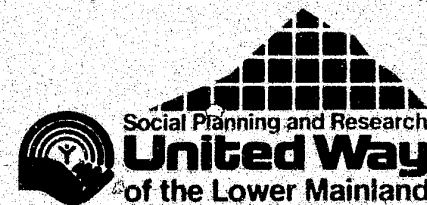
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Child Sexual Abuse Project

Working Paper Two

April 1982



CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE FAMILY

A Review of Trends in the Literature

with an addendum on

The Incest Taboo - Some Theories

Sarah Lawton-Speert

and

Andy Wachtel

Child Sexual Abuse Project

Working Paper Two

April 1982

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Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Lawton-Speert, Sarah, 1954-
Child sexual abuse in the family

(Working paper / Child Sexual Abuse Project ; 2)
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.

1. Incest. 2. Child molesting. 3. Family.
I. Wachtel, Andy, 1947- II. United Way of
the Lower Mainland. Social Planning and Research
Dept. III. Title. IV. Series: Working paper
(Child Sexual Abuse Project) ; 2.
HQ71.L38 364.1'536 C82-091137-2

ABOUT THE UNITED WAY
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PROJECT

In September 1980, a conference on Sexual Abuse of Children Within the Family was held, co-sponsored by The Justice Institute of B.C. and the B.C. Ministry of Human Resources Child Abuse Team. Over 200 people attended who have responsibility to victims, offenders, and their families. Since that time, both established and newly-formed groups have worked to create and implement preventive programs and treatment resources.

The Social Planning and Research Committee of United Way has a long-standing commitment to problems of family violence. It has sponsored a series of research projects, the Task Force on Family Violence, subsequent implementation committees and staff and volunteer support for conference planning.

The Child Sexual Abuse project is funded by the Western Regional Office, Health Promotion Directorate, Health and Welfare Canada. Work began in January 1981 with the establishment of a project advisory committee to support and help direct research and planning. The research will include a literature review, annotated bibliography, analysis of record-keeping systems and available information, present policy, and programs and models of treatment and intervention.

The Advisory Committee hopes to facilitate co-ordination of a multi-disciplinary approach to the problems identified. To this end, working papers are designed to provide common ground for discussion of issues among the various professions involved. And ultimately, both research and planning are directed towards fostering development of guidelines for integrated service delivery and program operation.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews changes in the analysis of child sexual abuse from the early decades of the century to the present. The most striking of these changes were:

- 1) Initially, incest was seen as an uncommon and atypical form of child sexual abuse. That perception has changed to the extent that much current theorizing about the causes and dynamics of child sexual abuse center on abuse within the family setting.
- 2) A long period of interest in trying to characterize the particular deviant nature of the abuser has given way to a strong focus on family dynamics and the "dysfunctional family".

The bulk of theorizing has focussed on father-daughter incest. Other incestuous relationships have been somewhat neglected. All the same, the literature on father-daughter incest does promise new insights into the factors underlying the general problem of child sexual abuse.

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CHAPTER 1

Four Introductions

1. Overview

This paper reviews changes in our understanding of child sexual abuse from the early decades of the century to the present. The most striking of these changes are two: 1) from a denial of the relatively common occurrence of incest to a central emphasis on it, and 2) concomitantly, from an attempt to characterize the deviant individual to a heavy focus on the familial context.

Some of the earliest research discovered that much sexual abuse of children took place among family members, but it has been only recently that families, rather than family members, have been implicated in this problem. This new awareness required a willingness to talk to all the family members, instead of just the ones most handy. The discovery of family therapy as a method of clinical treatment, and also an increasing interest by sociologists in the problem, have also helped advance a family approach to sexual abuse, in contrast to the earlier psychodynamic approaches.

Family dynamics have been easiest to identify in the case of incest. Father-daughter incest has been the kind most theorized about, since it is the kind most frequently observed. Here the sexual abuse takes place in the heart of the nuclear family, and the group process is most readily analyzed. (Finkelhor, 1979; p. 25)

These shifts in the focus of analysis do represent some advance in our understanding. At the same time, we take the position that advance has been gained in part at the expense of the wide acceptance of some dangerous assumptions. Much of the discussion in this review turns on these assumptions, especially the questionable notion that people can be seen as sub-units of a larger entity, the family (and it is this entity that is the "patient" in family therapy).

Incest calls into question the whole nature of relationships among family members. We argue that much of the literature betrays a cultural double standard; women as wives and mothers (and even as daughters) are expected to be more responsive and responsible than men in their corresponding roles. Men may commit offenses but women are faulted both for sins of commission and omission.

For their part, the women often tended to be "psychologically absent" in their relationships with both their husbands and their children. They seemed to exhibit a lack of psychological investment in the interpersonal aspect of their marriages and family lives. We speculate that this posture was the end result of multiple unsuccessful attempts at psychological investment that were either rebuffed or ignored by their mates. Lest we convey the impression of total victimization, however, one should note that the wives chose and, to a certain extent, "set up" their responses and modes of interaction. "Psychological absence" is an excellent defense mechanism and at the same time an effective method of escaping responsibility. The extreme blurring of role boundaries in incestuous families is a condition for which all adults within the family circle must be held accountable. Poznanski and Blos (1975) note that the wives of incestuous husbands choose to ignore or do not respond to their husbands' open and inappropriate behavior with the incest victims. Movements outside established role boundaries are perceived and limited by responsible spouses and parents. For whatever combination of reasons, one of the characteristics of the "psychologically absent" mothers of incest victims is to fail to protect by failing to limit inappropriate behavior between their husbands and their children. (Sgroi and Dana, 1982; p. 193)

This paper addresses analytical problems remaining in the literature - such as the double standard which colours the preceding quotation. At the same time, however, our review of the literature suggests that some genuine progress in understanding, which has been gained through the study of incest, is beginning to spill over into the study of the wider problem of child sexual abuse in general. Common issues include the historical situation of children as powerless and lacking in rights, notions that permit children to be viewed as possible (sometimes even as desirable) sex objects, and possible connections between victimization of an individual child both within and outside the family.

2. Problem Definition - Child Sexual Abuse and Incest

There is no pat definition of child sexual abuse. All the same, there is an emerging consensus about the general shape of such a definition. As well, the term 'incest' is being broadened in application and related to sexual abuse in a particular fashion. As we understand current trends in usage, the following definition captures the major points:*

child sexual abuse is the exploitation of children to meet the sexual needs of more powerful, usually substantially older individuals.

In that most theories suggest that children pass through developmental stages in understanding and expressing their sexuality, this definition excludes exploratory sexual play among peers.** For adult initiated activity, the test for exploitation is a simple one. Any physical interaction which would have sexual connotations if engaged in between adults and which the adult wishes to conceal from public knowledge is suspect.*** Even if the sexual nature of the activity is not understood as such by the child, its forbidden nature communicates it to the child as abuse.

* The definitions and statements of terms advanced here are working syntheses of views in the literature which the United Way Child Sexual Abuse Project Study Advisory Committee considers to be of explanatory merit. For a slightly differently elaborated working definition, see the Introduction to "Child Sexual Abuse and Incest: An Annotated Bibliography" (September, 1981) by the same authors.

** Finkelhor (1979), classifying responses in a sex survey, used an age differential of at least five years between offender and child victim for children under age 12 and at least 10 years for teenagers. Of course, abuse is possible between age peers and not all relations between teenagers and adults are necessarily abusive (although our society looks with some suspicion even on such situations as the marriage of a 15 year old girl and a 40 year old man, for example).

*** This test is sensitive to different cultural or community standards. As theories of child development vary, so too do the activities which are considered abusive. But this is not an argument for uncritical acceptance of cultural relativism. By the standards of current scientific theories for example, many cultures can be seen to be sexually abusive. Our own culture's penchant for putting young children in seductive costume and poses, and the current prominence of this in advertising, is a minor example. What we argue here, however, is that neither the person who finds such advertising titillating nor the parent who sells the services of his or her child as a model is abusive in the terms of this definition.

Incest, technically speaking, is a legal term reserved for a situation involving intercourse between proscribed relatives. For a number of reasons this term is coming to be used in a wider sense. First of all, in general (non-technical) usage, incest encompasses any sexual activity. Thus, for example, anal intercourse between relatives, which the law may distinguish as buggery, is also seen as incestuous behaviour. Second, to focus on the social import of the sexual activity, we include not only certain blood relations but anyone who stands in a kin-like relationship (and particularly those within the domestic unit). For example, just as sexual relations between a girl and her father are incestuous, we extend that to include sex with a step-father or with her mother's live-in lover. When, in addition, the criteria of exploitation and imbalance of power are met, incestuous relations involving a child or children constitute a special type of child sexual abuse.

3. Customary Warning about the State of the Art

The literature on child sexual abuse has grown prodigiously; much of it is arguably more or less wrong. It is important to keep in mind that a good part of the literature reviewed in this paper is dubious. As reviewers, we try to identify what seems suspect to us; readers will doubtless draw their own conclusions.

The bulk of the studies cited were based on small and highly unrepresentative samples. Except for the reanalysis by Gebhard et al. (1965), the pioneering research of DeFrancis (1969) and the surveys undertaken by Finkelhor (1979), few of the works included have even reasonably large sample bases. Some very influential papers depend on a few case studies; a notable example is that of Lustig et al. (1966), which generalizes from six cases of father-daughter incest. Sample size aside, representativeness is

an issue. Persons who come to the attention of psychiatrists, the hospitalized patient, offenders who are incarcerated, a sample drawn from second year social science classes - it may not be reasonable to generalize from any of these.

The case description approach does have a long history, in medicine for example. It works well when one can assume there is a strong pattern to be discerned, a disorder which exhibits only a limited range of typical symptoms. A traumatic event occurs, say a pregnant woman takes a contra-indicated drug, and a specific pattern of associated birth defects appears in the infant. Freud defined a whole range of personality disorders on the basis of a few interesting case examples and practitioners continue to find many of his diagnostic patterns, the syndromes and complexes, useful.

The difficulty is that it requires a leap of faith to assume similar patterned expression for child sexual abuse. This is because child sexual abuse is a very general term and describes a wide range of behaviors and problems. When we try to consider even a much narrower question - for example, does sexual intercourse between a father and daughter have damaging psychological implications for the girl? - we assume that our categorization of an act as incestuous defines its central significance. But, in fact, other considerations may be of equal or greater significance - what was the victim's psycho-developmental stage when the abuse occurred, what other family problems co-existed, was there a single incident or a pattern of abuse? Existing research suggests a number of typical patterns in family dynamics but is not yet able to speak to all these possible factors.

The literature also suffers from the disadvantage that most studies are retrospective rather than longitudinal. This makes it harder to isolate the impacts of abuse and chart typical consequences as they appear and change year by year after the events.

Together, these various limitations of the child sexual abuse literature make all the more worrisome the inevitable influence of ideological bias in studies in this field. Writers disagree about whether sex with children is "normal" or "sick", a sexual problem or an abuse of power, an act initiated by an individual or a family conspiracy, a threat to civilization as we know it or an inevitable feature of patriarchal society. We need not comment on the methodological inadequacies of particular pieces of research reviewed; the reader can get by simply remembering the typical shortcomings mentioned above. The ideological viewpoints, however, colour interpretation of findings in a subtle, difficult fashion. A major goal of this paper is to try to chart a coherent line through the literature, skirting assumptions which litter the field - differences in the ways in which child sexual abuse is defined, varying assumptions about the "innate natures" of men and women, children and adults, and relationships within the family.

4. Who this Review is For

This paper is addressed to workers in the wide range of professions which deal with cases of child sexual abuse. Because we look for a cross-disciplinary readership, no special background is assumed. Indeed, a goal of the review is to foster discussion of central issues among different professionals. This report does not promise an exhaustive review of the field but the literature covered touches on many of the major issues as we view them. The review should provide enough background so that other articles encountered can be placed within a certain context.

The scope and focus of this paper are relatively narrow. Some particularly notable omissions are the literature on incidence or prevalence of the various forms of child sexual abuse and that on the traumatic consequences, short and long term, of sexual abuse and incest. Both these issues demand full-scale reviews and would not be served by cursory attention here. Even within the purview of our discussion, there has been no attempt to outline the literature on incestuous relationships other than father-daughter.

For the reader who is new to the field, this review represents our understanding after a year or so of reading. For the reader who is steeped in the literature, we trust this paper has the charm and bravado of a first review.

CHAPTER 2

Full Circle - Incest Denied to Incest as the Prototypic Child Sexual Abuse

Freud and the Paradox of Incest Denied

Freud, as in so many areas, had a decisive impact on the study of child sexual abuse. His work tended to emphasize the importance of the incest taboo - the need for the boy to give up the aim of possessing his mother and the girl her father - as a universal psycho-sexual developmental crisis. He came to this theory through a personal crisis of his own.

After hearing amnestic accounts of incest from several women with hysteria, Freud theorized that incest was the psychic trauma responsible for the neurosis. Further analysis indicated the incestuous experiences were fantasies derived from the needs of the patients, rather than trauma inflicted from the outside. Freud felt devastated at the repudiation of his theory, and considered abandoning the analytic approach altogether. The salvation of psychoanalysis came with Freud's epic decision that children construct their own traumatic fantasies as their instinctual needs conflict with outer events. In effect, whether the incest happened or not was immaterial. (Summit and Kryso, 1979; p. 51, footnote)

Some authors assign Freud a deal of responsibility for the professional attitude engendered.

Freud's conclusion that the sexual approaches did not occur in fact was based simply on his unwillingness to believe that incest was such a common event in respectable families. To experience a sexual approach by a parent probably was unlikely for a boy: Freud concluded incorrectly that the same was true for girls. Rather than investigate further into the question of

fact, Freud's followers chose to continue the presumption of fantasy and made the child's desire and fantasy the focus of psychological inquiry. The adult's desire (and capacity for action) were forgotten. Psychoanalytic investigation, then, while it placed the incest taboo at the centre of the child's psychological development, did little to dispel the secrecy surrounding the actual occurrence of incest. (Herman and Hirschman, 1977; p. 62)

Florence Rush goes further, using Freud's correspondence with his friend Fleiss to trace his denial and eventual betrayal of his patients' experience of abuse. She makes this the centrepiece of her argument that societies always manage to avoid facing the ugliness of their degradation of women and children.

It is unfortunate indeed that Freud was so resistant to the possibility of female childhood seduction, for, had he followed through, he might have come to believe - as many others do - that there were, in addition to sexual assault, other causes of female neurosis ...

Freud was unable to admit that women could contribute beyond the role of passive wives and mothers, and held along with others that they were inherently defective. As a result, he could not acknowledge that they suffered from sexual abuse and social inequality and discrimination. At the risk of belaboring Freud's misogyny, it must be noted that his theories on sexual abuse of children and female deficiency are so closely allied that his bias cannot be avoided. (Rush, 1980; pp. 94-95)

Even those who argue that it was not Freud but Freudians who took the wrong path, agree about the unfortunate results (Finkelhor, 1980).

While Freud continued to maintain that many of his patients had in fact been molested, most psychiatrists began to assume that either the memories were fantasies, or that the child had desired the trauma because of an abnormal psycho-sexual constitution. Litine, et al., (1956) described the unfortunate effect of his erroneous assumption many years later; it drove people with an actual incestuous experience out of therapy, or worse, into psychosis, by continually denying the reality of their experience. (Rosenfeld, 1977; p. 92)

With incest relegated to the status of a common fantasy but a rare and exotic event, the study of child sexual abuse took on some predictable characteristics. The first was that those who talked about child sexual abuse at all emphasized the danger posed by the stranger, the deviate. Not that there are no such persons; pedophilia is a genuine problem. However, focus narrowed to the personal characteristics of deviants. Studies concentrated on persons convicted of sex offenses (Rosenfeld, 1977; p. 92). Analysis of the social production of such deviance tended to be shallow and along the lines that our culture's moral fibre was breaking down.

Moralists and sexual alarmists ... for many years did express concern that children were being sexually abused as a result, in their view, of increasing promiscuity and the liberalization of sexual attitudes (Hoover, 1947). Since they were using the issue of child molesting as a way of campaigning against other kinds of progressive reforms that most social welfare professionals supported (e.g. sex education, humane treatment of sex offenders, end to censorship), these latter tended to discount the alarms of the moralists. Moreover, in many respects the moralists were mistaken about the problem, since they portrayed the greatest danger to children as coming from strangers and depraved individuals outside the family. (Finkelhor, 1981; VS-12, p. 2)

Incest as the Prototypic Child Sexual Abuse

That some children face danger from within their own family has been a very disturbing concept in our society. While it was always understood that some parents provide less adequate home environments, indeed that some are corrupting influences, there was a long-standing cultural resistance to scrutinizing and intervening in family life.

The first period when public interest focussed on child abuse occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1875, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals intervened in the abuse case of a nine-year old girl named Mary Ellen who had been treated viciously by foster parents. The case of Mary Ellen was splashed across the front pages of the nation's papers with dramatic results. As an outgrowth of the journalistic clamor, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was formed. Soon incorporated under legislation that required law enforcement and court officials to aid agents of authorized cruelty societies, the NYSPCC and other societies modeled after it undertook to prevent abuse.

... (However,) natural parents were not classified as abusers of the great majority of the so-called "rescued children". In fact, the targets of these savings missions were cruel employers and foster or adopted parents (Giovannoni, 1971:653). Rarely did an SPCC intervene against the "natural" balance of power between parents and children. (Pfohl, 1977; pp. 313-314)

This resistance was swamped in a characteristic surge of public concern following the redefinition of the problem as "the battered-child syndrome" (Kempe et al., 1962).

Despite documentary evidence of child beating throughout the ages, the "discovery" of child abuse as deviance and its subsequent criminalization are recent phenomena. In a four year period beginning in 1962, the legislatures of all fifty states passed statutes against the caretaker's abuse of children. (Pfohl, 1977; p. 310)

The social movement which mobilized around this problem agitated for the recognition of children's rights. Scholars in this area began to document a long (in fact immemorial) history of child abuse, sexual as well as physical, both within the family and outside it (DeMause, 1974).

A second critical focus was trained on relations within the family as the new wave of feminism arose in the late 1960's. The family was seen as playing a critical role supporting sex role inequality (and not merely sex role differences). Thus, analysis of violence against women, which began with a focus on rape (which itself turned out to involve assault by intimates in many cases), progressed naturally to wife battering (and the concept of rape within marriage). This concern subsequently spread to other forms of family violence, notably physical abuse of children and, more recently still, child sexual abuse (for some connections drawn see Dietz and Craft, 1980; Rush, 1980; Butler, 1980; and Finkelhor, 1979).

Abuse of power was seen to be distressingly commonplace, not rare and deviant. The idea that incest was a relatively common occurrence became plausible. Strangers who lurk in parks or lure children into cars with forbidden sweets gratify their sexual passions at considerable risk. By contrast, recruiting children within the security and privacy of the home - children who are always available, already subject to one's authority, dependent - it suddenly seemed horribly plausible that these lesser risks might tempt many.

The children's rights outlook differed from the feminist analysis in that it suggested meliorist rather than major reformist approaches. That is, where feminism has a radical edge which argues that only a fundamental change in the social order will finally eliminate sexist power abuses, the children's rights movement seems more sanguine about the possibility of incremental changes altering the condition of children.

Finkelhor (1979) argues that children's rights advocates conceptualize the problem of incest on the micro-level (as a problem of "dysfunctional families"*) rather than on the broader social level favoured by feminists. Thus, there are two major analyses, each of which acts as a partial criticism of the other, which have brought child sexual abuse into the open. For both, child sexual abuse within the family is a special concern, one of central theoretical importance.**

Current child sexual abuse literature strongly reflects a growing scholarly and popular emphasis on family dynamics. Child sexual abuse outside the family circle is not so fully explained; there is an unsatisfying miscellany of character defects and situational factors apparently at work in extrafamilial abuse which don't resolve into a more general analysis. Because of this, the bulk of the review that follows centres on incest. More specifically, father-daughter incest is the single best developed topic. In theoretical terms, it represents the best illustrations of the dynamics at work.

* And see the critique of the concept of "dysfunction" below, page 25.

** It is also true that a large portion of cases coming to the attention of service providers are intra-familial or incestuous in the broad sense. However, the space given to incest in the literature is disproportionate and to father-daughter incest especially so. For example, Loreda (1982) notes:

Although the most frequently reported type of incest is parental, usually involving father and daughter, the most common form of incest may be sexual activity among siblings, typically between brother and sister . . . Research indicates that girls are equally as likely to participate in sibling incest as in parent-child incest . . . It has also been reported that boys are as likely to participate in incestuous relationships with brothers as with their step-fathers. (p. 177)

CHAPTER 3

Focus on the Offender

The Search for the Typical Offender

During the thirties, forties and early fifties, the bulk of research shifted to court-referred populations. This was in sharp contrast to Freud's investigations which were based on an upper-class private practice population that had little contact with the law. (Rosenfeld, 1977; p. 92)

When incest was considered to be a rare, almost exotic behaviour, researchers thought it reasonable to see if a simple theory or single classification scheme could explain most offenders. After all, the job of science is to find a simple explanation for an apparently complex situation. Unfortunately, as in other parallel attempts in the history of the study of deviance (aiming to isolate the "criminal personality" or a general cause for juvenile delinquency, to take two very prominent examples), it began to seem that similar behaviour was the consequence of a wide variety of factors.

Meiselman's summary scheme (1978) is a good example of the result. The classification scheme is atheoretical; it has no unifying principle.

Classification of Incestuous Fathers

Endogamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Heavily dependent on family for emotional and sexual needs* Unwilling or unable to satisfy sexual needs outside the family <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Personality disorder<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Shy and ineffectual in social relations* Intellectual defense structure and tendency to paranoid thinking* Intensely involved with daughter, over-controlling of her* Often involved with prepubescent daughter- Subcultural variety<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Lives in isolated rural area* Moralistic, periodically atoning for sins* Social milieu semitolerant of incest* Usually involved with postpubertal daughter
Psychopathic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Criminal history* Sexually promiscuous, unrestrained by marital bonds* Little emotional attachment to daughter
Psychotic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Severe ego disorganization of organic or functional origin
Drunken	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Incest occurs only when father is extremely intoxicated
Pedophilic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Generally attracted to young children as sex partners* May lose interest in daughter as she ages
Mental defective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Low intelligence a factor in reduced ego controls
Situational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Incest occurring only during high-stress period for father

The factors are plausible; incest is certainly more likely in a situation of stress, where the man is of low intelligence and has reduced ego controls, is intoxicated, has little emotional attachment to his daughter, is predisposed to sex with children, and feels unable to satisfy his needs outside the family. The question, however, is whether the typical incest offender is significantly more likely than the non-offender to be mentally defective, psychotic or pedophilic. On such questions, the literature is inconclusive at best. A few illustrations suggest the differences in findings.

Mental Deficiency - Contradicted in the Literature

Some have speculated that subnormal intelligence could be a factor that enables fathers to disregard the incest taboo, either by limiting their understanding of what sexual relationships are forbidden or by impairing impulse control through a decreased ability to visualize the consequences of actions. Meiselman found individual cases reported in the literature (e.g., Bender and Blau, 1937) in which a mentally defective father engaged in sex play with his young children as if he were one of their peers, and some studies with larger samples have found a high rate of subnormal intelligence among incestuous fathers. Weinberg (1955) classified nearly 65 percent of these fathers as being of dull normal intelligence or below, while only about nine percent had superior intelligence; Kubo (1959) reported that two out of 13 fathers were what he called "imbeciles".

The Kinsey Institute (Gebhard et al., 1965) conducted one of the largest studies on the intelligence of incarcerated sex offenders (including 138 incest offenders and 60 heterosexual child molesters). They found that the incest offenders exhibited a higher level of intelligence than the other group of sexual offenders. Only nine percent of incest offenders had an IQ of 70 or below. Cavallin (1966), Lukianowicz (1972) and Weiner (1962) had also found incest offenders of average or above average intelligence.

Meiselman suggests that personal maladjustment is a more important determinant of incest with prepubertal daughters (under 12 years of age) than intelligence, which may only serve to allow these fathers to rationalize their sexual behaviour more elaborately. Even in cases where fathers are mentally defective, Kubo (1959) noted that they seemed fully aware that incest was socially disapproved behaviour, and that they attempted to conceal the incestuous activity from others.

Psychosis - No Clear Association

A common assumption is that a high proportion of offenders must be psychotic to be capable of committing incest - a "crazy act". Most studies do not support this hypothesis. Cavallin (1966) and Lustig et al. (1966) found no instances of psychosis prior to the incest offense. Weinberg (1955) states that "several" of his 159 incestuous fathers were psychotic. Other investigators have reported 6% (Medlicott, 1967), 12% (Merland, Fiorentini, and Orsini, 1962) and 40% (Magal and Winnick, 1968). There is some evidence (Martin, 1958) that imprisoned incest offenders display more generalized psychological disturbance on projective tests than men who are imprisoned for sexual relations with young, nonrelated females.

The exact proportion of psychotic offenders in any one study depends on the research setting. Studies conducted in prison settings for instance, usually find very few psychotic fathers because such men are much more likely to be sent to mental institutions if they are convicted in the first place. The Kinsey Institute study (Gebhard et al., 1965) discussed this sample bias.

On the other hand, it sometimes appears that the offender became overtly psychotic after the offense has been exposed, during the stress of the investigation or trial, or while serving his prison sentence. Some of these cases of psychosis may be manipulative and a way to avoid going to prison but, more commonly,

the psychosis is schizophrenic in nature and seems to have been developing over a long period of time and to have been precipitated by the turmoil surrounding the public exposure of incest. Weinberg (1955) found that 11 men in his large sample had become psychotic after being imprisoned for incest. Cavallin (1966), reporting on the psychiatric assessments of 12 imprisoned incest offenders, found three who appeared to be borderline psychotics and two who were quite definitely schizophrenic but only displayed symptoms after incarceration. The concept of subclinical schizophrenia may be intriguing but it is not very conclusive.

Alcoholism - A Disinhibitor, Not a Cause

Early research (Marcuse, 1923) noted that chronic alcoholism, or a drunken episode at a time of stress, is often associated with father-daughter incest. Subsequent studies have echoed that finding. Bluglass (1979) reports a higher percentage of alcoholics among incest offenders than for other sexual offences. In several studies, approximately half the offenders were problem drinkers (see Virkkunen, 1974). In the literature as a whole, a wide range of (significant) association is reported (Julian and Mohr, 1980). Only 15% of Lukianowicz's (1972) sample were diagnosed as alcoholic; Kaufman et al., (1954) found 73%.

Some of the most detailed information has been provided by Gebhard et al., (1965), who defined as alcoholic any man who drank a "fifth" or more per day or drank to the extent that his social and occupational adjustment was seriously impaired. Using this definition, nearly 25% of the fathers imprisoned for sexual relations with prepubertal (under 12) daughters were alcoholic; the percentage of alcoholic fathers decreased as the age of the daughter involved in the case increased. A much larger number of offenders, although not alcoholics, drank "to relieve stress" and reported that they had been drinking at the time of the first incest incident. Use of drugs other than alcohol did not seem to have been a factor in any of the incest offenses.

Virkkunen (1974) examined the ways in which alcoholic offenders differed from non-alcoholic offenders. He found that the alcoholics had committed more criminal offenses and this was especially true when considering acts of violence only. The alcoholics had also committed more aggressive acts before the detection of incest. Virkkunen (1974) stated that this study bore out the idea that alcohol has some kind of a triggering effect in starting sexual abuse because of the inhibition-removing influence of alcohol.

The data can be interpreted in a slightly different way, however. For instance, Finkelhor (1979) argues that alcoholism doesn't cause incest; rather, it is another symptom of underlying deviance. Alcohol acts as a facilitator, a disinhibitor, and thus "precipitates" the incestuous approach. This is particularly likely for the first advance or for escalation of the sexual abuse. Alcohol seems to serve a similar function in other situations of intra-familial abuse, wife-battering for example.

Pedophilia? - Incest as an Extension of Normal Sexual Preferences

Based on a review of studies which have attempted to classify child molesters into various types, Quinsey (1977) hypothesized that: "incestuous child molesters are a special case of situational offenders whose offenses are related to family dynamics and opportunism rather than inappropriate sexual preferences" (and see Swanson, 1968). Quinsey, Chaplin and Carrigan (1979) designed a research project to test that hypothesis. Sixteen incest offenders were matched with 16 child molesters as closely as possible according to the offender's age at the time of the abuse and compared the age(s) of the victims. Data revealed that father-daughter incest offenders showed more appropriate age preferences than the child molesters. Offenders who had abused other female relatives exhibited a similar (but nonsignificant) trend.

Working from the opposite direction, Gebhard et al., (1965) found that it was rare for pedophiliacs to extend their sexual interest in children to include their own.

Studies of the sexual preferences of nondeviant heterosexual men, using penile responses to suggestive pictures (males and females of different ages) as a measure of sexual arousal, have consistently indicated that, although men respond most to adult females, they also show considerable arousal to pubescent and prepubescent girls (Freund et al., 1972; Quinsey et al., 1975).

Costell (1980) sums up the research as follows:

Offenders classified as non-deviant are those men whose preferred sexual partners and activities fall within a range accepted as normal. When such men choose a female child or adolescent as a sex partner, it is usually an indication that access to age-appropriate, preferred partners is limited, that an acquiescent minor is available, or that social mores and poor impulse control fail to inhibit such behavior. Father/daughter incest is the best studied example of this phenomenon. . . Such relationships often reflect family disfunction rather than true sexual psychopathology.

Summary

As the above examples show, individual traits do not distinguish offenders from non-offenders. Other classificatory schemes, notably the "endogamic" category that heads Meiselman's list, refer not to single traits but to whole syndromes. Patterns of relationships dominate the research literature today; we consider those next.

CHAPTER 4

Blaming the Victim

The Victim-Offender Dyad - Notions of Victim Precipitation

An interpersonal offense obviously includes not only an offender but a victim. In the case of incest, the two are intimately bound up with each other in a more than metaphorical sense. Even where the relationship between offender and victim clearly appears to be one of exploitation, people display a strong tendency to try to explain why that particular child was victimized. Indeed, as already intimated in the discussion of the Freudian role in defining the research attitude towards incest, interest in the role of the victim accompanied the focus on the offender.

Many of (the children) were felt to be active participants or initiators in the relationship for which only the adult was to be punished. For very different reasons, the child was again focussed on as the responsible party. (Rosenfeld, 1977; p. 92)

Victim provocation has been studied by many (see Meiselman, 1978; Mannheim, 1965; Ramer, 1973; Virkkunen, 1975; and Rosenfeld, 1977a). Herman and Hirschman (1977) characterize this approach as "blaming the victim", one of a series of defense strategies (along with denial and social and emotional distancing) they see researchers adopting because of personal discomfort (and see Geller, 1977). They offer the following quote from the classic study by Bender and Blau (1937) as typical:

These children undoubtedly do not deserve completely the cloak of innocence with which they have been endowed by moralists, social reformers, and legislators. The history of the relationship in our cases usually suggests at least some cooperation of the child in the activity, and in some cases the child assumed an active role in initiating the relationship... It is true that the child often rationalized with excuses of fear of physical harm or the enticement of gifts, but these were obviously secondary reasons. Even in the cases where physical force may have been applied by the adult, this did not wholly account for the frequent repetition of the practice. Finally, a most striking feature was that these children were distinguished as unusually charming and attractive in their outward personalities. Thus, it was not remarkable that frequently we considered the possibility that the child might have been the actual seducer, rather than the one innocently seduced.

The literature on the victim differed in emphasis from that on the offender. Researchers viewed offenders as rare types of deviants and looked for distinguishing pathological characteristics. It was felt to be unnatural for men to prefer little girls, especially their daughters. By contrast, Freudian theory suggested that every girl goes through a stage of desiring her father* and it is quite normal for a girl to come to prefer someone like her father. It is hardly considered unnatural for girls to be attracted to "mature" men**. Thus, there was less research interest in observing incest victims for signs of predisposing pathology. Rather, as in the quote above, it was characteristically observed that they were seductive.

* To be fair, a Freudian would probably argue that the little girl wants her father as a love object, not a sex object in any adult sense of the word. She might still learn to be "seductive", however.

** There is no concept like "gerontophilia" - the inappropriate lust after much older men - simply because our theories do not suggest it is inappropriate. In popular parlance, there are notions that do capture this sentiment. One is the unfortunately titled "Lolita Complex". Rush (1980) makes the telling point that we take the term to refer to Lolita's nymphomania whereas the sexual mania was mostly in the mind of Humbert. Another is the "sugar-daddy" relationship, really a form of exploitative prostitution. The girl falling in love with a man "twice her age" (not to mention three or four times) is regarded with some suspicion.

The view of the offender has changed in the literature from sexual deviant to essentially "normal". It has come to be recognized, as noted in the preceeding chapter, that it is not psycho-sexually abnormal for men to find girls, even quite little girls, arousing. By contrast, the view of the girl victim has been more resistant to change. A tinge of the notion that the child brings trouble on herself persists, even among researchers who take a fairly strong position on offender responsibility.

(The daughter) is entering adolescence and is learning to transmit the magical vibrations our society requires of the emergent woman. She radiates the fragile innocence of a child mixed with the vaguely destructive allure of the temptress. (Sumnit and Kryso, 1978; p. 54)

Summary

The concept of victim precipitation has proven seductive to researchers in the field of child sexual abuse. The most unwilling and prudent victim can still be faulted for provocation; after all, people rob banks "because that's where the money is". As is clear from our definition of child sexual abuse, we believe that placing the responsibility for abuse, even in part, on the child is turning the logic of the situation on its head (and see Clark and Lewis, 1977; Chapter 10).

It is not that children are "innocent" in the sense that they have no will, no desires, no sexual aspect to their nature. However, what is acted out in father-daughter incest, for example, is adult fantasy, not the children's. There is little to be learned from the literature on the offender-victim relationship. The qualities that the offender seeks in the victim - availability, vulnerability, malleability, etc. - are commonplace in children. Qualities the offender does not find at the start can be taught.

CHAPTER 5

The Family Dynamics Approach

Introduction - A Focus on the Mother-Father-Child Triad

A focus on the character of the offender does not go far towards explaining why incest occurred. It apparently can result out of any of a variety of circumstances. A focus on the victim is even less successful - any kind of girl might be a target. Victim precipitation is a slippery concept, especially in the case of incest (see Silverman, 1974 and Finkelhor, 1979). Offenders evidently find the victims seductive; if the clinician also finds some victims seductive, the observation suffers from at least three sorts of possible contamination.

The first is a halo effect: to some men, known incest victims may derive a certain cachet from their dubious status. They have been involved, however unwillingly, in a highly illicit and culturally loaded sexual relationship which marks them with a tinge of notoriety and curiosity value.

The second contaminant is simply definitional; our society tends to regard children as at least mildly attractive (and teaches them to behave so). The third bias results from the attempt to infer pre-incest demeanor from that exhibited after the sexualizing effects of the incestuous situation itself.

A focus on the relationship between offender and victim seems more promising. Is there some match up in personality type or circumstances such that certain children are more likely to be victimized by particular sorts of offenders? Do certain types of offenders create predictable effects on their victims?

However, these questions, which imply that one can limit observation to the dyad of offender and victim, have come to be regarded as mis-stated. They neglect the context in which incest takes place - the family. That context is defined in the literature not by the incestuous dyad of father and child but by a triad of relationships involving the mother as well.

Incest has come to be viewed as occurring only within certain family dynamics (Lustig, 1966; Cormier, 1962). This development is sketched by Rosenfeld (1977; p. 92)

The focus on individuals and their traits made it difficult to capture the complexities of these cases. Beginning in the mid-fifties a new emphasis appeared in the literature on incest. Kaufman, et al. (1954) reported their experience in treating 11 cases of incestuous activity between a parent and child. They wrote of a complex web of interpersonal relationships involving three generations of a family in complicated interpersonal dynamics. Though they reported the individual traits of the family members, their conceptualization was multi-generational and oriented towards the social economy of the family. This focus would merge in the sixties with the growing interest in the family dynamics.

Perhaps the most important work of the fifties was Weinberg's classic research on incest. Weinberg (1955) studied 203 families in which incest had occurred, primarily between a father and a daughter. All of his cases had been reported to the courts and, in many, one participant had been incarcerated. As a sociologist, Weinberg was particularly concerned with the family structure. He felt that incest could occur in two different types of families. The first was the ingrown or "endogamous" family, where members of the family were not able to form meaningful relationships outside the home ...

The second type of family was loosely organized with sexual relationships of all types permitted with few restrictions. In these families, incest was just one aspect of a more general promiscuity.

The cogency of this family dynamics approach has made it central to all discussion of incest today (including father-son incest - see Raybin, 1969 - and brother-sister incest - see Meiselman, 1979). While we acknowledge its importance, it is essential to note from the beginning that most of the logical errors of earlier approaches (e.g., assuming an effect of incest is really its cause) have been carried into this new approach. Most of these errors will be raised in the course of reviewing the family dynamics literature below. However, one new problem arises directly out of the family dynamics level of analysis - the implications raised by the notion of the "dysfunctional family". Because this concept has become so prominent in the literature, it merits immediate attention.

The "Dysfunctional" Family - Dangerous Implications

In treating husbands and wives, one becomes aware that incest is an extreme symptom of family maladjustment which existed from the beginning of the marriage, and that the incest was the last and most serious manifestation. The case becomes in effect one of family therapy, the outcome depending on the resources of husband and wife, their willingness to involve themselves and to work together mutually towards a common aim. (Cormier et al., 1962)

The leap from the notion that incest results within certain family dynamics to the idea that it is a symptom of particular types of families ("dysfunctional" ones) seems reasonable enough. Conceptually, the family is a unit. People do act to preserve the integrity of the family or to further its common interests. The family unit bounds an important set of interdependent relationships. Furthermore, it is often a fact that all members of the incestuous family are motivated to preserve it; this gives the therapist an important lever for intervention. Finally, a focus on family dysfunction saves the therapist from having to blame and therefore antagonize a client.

A danger must be recognized, however, in treating the family as an "organic system" which tries to maintain "family homeostasis" (Giarreto, 1976; p. 43). At a crucial level, the analogy is false. The father is not the family "head", the mother is not its "heart". To make that plain, the baby is not the left knee or the spleen. The family can be broken up and the individuals remain viable.

Similarly, the "dysfunctional family" is not sick in the way an organism falls ill. Most importantly, it is not "dysfunctional" in the same sense for all its members. The incestuous father may be victimizing his daughter for what he sees as the greater good of keeping the family together. Not so incidentally, he is also meeting certain of his personal needs. The incest victim may be forced to acquiesce to the situation to save the family too, but she does not initiate the relationship for that reason; she does not in fact initiate it at all (Finkelhor, 1979). In decisions affecting the family, free and equal choice by all family members is not the rule.

Where there is confusion on these points, as in the following example where it is the "family" that is seen to act, the therapist can come to believe that it is the family (rather than the victimized members) which must at all costs be saved.

People in incestuous families have had long and painful experiences with deprivation and separation. As a result, family members are far less concerned with community standards than with intense, pregenital fears of abandonment and with attempts to obtain minimal nurturance. The family's energies were devoted to staying together at all costs. Incest seemed to serve this function. It reduced intra-familial tension. The whole family, including non-participant members, was involved in condoning and supporting the practice. In the presence of the parents' sexual estrangement, all family members were reassured by the incest, reassurance that was vital in the presence of intense separation fears ... Thus, while adultery would threaten the family because one parent was finding sexual satisfaction outside the family, incest served the structural function of keeping the family together with all needs met internally. (Rosenfeld, 1977; p. 92, emphases added)

Some writers are concerned that the concept of the "dysfunctional" family jeopardizes the victims, is another instance of blaming the victim.

To assign to each family member a role in causing the incestuous assault is to imply that whatever happens to women and children in our homes can be traced back to something that is our fault. The promise held out to us by family systems theorists is that once we figure out as mothers and as children what we have done wrong, our victimization will stop. (Butler, 1980)

Varieties of Incestuous Family Dynamics

From the beginning, a variety of family dynamics were associated with incest. In his review, quoted above, Rosenfeld (1977) cites Weinberg (1955) as the seminal work which distinguished two basic types - the generally promiscuous and the "endogamous".* It is the latter which has seen the greatest elaboration and efflorescence (and see Meiselman's offender classification above, page 7).

Here we consider two different types of classification that expand this dynamic. Just as it is important to remember that father-daughter incest has been singled out for special attention, so it must be noted at the outset that endogamous dynamics form a major and perhaps disproportionate part of current theorizing. In fact, these two observations are related. One of the principal reasons for all the attention paid to father-daughter incest is that it is explained so compellingly by the various endogamous dynamics.

* Endogamous (or endogamic) incest is a very clumsy term which we use because it has been adopted in the literature. Literally, it is entirely redundant because "endogamy" alludes to relations within a kin group and incest is endogamous by definition. The sense of the usage is otherwise, however. It emphasizes the turning inward, an avoidance of extra-familial relationships.

The Stern and Meyer Classification - A System of Logical Contrasts

Stern and Meyer (1980) developed a very neat set of three types of incestuous family dynamics, warning that "too frequently, the literature on incest has oversimplified the dynamics of father-daughter incest by implying a single stereotyped interactional pattern among family members". As one can scarcely improve on the economy of their presentation, the following outlines the classification:

The first interactional pattern, the dependent-domineering pattern, is the one most commonly seen at the Centre for Rape Concern. It is characterized by a marriage between a dependent, inadequate man and a stronger, domineering woman. He looks to her for support and nurturing. She, in turn, will often speak of having not two but three children, and, in fact, she treats her husband as another child. He has little real power in the family, although he may be provoked to violent outbursts. Eventually, as the mother-wife grows tired of her husband's dependency and his inability to meet her needs, she withdraws from him emotionally and sexually. He then may turn to a less threatening more accepting female - his daughter. This often occurs when he is under the influence of alcohol.

The second interactional pattern, the possessive-passive pattern, occurs in some strong, patriarchal families. In such families, the father controls everything. His wife and his children are his possessions. Mother tends to be passive and downtrodden and may be partially incapacitated by some physical illness. The father feels that his daughter belongs to him and that this fact give him license to use her sexually. Often, he rationalizes his molestation of his daughter, stating that his purpose was to "break her in" to sexual relationships and that he "treats her better than other men would."

The third interactional pattern observed at the Centre might be termed "incestrogenic". It is the dependent-dependent pattern. Frequently in these families, one or both of the parents have been sexually abused by their parents or other family members as children. Often, the parent/victim marries, if not another

victim of sexual abuse, a victim of childhood emotional deprivation. Clinging to each other, these emotionally dependent adults cannot meet each other's needs or those of their children and, instead, look to their children for parenting and love.

A closer look at these three interactional patterns reveals that all involve relationships in which the overriding characteristic is resentment. Each partner resents his/her mate because each needs his/her mate, and each must depend excessively on the other while being unable adequately to meet the other's needs.* (pp. 83-84)

The Summit and Kryso Spectrum - A "Practical Guide"

We are convinced that incest is a specific variant of child abuse with identifiable antecedents and predictable consequences. We are also impressed that incest itself is a symptom common to a diversity of parental conflicts, and that a classification of that diversity is required to achieve a differential specificity of management and prognosis (p. 52).

Summit and Kryso set out a "progression of categories of sexual involvement" of supposedly increasing individual and social harmfulness. The authors realize that their scheme is not logically tight and comment on the fact that the two ends of their spectrum seem almost to join. "There is a distressing similarity (in category 10) to the characteristics of the 'ideological' category (category 2) ... The distinction depends on highly subjective and relative judgements." (p. 56) With that problem in mind, we take the liberty of collapsing and reordering categories in presenting their spectrum.

As the authors do, we can make short work of their first four categories - not that these incestuous situations are less serious in their consequences but because they are of a lower order conceptually and are not well articulated with a family dynamics approach.

* Note that the authors, while focussing very much on the family, never talk in terms of "dysfunctional families" as such but rather in terms of adults who are acting inappropriately.

Category 1, "incidental sexual contact", is sexual abuse suppressed but leaking out, giving rise to varieties of what might be called sub-clinical incest. Such abuse can poison the relationship between child and parent but certainly won't get the offender arrested.

An example of incidental response to adolescence is household voyeurism. Men may station themselves around corners with mirrors or outside of slightly open doors to watch their daughters undress. They are content that this has no impact on their daughters because they are sure their daughters are not aware of it. The girls report otherwise, usually with a strong sense of disillusionment and distress. (p. 53)

Category 2, "ideological sexual contact" is the psychological converse of the first. Here parents encourage sexual activity as beneficial for the child and "potential arousal, anxiety and guilt are sublimated through idealization and rationalization by parents who are sometimes strikingly naive about the consequences for the child." (p. 53)

Category 3, "psychotic intrusion", is stated to be a rarity. We have dealt with it sufficiently in the discussion on types of offenders.

Category 4, "rustic environment", is of interest because it is a "stereotype that dominates popular concepts of incest". The authors include it even though they recognize, rightly we believe, that it is a dubious concept.

There is a prevailing folklore that isolated mountain settings promote incest and inbreeding. We suspect that rustic incest jokes supply a prejudicial scape-goat for urbanites not entirely immune from incestuous conflicts, and that regional variations in incest behavior are minor. (p. 53)

Summit and Kryso might have done better to drop this category entirely and to seek to explain rustic in terms of the same dynamics as urban incest, with some emphasis on social isolation.

Category 5, "true endogamous incest", begins the family dynamic descriptions which the remaining five categories elaborate. This variant is the first type in the Stern and Meyer classification (page 29 above). Summit and Kryso devote a lot of space to the discussion and differ in a number of small ways from the Stern and Meyer outline. Most notably, they characterize the mother as disenchanted and withdrawing rather than as truly dominant (and see further below).

Categories 6 and 7, "misogynous incest"* and "imperious incest" are variants of the second type in the Stern and Meyer classification. In the former, the offender shows a tendency toward violence and punishment of women. "The daughter is seen as a possession, and possessing sexually is an assertion of his invulnerability to the control of women as well as an act of positive defiance toward his wife." (p. 55) Imperious incest is characterized by an offender that "plays out an incredible caricature of the male chauvinist role, requiring wife and daughters to perform acts of sexual fealty."

Categories 8 and 9, "pedophilic incest" and "child rape", are at most emphases rather than separate types. The first distinguishes a preference for sex with children which is more or less successfully repressed but breaks out in the stimulating and secure environment of the home. Child rape is an elaboration of misogynous (or imperious) incest. "The child rapist, confusing masculinity with power, can feel sexually adequate only by frightening and overpowering his victims." (p. 55) The offender may carry these anti-social tendencies into his outside relationships.

* The authors note that the man in their true endogamous incest category is also basically misogynous - "romantic idealization, disenchantment, and anger towards the wife are typical".

Summit and Kryso's last category is "perverse incest", yet another logical variant on the Stern and Meyer second type. In this case, the sexual element becomes the overwhelming mode of expressing the power relationship.

These cases become more bizarre, more frankly erotic, more flagrantly manipulative and destructive than those in earlier categories. Many of them have kin of self-conscious, sex-scene quality in which the individual seems to be trying to set up rituals to fulfill a variety of forbidden fantasies ...

This group is called pornographic because of an apparent need to go beyond limits of socially acceptable sexual practice to explore whatever is most forbidden, with incest representing the ultimate taboo. (p. 56)

Summary

Study of the context of intrafamilial child sexual abuse provides the most powerful tool to understand the causes and immediate consequences of incest. Shifting focus to the family carries a danger that the family unit will come to seem more important than the individuals who constitute it. Nonetheless, it does seem that a number of patterns of relationships among father, mother, and child victim may give rise to father-daughter incest of various degrees of destructiveness. (In fact, while the literature is much less developed, similar dynamics are reported in father-son incest and in situations where both father and mother are abusive.) Because the family dynamics approach brings together so many observations, we devote the next chapter to a discussion of some major implications.

CHAPTER 6

Dimensions of Endogamous Incest - Discussion

Character Defects

Although family dynamics researchers no longer talk about offender characteristics in isolation, they do generalize about characterological defects that interact with social or situational factors.

Stern and Meyer note that "resentment" is a theme common to all types of endogamous incest. Resentment, however, is itself a symptom of a sense of inadequacy and inability to engage in mutually satisfying relations with ones spouse. In social terms, this is role failure and it is perhaps better to consider it at this level; the incestuous father is resentful because his marital relationship doesn't live up to his expectations. If we trace the problem back to its source, it is not merely resentment which must be abated.

Summit and Kryso argue that all offenders exhibit a "lack of impulse control". This is virtually tautological. One is not supposed to give in to incestuous impulses. Where incest occurs, there is therefore lack of impulse control. Even in the over-controlled situation they describe for "incidental sexual contact", where offenders fight their tendencies, this struggle itself confirms essentially weak impulse control.

Rigidity, dominance-submissiveness, and dependence are characterological traits which together suggest the notion of the authoritarian personality (see Brown, 1965; Chapter 10). Rather than take this further, however, we prefer to shift the analysis to the social level. That is, we do not suggest that incest offenders be viewed as authoritarian. Rather, it seems to us that incest is by definition abuse of authority and that authoritarianism is one way of characterizing dysfunction in the family.

Machismo - The Stress of Role Expectations

Machismo is a term that, like incest, has undergone considerable expansion and popularization in recent years. It refers to a cultural definition of male roles (and masculine identity) in terms of strength, control, dominance and the like. Perhaps more to the point, machismo stresses the fear and suppression of the contrary tendencies - weakness, dependency, etc. Machismo takes to an extreme the sex role distinctions in society and attempts to suppress male expression (or recognition in themselves) of "feminine" qualities.*

The need to feel in control, at the very least within their own home, characterizes offenders in all the endogamous incest situations. But the contradictions at the heart of the concept of machismo defeat the incestuous father in his aims. He seeks control, obedience, respect, devotion in addition to self-gratification. He must delude himself into the view that his actions are not predatory but the mere expression of his rights, a natural extension of his dominant protective role. However, like the master who is faintly but inescapably aware of his dependence on his slaves (and their knowledge of that), the incestuous father is caught in the trap that he is dependent on his family in order

* In the Latin cultures in which the term machismo was first coined, attributes like emotionalism and sentimentality, for example, are not proscribed but must be clearly appropriate and "manly". One can express great feeling for parents, comrades, country or noble ideals.

to express the dominance he wants. Stern and Meyer's classification express the offender's role failure as emphasized by a successful or dominant wife (i.e., he isn't dominant), by a totally (or even aggressively) passive one (i.e., dominating a dishrag is not dominating anything) or by a demandingly dependent wife (i.e., he can never be strong enough). Misogyny is a natural ideological position for men trying to deal with these "attacks" on masculinity.

The system of assumptions underlying machismo characterizes not only the incestuous family but also much writing on incest. Even where researchers note this, it still affects their outlook. One may start with the assumption that it is not enough for a man to control only his family; incest is itself a sign of dependency. A rather striking example of this sort of analysis of endogamous incest is found in Gebhard's worldly-wise description of the "dependent" offender, a variant of the offender as victim.

The "normal", or at least the "nonincestuous" male, when fed up with his life and unhappy marital state, seeks and usually obtains relief from stress in a number of ways that society deplores yet tolerates: he gets drunk; he discharges his aggression in barroom or party brawls; he finds heterosexual gratification either from prostitutes, pickups, or a more stable affair or with a mistress. The incest offender seems unable to utilize these time-honored methods effectively. He drinks, to be sure, but it does not seem to provide an escape or catharsis. His hostile feelings, if physically expressed at all, are expressed toward his children or wife rather than toward other adult females or males. Lastly, and most importantly, the dependent variety of incest offender does not obtain, or often even seek, coitus with adult females other than his wife. At least two thirds were not engaging in extramarital sexual activity at the time of their offense, and the remaining one third or less generally sought it with low frequencies better measured in terms of per year than per month. (Gebhard et al., 1965; p. 227)

Social Isolation - An Intensifier

Running through the classification schemes of endogamous incest is the element of social isolation. First of all, incest is both more likely to result from and also is a compensation for social isolation (see Bagley, 1969; Riemer, 1940; Weinberg, 1955; Finkelhor, 1979). Isolation per se - the rustic and dispersed community, the cultural backwater - and alienation - the anonymity of tract housing or labyrinthine high rises - both represent situations of potentially weakened social control due to conventions preserving social distance.*

As well, men who are emotionally cut off from the larger community - through unemployment or work failure, unrewarding or stressful jobs, or even the sense of hollow success - are thought to be at greater risk of offending. They compensate for that social isolation by making greater demands on the family and withdrawing into it.

One study making this connection was done by Justice & Justice (1979). They gave family members who had experienced incest a checklist of 43 events that may have occurred in their lives, or changes they may have experienced, in the past 12 months. These events ranged from serious to trivial, from death of a spouse and divorce to preparing for Christmas. The more serious changes require greater adjustment and carry a heavier weight on the scale. Above a score of 150 on their scale, persons are at increased risk of getting sick. The authors wanted to see if similar stress was associated with incest.

* It is not necessary to assume that nobody knows what goes on in the privacy of the incestuous household, rather that no one feels they have any business knowing or intervening.

Justice and Justice reported a mean score for incestuous families of 240. They hypothesize that stress wore the family members down to the point that they lost the restraints they might normally have over their behaviour and collapsed in disaster. For these families, the disaster happened to be incest. Justice and Justice note that excessive change is not a cause of incest; it is a contributing condition. In their study sample, most of the changes were initiated by the subjects themselves. Some of the changes might be consequences of attempts to surround the incest in secrecy.

These findings parallel other observations in the literature. Riemer (1940) pointed out that almost all of the 58 incest cases that he studied revealed some serious disruption of the family's well-being in the year or two before incest began. Economic crises, diseases or accidents, and loss of employment because of alcoholism were often the stressful events. Weinberg (1955) asserted that all of the fathers in his sample had gone through a period of restlessness and tension just prior to resorting to incest. Injuries, diseases, financial setbacks, and other kinds of personal losses or conflicts had often left the father in a state of anxiety and depression that he exacerbated by increasing his alcohol consumption. His distress was accompanied by increasingly impulsive behaviour and often by intensification of his sexual desires.

We believe it is more useful to think in terms of the social isolation implied by all these changes and crises rather than in terms of the resultant psychic distress and tension. This is not generalized stress but arises specifically out of social isolation, lack of social supports and role strain or role failure.

If an incestuous situation develops, the sense of social isolation is intensified for everyone in the family. The secret erects its own protective barriers. And, especially for the domineering father with an adolescent daughter, the need to exercise continuing control can lead to extreme restriction of her activity.

Role Inversion - The Missing Grandparents in a Three Generation Dynamic

The fathers involved in incest typically come from backgrounds of emotional deprivation and desertion experiences which have generated strong desertion anxiety . . .

The mothers also experienced either physical or psychological desertion in their childhoods. These desertion experiences left them with strong dependency residuals and needs to be mothered, which apparently impelled these women to define their daughters in adult maternal roles. The mothers had markedly ambivalent feelings toward their own mothers which were transferred to their daughters as the daughters were defined in maternal roles ...

The occurrence of incest between father and daughter represents a role reversal and disintegration of the boundaries between the generations, with the child cast in the role of satisfying needs of her father and required to assume a protective role toward her mother ...

The normal generational differentiation was destroyed in the role reversal between mother and daughter. The child's normal developmental goals were subverted in the service of the idiosyncratic needs of her parents, and eventually even the strongly institutionalized sexual arrangements of the family were violated. (Lustig et al., 1966; p. 33 et passim)

By definition, incest places the daughter in an anomalous status, fulfilling a "wifely" sexual role. The above position, however, takes this further and sees the daughter often acting in a "parental" role vis-a-vis her own parents. Lustig, one of the pioneering developers of the concept of the dysfunctional family, hypothesizes that both parents are themselves victims, emotionally (and psycho-sexually) crippled in childhood; they try to satisfy their dependency needs through the daughter. Incest is only one aspect of this problem, indicative of the depth of familial dysfunction. And incest is not an inevitable outcome:

We hope our observations might generate fruitful hypotheses for further research, particularly employing comparisons with similarly dysfunctional but nonincestuous families, and we defer any more definitive conclusions to future investigators. (Ibid., p. 39)

Unfortunately, this research program remains unfinished and, as noted earlier, an often too simplistic notion of the dysfunctional family has become entrenched in the incest literature.* One of the central points in any description of endogamous incest, however, remains the observation of some degree of role inversion (Browning and Boatman, 1977).

Lustig described an "incestrogenic" dynamic in which the issue is not the triad of father-mother-daughter relationships but precedes it. The daughter is not only turned into a surrogate wife for her father but also, and more fundamentally, takes the place of her grandparents, mothering both her parents.** The dynamic is a three generation cycle and in theory can go on damaging people generation after generation. The central fact, however, whether the incest dynamic is two generational or part of a pseudo-three-generational chain, is that the young victim is the one who suffers from the distortions introduced in her family relations.

The Notion of the Bad Mother - The Other Face of Machismo

It is interesting that despite the formal innocence of the mother in the actual incestuous event, she seems to emerge as the key figure in the pathological family transactions involved. As the reader has by now noticed, it has been impossible to describe either mother or daughter apart from each other. They seem to emerge as psychologically inseparable, each reflecting certain ego subsystems of the other ...

* Lustig et al. (1966), appear to be fairly clear about the asymmetries in the situation. As in the case of many influential articles, the shortcomings indicated by the authors are subsequently ignored. In insisting that incest is a sort of conspiracy of all members to try to deal with the dysfunctional family's problems, Lustig did not lose sight of the fact that the daughter's problem may or may not stem in turn from her parents' relations with their parents; certainly, however, the problem does not start with her.

** This theory enables Lustig et al. (1966) to explain the prominence of father-daughter incest compared with father-son, mother-son or mother-daughter types (although they see repressed homosexuality in some of the parents). The authors argue that the daughter is the obvious surrogate for each parent's mother, a role not easily projected on a son.

Despite the overt culpability of the fathers, we were impressed with their psychological passivity in the transactions leading to incest. The mother appeared the cornerstone in the pathological family system. (Lustig et al., 1966; pp. 38-39, emphasis added)

The prominence given to the role of the wife-mother in the dynamics of father-daughter incest is striking (Cornier et al., 1962; Raphling et al., 1967; and see above, Summit and Kryso, 1979; Stern and Meyer, 1980).* The mother in various instances is guilty of sins both of omission and commission. She may withdraw physically from husband and children - becoming heavily committed outside the home. Where this throws her husband into contact with the children (particularly if he is unemployed for example and at home) without her supervision, at the very least she may be accused of failure to protect her daughter (Justice and Justice, 1979). The mother may withdraw sexually from the father, either simply rejecting him or becoming a frustrating tease (Lustig et al., 1966). She may be so in need of relief from her "conjugal duties" that she actively arranges for her daughter to substitute for her. She may be weak or ill, withdrawing to her sick bed and training her daughter to mother her. She may be dominant and imperious, belittling her husband and goading him into retaliation through incest. She may similarly act cold and withdrawing towards the daughter, making her feel abandoned and perhaps causing her to relish the strange sort of "power" she derives from taking the wife's role with her father and in this way "retaliating" against her rejecting mother.**

* For a similar treatment in a case of father-son incest, see Awad (1976).

** The unloving mother and the weak father are fixtures in other problematic family dynamics in addition to that of incest. For example, the literature on schizophrenia explored this dynamic for many years. Bateson et al., (1956) in his work on the double bind phenomenon, theorized about the production of schizophrenia in a family member who was victimized by being forced to take on the family's "sickness" leaving the parents and other family members to lead more or less "normal" lives.

There are writers who question the centrality of the mother's role (Butler, 1980). Even for them, however, there remains the question (especially important in terms of what intervention strategies are possible) of whether the mother was aware of (and condoned) the incestuous relationship. The question invites several types of responses. There are those trying to explain genuine obliviousness - the father being careful to conceal his deeds and the daughter unable to talk (because of threats, fear of the consequences of exposure, terrible shame, or lack of where-withal to explain what is occurring). Other mothers are characterized as unconsciously blocking realization because of inability to deal with the consequences of acknowledgement. And a third approach considers women who can mount only ineffectual opposition or react with impotent passivity (see Summit, 1979; Finkelhor, 1979).

One line of inquiry which has arisen in these regards notes that the same notions of machismo which lead to father-daughter incest are central to the analysis of wife battering (Dietz and Craft, 1980). These authors point to evidence that many mothers in incestuous families not only suffered from rejection as children but may indeed have been abused and now again find themselves in an abusive marriage (Tormes, 1968; Weinberg, 1955; Rhinehart, 1961; Summit, 1979; Finkelhor, 1979).

The significant point in all this, however, is that even the latter analysis makes concessions to patriarchal assumptions in our culture. That is, the notions of the bad or the weak mother illustrate the extent to which we hold higher expectations of a mother's than a father's actions.

Whether she is genuinely unaware, is concealing, or refusing to see, the mother is no longer able to fulfill her function in the family and protect the daughter. (Comier et al., 1962)

Or, an example at an even deeper level:

Depending on their background, their adult adjustment, their choice of a mate, and their relationship with their daughters, they can either prevent incest or they can almost assure it will happen. (Summit, 1979)

Mothers are expected to be naturally nurturant, giving, and - like the proverbial she-wolf guarding her cubs - fearless and totally without concern for self in protecting their children. Fathers by contrast are more easily excused for weakness and self-indulgence. To consider only a key example, the incestuous father is seen as frustrated and starved of sex by his wife; mothers apparently have no comparable sexual needs. Even when writers understand this bias, it proves difficult to take into account.

In about half of the cases some degree of sociosexual deprivation existed at the time of the offense, which may have triggered the behavior. Of course, sociosexual deprivation is a chronic condition with most men; at least it is uncommon to find a man who claims he has all the sociosexual contact he wants. (Gebhard et al., 1965)

Summary

The dimensions suggested in this analysis of father-daughter incest dynamics are all quite commonplace. Many people feel isolated in our society. They lack both the supports and the constraints that we associate with the small-scale community. Sex role relationships are problematic. The changes attributed to the current wave of feminism (and the reactions to it) are widely felt as threatening. The exposure of the pervasiveness of family violence, and notably that of child abuse, suggests that the ranks of the "walking wounded" are large. Though we know people are resilient, it sometimes seems that the proportion of fully mature, competent individuals must be small.

The family is an emotional hothouse. People bring their stresses home and hope to find relief. If they are not successful in this, failure of expectations adds to their distress. All these popular generalizations would lead one to expect a large number of dysfunctional families. Whether incest is a "survival mechanism" (permitting the dysfunctional family to continue to dysfunction) or merely a possible consequence of offender problems, this is evidently not a time for complacency.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions - Towards a General Theory of Child Sexual Abuse

The family dynamics which may result in father-daughter incest do not easily generalize to other contexts of child sexual abuse. Their underlying dimensions, however, do suggest some probable factors in the sexual abuse of children generally.

Availability and Acquiescence

The family situation is an excellent case of the victim as sitting duck. Opportunities for abuse can be cultivated and the child may have no real avenue of escape from the offender (Forward and Buck, 1979). However, availability and acquiescence are factors in a wider range of victimization and explain why large numbers of child sexual abuse cases appear to be perpetrated by offenders who are known to the victim - relatives from outside the households, care-takers, friends of the family, relatives of the child's friends, etc. (DeFrancis, 1979; Finkelhor, 1979).

Offender Needs for Sense of Control, Competence

Sexual abuse itself may express any of a range of needs - dependency, aggression, abandonment, anxiety-reduction, perverse self-loathing, even sexual gratification. On a more general level, the incestuous father can be seen as seeking control and a resulting sense of compensating "competence" which escapes him outside the family or in his relationship with his wife (Summit and Kryso, 1978). In some sense, the child sex victim yields any abuser the same attractions.

Sexualization of Children

The child incest victim may be taught that the basic way to get close to others is through sex. A distorted sense of self or "acting out" self-destructively may lead to perpetuation of the child's victimization with others, both within and outside the family (Myers and MacFarlane, 1979). Studies of juvenile prostitution, for example, suggest an association with earlier intrafamilial sexual abuse (James and Meyerding, 1977; Layton, 1975; TRACY, 1979). Beyond this, there is a sense in which our society tends to "sexualize" children (children are taught age-inappropriate behavior which ambiguously emphasizes an amalgam of the cutesy, innocent and seductive). As well, there continues to be inculcated into men a sense that even quite young girls are attractive and more or less appropriate sex objects (Rush, 1980).

Social Isolation

Different aspects of social isolation come into play to make the child vulnerable to sexual abuse outside the family as opposed to within it. The socially isolated incestuous family is characterized by a vigilant father who might like to manage the other family members in their outside interactions.* Privacy conventions make it difficult for outsiders to "pry" into family affairs.

Outside the family, children are seen as vulnerable when there is little parental supervision (DeFrancis, 1969). In many circumstances, and even with increased public attention to child neglect, there is no effective public supervision of children. Since the school is at least a partial exception, evidence of abuse may be noticeable there.

* * *

* But see the discussion above (p. 41) on the role assigned to maternal vigilance.

There are other cross-overs of factors in incestuous family dynamics to general explanations for child sexual abuse. What is clear, however, is that we are not yet in a position to gauge the real significance of the factors already proposed. Some are fuzzy, many are interrelated. Some affect everyone in our society and therefore must require other factors to result in child sexual abuse.

If we are to escape a growing multiplicity of generalizations, a good deal of further work needs to be done. We end with the point that our inquiry should not be focussed on abuse alone. One of the greatest gaps in our present understanding is fairly summarized in Finkelhor (1979):

A deeper flaw is the fact that we know more about sexual deviance than we do about sexual normality or ordinariness - to choose a less value-laden word - and this topic is a good case in point. Here we are inquiring how children come to have sexual experiences with adults when we hardly know how they come to have sexual experiences at all. Thus all theories about children's sexual victimization must be viewed against their true backdrop: a vast ignorance of the forces governing the development and expression of sexual behavior in general. (p. 20, emphasis added)

Addendum:

The Incest Taboo - Some Theories

The Decline of the Incest Taboo

Prohibitions against incest are often described (not altogether correctly, it turns out) as among the very few universally found social rules (Rist, 1979). Lindzey (1967) writes that:

. . . the existence of prohibitions against nuclear incest (and by this I mean sexual relations between members of the nuclear family other than mother with father) long has been observed to be one of the few regularities in complex human behavior that transcends time and culture. The presence of such taboos appears to be almost exceptionless, and they are much more than ideal cultural patterns, inasmuch as the overt incidence of incest is believed generally to be very low.*

This supposed universality gives the incest taboo something of the status of a natural law. With the recent awareness in our society that the occurrence of incest is much more common than we might like to believe (Sarafino, 1979; Finkelhor, 1979), a sense of indignation has grown. It is not merely that the behavior itself is outrageous but also that our assumptions have been undermined. No one can "repeal the law of gravity"; what then has gone wrong with the inviolable taboo against incest?

* "Nuclear incest" is not proscribed in all cultures. Some examples of brother-sister marriage, for example are very well known - among the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt, the royal family of the Inca, and some others. These royal marriage customs do not contradict the generality of nuclear incest. No one, after all, provides as suitable a match for a divine king as another exalted person. The same argument does not apply and incest is not permitted to others in those societies. However, this sort of exception (and there are others) does emphasize that incest prohibitions are not related to the nuclear family unit as such but to a set of kin specific to the particular social structure. In our society, sexual relations with other categories of relatives and in-laws (between grandparent and grandchild, uncle and niece, etc., and variably with cousins) are also treated as incest. Theories about the incest taboo are general and tend to ignore these specifics. Which relatives are proscribed by the taboo can sometimes be explained for a particular society but that is quite a different exercise and not one to be attempted here.

The first point to consider is that even taboos vary greatly in social significance and efficacy. Our society does not make great use of taboo as a social control mechanism. Furthermore, we no longer have a strong sense of penalty for breaking the taboo.

Tabu may be defined as a negative sanction, a prohibition whose infringement results in an automatic penalty without human or supernatural mediation . . . any situation of such inherent danger that the very act of participation will recoil upon the violator . . .

Some societies use tabus as a major way of controlling social behavior, while others have relied upon external social sanctions. Even such a widespread tabu as the incest tabu cannot always be properly so classified, for whenever an external social penalty is required to maintain it, some of the essential force inherent in genuine tabu is lost. (Mead, 1934)

"Taboo" is a more appropriate term than "prohibition", for the incest interdiction, which often lacks any legal sanction, is typically accompanied by a special sense of intense horror. . . There is great variation among societies not only with regard to the extensiveness of its application and the range of intensity of associated emotions but also in the occurrence of ceremonial and customary abrogations and in the relative frequency of specific types of infraction. (Mead, 1968)

If incest went unpunished in the Northern Gilbert Islands, for example, the inhabitants traditionally believed that the sun would fall from the sky. Similar taboo violations on Celebes Island, in Indonesia, were thought to precipitate crop failure, and on Mindanao, in the Philippines, to bring on flooding. Adhering to the taboo was said to prevent these natural disasters. (Forward and Buck, 1979; p. 9)

In our society, external sanctions are used to a large extent - incest has been absorbed, relatively recently, into the criminal codes (Bluglass, 1979). Before that, supporting sanctions were provided by church interdiction, though perhaps incest's tabooed nature was also felt more strongly. While there is no doubt that people still look with horror (and also with prurient interest) upon cases of father-daughter incest, for example, it is not clear that there is any consensus on what the nature of the harm is.

Prior to the development of a genetic theory of inherited traits, there was a general belief that the fruit of incest was likely to be born deformed, the monstrous result of the "mixture of bad blood". Following popular acceptance of a genetic theory, the same notion was translated as the deleterious effects of extreme inbreeding. Some writers have pointed out the illogic of holding this view (of the result of human inbreeding) while simultaneously boasting about the admirable qualities achieved in strains of pure-bred horses, dogs, etc.

It has often been pointed out that the effects of close inbreeding in a small group depend upon the original frequency of deleterious genes. Theoretically, a succession of nuclear families could practice inbreeding for several generations without adverse effects. Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, was the product of eleven generations of brother-sister marriage within the Ptolemaic dynasty. (Harris, 1975; p. 327)

The fear of monstrous offspring has not completely disappeared. However, it is in decline not only because of the above argument but also, of course, because our society no longer automatically equates sex with pregnancy.

Taboos vary greatly in the force of revulsion engendered and so in how seriously they are taken.

Samoan society has so little confidence in the observance of . . . taboos . . . relating to food during pregnancy that a secondary tabu is relied upon, the one against the inherent dangerousness of an expectant mother's ever being alone; thus under cover of enforced gregariousness, the woman's food is supervised. (Mead, 1934)

Breach of a taboo in one society (or in a particular context) may be regarded as merely seriously embarrassing, a severe lapse in taste. At the other extreme, violation of a taboo may turn a transgressor into a moral leper.

Some argue that the incest taboo is gradually weakening in our society in this sense too. It simply doesn't threaten social relations today in the same way it might once have.

The penalizing of some forms of incest is characteristic of all human societies; the varying intensity of the punishment is largely determined by the degree to which the practice of incest interferes with the social obligations essential to the maintenance of the social structure. The law against incest is rarely enforced in modern societies with the vigor with which the correlate amongst many primitive peoples is enforced, for no modern society is based upon (kinship) obligations to the same degree as are most primitive societies. (Fortune, 1934)

Indeed, some social workers and medical professionals complain that the taboo is too weak now to prevent incest from taking place but is just strong enough to be effective in keeping incest a secret (Butler, 1979; Armstrong, 1978).

Quite apart from the incest taboo's relative potency today, incest itself remains a very corrosive event - damaging to individuals, destructive to family relationships, undermining family members' capacity to interact with others outside the incestuous family, stultifying as a secret, and heavily stigmatizing if disclosed. Whatever the status of the taboo, incest does visit various misfortunes on victim, offender, and other family members as well. In fact, each theory purporting to explain the origin of the incest taboo has at its centre a particular vision of the central harm brought on by incest. It turns out that none of these theories is very convincing on the point of why incest was first proscribed. Each, however, does help explain why some sense of the incest taboo is so universal and has persisted for so long.

Theories About the Origin of the Incest Taboo

The reasons for suppression of incest have piqued the imagination of generations of social science theorists. The incest taboo was a central concern of anthropological writing during the heyday of the speculative (armchair theorizing) tradition of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Only a few strands of that era's theories retain any influence today. In effect, there are two main views on the incest taboo which can contribute to our current understanding of the problem. A third theory also has echos down the present. The latter is dealt with first because it illustrates some of the central concerns of the speculative tradition and represents a caution to present theorists.

Eugenic Argument

Edward Westermarck (1891) entered the debate on the incest taboo by coming down strongly against the notion then prevailing in scientific circles that, in the beginning, people lived in promiscuous hordes in which the family and the incest taboo were unknown. Instead, following the Darwinian tradition of extrapolating from animal behavior to human, he argued that pairing was always found among humans, as among some of the apes, and that the incest taboo reflects an innate sense of sexual repulsion among individuals reared together. Further, that natural aversion had positive survival value as it prevented deleterious in-breeding.*

* Fortune (1934) attacked this theory as follows:

While it may be true that familiarity does not arouse sexual desire, such familiarity must be of a non-sexual character. If, for example, brothers and sisters were encouraged to sexual familiarity in childhood, there is no evidence that sexual aversion would develop between them.

But for counter-arguments, see Lindzey, 1967 and Fox, 1962.

In this theory, 19th century speculation is seen in its modern scientific aspect; Westermarck used observations of animal behavior, exhibited a psychological orientation and discussed cultural traits in terms of their evolutionary survival value. However, one overwhelming failure in this theory minimizes its importance for us and illustrates why this and other "eugenics" theories have faded (and see above). The problem is - if the incest taboo reflects an inbred aversion, selected for over the ages, why is there any need for the social control mechanism of a strict prohibition? We don't have a taboo against walking on the ceiling. Natural law - in this case gravity - makes it ridiculous. Similarly, we must choose useful theories on incest among those that suggest that incest occurs and thus requires control, rather than among those that argue that incest is extremely unlikely.

Alliance Theory

Tylor (1889) provided an explanation which was couched in social terms. He argued that the incest taboo is not instinctual. Rather, it is a social invention created because of the advantage it permits - the cementing of relations within a much larger group of people through intermarriage. If there are also evolutionary advantages from the creation of a larger gene pool, that is a supporting - but unintended - benefit. Tylor was especially interested in the political aspect of his theory. In simple societies, virtually all social relationships are subsumed in kinship; the major way of establishing political alliances is through the reinforcement of kin ties through marriage. Grade school histories provide excellent examples of kings and queens contracting politically motivated unions.

Levi-Strauss (1947) is the most influential exponent of "alliance theory" today. He downplays the political benefits in favor of the general effect the incest taboo and marrying out of the family can have on the whole fabric of society - sustaining economic ties, defining social relations, setting the pattern for all sorts of reciprocal relationships. Incest threatens this wider web of social relations.

There are several cultural consequences of the incest taboo. One of the most basic is that family members must look outside the nuclear family for marriage partners. This led to the establishment of exogamy, the taboo of marriage to certain kin . . . By instituting exogamy, the social group was enlarged, leading to a shift of dependency from the family to the community. Such a shift from familial to community dependence is a requirement for the development of society. (Rist, 1979)

The Development of Personal Autonomy

Freud provides the underpinning for the other major theory of the incest taboo of significance to our discussion. This contribution lies not in Freud's own theory (1913) of the origin of taboo - a sort of group memory of primordial sons rising up and killing their father. In this regard, Freud's writing is an amusing throwback to the bad old days of wildly speculative anthropology. Rather, Freud's impact arises out of attempts by anthropologists to test the developmental crisis he was so luridly discussing - the Oedipus complex. This complex is an expression of the existence of the incest taboo. In every child, it suggests, the incestuous impulse is overwhelming. In every child, the repression of the impulse and the resolution of the frustrations represented by adult authority and cultural rules demanding self-denial are fundamental developmental landmarks.

People who live together, who depend on each other for love and support, and who have intimate daily contact with each other will tend to develop sexual relationships with each other. Children respond gladly with their whole bodies to loving contact. They want to be treated as something special, and the sharing of sexual feelings could be very exciting. (Summit and Kryso, 1977)

The notion of the Oedipus complex was widely influential. Anthropologists realized, however, that Freud was generalizing not only on the basis of a distinctly neurotic sample but also within a particular and quite rigidly patriarchal society. The nature of adult authority and cultural constraints on the infant vary enormously among cultures. Malinowski (1927) was the first important researcher to test (and eventually to expand) Freud's notions in a markedly different society - in this case among the matrilineal Trobriand Islanders.

Malinowski drew the conclusion that the Oedipus complex as formulated by Freud is only one among a series of possible "nuclear complexes", each of which patterns primary family affects in a way characteristic of the culture in which it occurs. In this perspective, Freud's formulation of the Oedipus complex as based on a triangular relationship between father, mother, and son appears as that particular nuclear complex which characterizes a patriarchal society in which the most significant family unit consists of mother, father and child. The alternative nuclear complex which he postulated for the Trobriand Islands consisted of a triangular relationship between brother, sister, and sister's son, this in function of the nature of matrilineal social structure in which a boy becomes a member of his mother's kin group and is subject to the authority of his maternal uncle rather than the biological father. One of his most important observations was that in the Trobriand Islands ambivalent feelings very similar to those described by Freud with respect to father and son can be observed between mother's brother and sister's sons. Relations between father and son, on the other hand, are much more close and affectionate; however, Malinowski felt that the father should not be considered as a figure in the kinship structure since the Trobrianders do not recognize the existence of biological paternity. The child is seen as conceived by a spirit which enters the mother's womb and later the father appears to him as the unrelated mother's husband.

In addition, Malinowski noted that the Trobrianders give a very special importance to the brother-sister relationship. While the brother has formal authority over the sister and is responsible for her support, their actual relationship is one of extreme avoidance, to the point that an object may be handed from one to the other by means of an intermediary. He characterized the brother-sister incest taboo as "the supreme taboo" from the Trobriand standpoint; while incest with the other primary biological relatives and within the matrilineal kin group at greater biological distance is also forbidden, in no instance are the taboos as strict or surrounded by intense affects as in the brother-sister case.

However, we can include the mother as a primary object and also make the mother's brother into the primary focus of masculine identification if we presuppose that much of the boy's early feelings about him derive from the special place which the uncle, as her brother, occupies in his mother's eye. Presumably, at a very early age the small boy becomes aware of the special importance which he has to her, both as an authority figure and as a primary object in her fantasy life. In this perspective the ideal of sexual jealousy can be built into the triangular situation involving mother, brother, and son in that we might say that, by some process which is not yet fully understood, the boy becomes aware of the strong affective importance which the brother has for his mother; and when his jealousy and anger are awakened, he deals with them by identification. The mother's brother then becomes the primary rival. (Parsons, 1964; p.352 et passim)

The Trobriand boy's developmental crisis and the associated incest taboo he must learn are markedly different from those that Freud describes. Parsons (1964) outlines yet another such complex, which she illustrates with examples from southern Italian family life. In that society, the nature of the crisis and the way it is resolved is different again and particularly so for the father-daughter relationship.

... (The) incestuous impulses in the father-daughter relationship are quite close to the surface, in such a way that we might speak of a lesser degree of repression than is implied in Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex. There is of course a taboo but one might well speak of a persistence of the incestuous impulses on a preconscious level in such a way that they are openly expressed in cultural idiom, as in the frequent use of the word jealousy to describe the father's feelings about the daughter's suitor. (p. 386)

The incest taboo makes sense in these and other family structures; the Oedipus complex, however, must be understood in a rather generalized sense. Children want full access to their beloved parent and face a crisis when they must learn that wider social relationships exert dominant counterclaims in their beloved's attentions. The issue is not sexual per se (infantile sexuality is diffusely encompassing and not focussed in an adult sense) but it is expressed in terms of sexual rules which force the child to accept socially prescribed family roles. Incest would retard or totally inhibit the progressive development and socialization of children.

In any type of civilization in which custom, morals, and law would allow incest, the family could not continue to exist. Incest would mean the upsetting of age distinctions, the mixing up of generations, the disorganization of sentiments and a violent exchange of roles at a time when the family is the most important educational medium. No society could exist under such conditions. The alternative type of culture, under which incest is excluded, is the only one consistent with the existence of social organization and culture. (Malinowski, 1927)

Summary

Two theories remain important in current thinking about incest and influence therapists and service deliverers. Both posit that incestuous desires are commonplace (and even inevitable) and that the incest taboo is a social prohibition which arises because of the necessity to promote wider social ties.

Alliance theory argues that incest would destroy ties between families and the larger segments of society (Rist, 1979). In our society, kinship relations have been heavily supplemented or supplanted by other forms of relationships. Still, incest often characterizes inward-turning, socially isolated families. Whether social isolation results in incest, as clinical studies suggest, or incest results in social isolation, as alliance theory proposes, remains unresolved. But the effect of incest as a continuing danger to the establishment of social ties is a notion common to both.

Neo-Freudian theory holds that incest destroys the family itself and, in the process, the ability of children to learn how to relate to others (Storr, 1964; Schwartzman, 1974). Sex is a powerful force and incest may severely complicate relations within the family and inhibit the ability of family members to develop autonomous relationships outside it. Incestuous families are often characterized by failure of relationships and by role inversion and confusion. At the very least, this theory would suggest that to engage in incest is to play with fire. The child victims, and perhaps their siblings as well, may be seriously scarred.

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