

Overview and Methodology

by Warren Farrell, Ph.D.**

THE THREE FACES OF INCEST AND FEMALE SEXUALITY

Women reporting good incest experiences feel better about incest than women reporting bad incest experiences.
THE LAST TABOO?

After examining three hundred incest relationships, the effects of incest are

perhaps best described as a magnifying glass - magnifying the worst in a poor family environment and the best in a caring and loving family environment. It happens in all types of family environments. It is not always bad. In fact, the participants report more positive experiences than negative. Except in cases of male adult (over 18) -

female child (preteenage) relationships. Then it depends on whether we believe the

women's or men's reports. Or whether we are getting selective reporting from both sexes.

Whether or not a relationship is bad depends to a remarkable degree of some very

clear circumstances. Among mutually consenting adults seventy positive and one negative relationship was reported. Yet almost 25% of the relationships reported were adult

male with preteenage female. These were more than twice as likely to be reported as

negative than positive. Less than 1% of the relationships involved adult females with

preteenage boys (mother-son relationships were usually with teenage sons). If a relation-

ship was positive it is probably still continuing. If it was negative, it generally

had stopped some (seventeen) years ago and the woman felt increasingly guilty as time

passed.

Incest is seldom rape. Physical abuse was actually associated with incest in

only about one percent of the relationships,* although some five percent of the women

considered themselves raped although not physically abused (psychologically coerced).

The average negative relationship lasted about four a a quarter years including father-

daughter relationships. Rape is usually a one time occurrence. The average positive

relationship between male parent and female child lasted about eight years. Most of

these relationships were still continuing when reported. To treat incest like rape,

then, is to treat 100% of the cases in a manner

*Except those referred to me because of the physical force.

What about
low form
of incest

applicable to about one percent of the cases. And even then, the reasons for rape and incest are different. And the solution? Sending the rapist to prison does not hurt the victim. Sending the father, for example, to prison may deprive the victim of her source of financial support. Sending the daughter to a foster home deprives her of her emotional support. The victim is victim of double victimization.

While incest magnifies the best and worst of the family environment it also exposes the family fabric to rays of guilt that threaten to employ the magnifying glass' intensity to the point of burning a hole in all but the strongest of family fabrics.

In fact, the most important intervenor in father-daughter incest is not the mother. Not authorities. Not the school system. It is guilt.

Why do these findings differ so markedly from what is presently believed about incest? Simply, because current knowledge about incest is culled from the most traumatic cases- reports to psychologists, psychiatrists and prison officials. Almost every published study of more than twenty-five participants is of prisoners. We have an even more distorted type of knowledge of incest participants than we had twenty years ago about homosexuals- the patient and client reports that lead to the conclusion that all homosexuals are sick. We had no reports of homosexuals who were not patients, and to date we have no in depth reports of non-patient incest participants. Incest participants who have not gone to psychologists, psychiatrists or prison have a substantially different story to tell. Interviewing clients and prisoners about incest is like interviewing Cuban refugees about Cuba. But with incest the problem is finding a population who has not reported to anyone and may be punished with life imprisonment or even death* for reporting the incest relationship.

So I put a series of advertisements in magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and Canada ranging in socioeconomic readership from Harlem's Amsterdam News to Psychology Today. I asked persons with positive or negative incest experiences to call me collect (to minimize eliminating poorer participants) with the option of giving a false name

*Consenting adult incest participants may receive life imprisonment in Michigan; if the incest involves statutory rape, the older participant may receive life imprisonment in 19 states, or the death penalty in Alabama or North Carolina. Incest is generally arrested

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to guarantee anonymity. My methodological purpose was not to get a random sampling of the population (persons answering ads in newspapers and magazines were at the very least likely to be more literate, less private and more assertive than the average North American for starters) but a less biased sample than prisoners, clients and patients. My substantive purpose was to gain an understanding of whether or not

relationships that the participants considered beneficial (positive) were possible, and if they were, then what were the dynamics that tended to produce positive vs. not explored negative relationships. While the findings are pioneering, part of the implication of pioneering is the territory left unexplored and the tentativeness of the exact nature of each discovery, in the context of the whole.

From among the over three hundred persons responding to my ads I weeded out through "the detector" questions just over two hundred interviews involving exactly three hundred first hand relationships. Forty-two percent of the interviews were with women.

Sixty-two percent of the relationships were described by the participants as primarily positive experiences; 24% were described as primarily negative; and 14% were described as being about equally helpful and harmful, and so were categorized as mixed.

When only the incestuous relationships reported by women are considered, there were almost twice as many negative as positive cases. Women reported 52.2% negative, 30.4% positive and 17.4% mixed relationships. However, ^{MS} Magazine ad drew only negative reports from women (usually about experiences with their fathers).

Some therapists referred patients with severe problems to me, and perhaps most importantly women, who were not trained to brag about sexual exploits, were far less likely to pick up a phone in response to an ad and initiate a call about a positive incest experience than was a man.

As Cynthia Shaw (neg., da-fa; sis-bro) observed, "The positive aspects of it

are even more of a taboo than the incest.. It took me twenty years to admit to

myself that I physically enjoyed sexual contact with my brother. And a piece of

we will never admit that a part of me enjoyed the incest."

~~1800 - only 11% females~~

Additionally, of the twenty-eight women reporting incest with their fathers,

three, or about 11%, provided approximately 25% of the negative comments. Two of those

participants were referred to me by a therapist. I allowed this skewing of my sample

since my purpose was to understand the dynamics contributing to positive and negative

cases rather than to predict the percentages in the population-at-large.

Then why use numbers to report harm.

On the other hand, women with negative experiences often considered it "therapeutic"

to talk about it. Or, as Mildred Chatner (neg., sis-bro) put it, "For awhile I almost

waved it as a banner that said, 'Oh, poor me!'" Women reporting positive experiences

could not expect to receive such sympathy.

On the average, women with negative experiences told three times as many people

as women with positive experiences. For all these reasons, it seems probable that

women with negative incest experiences were more likely to call me if they saw the

ad, than were women with positive experiences.

About ninety percent of the men who reported positive heterosexual incest experiences

said the incest had also been positive for the women who were their partners. While

almost all the men seemed quite sincere, some were doubtless missing cues from the

women. Most evidence suggests that a disparity does exist between male and female

perceptions of positive incest. And between male and female reporting of the positive

incest that actually occurs. All of which is exacerbated by a personality trait

* The type of relationship is Inparentheses: pos.=positive; neg.=negative; fa=father; da=daughter; gr=grand; sis=sister; bro=brother; mo=mother; so=son; co=cousin; st=step. The person doing the reporting is listed first (e.g., "da-fa" indicates the daughter reported). All names are changed to protect identity.

common to female incest participants in negative relationships - a tendency to not express negative feelings directly to their partners (they did not have a problem expressing them to me - the difference between permission to be victim and permission to confront the source of the problem and risk the consequences).

The disparity is illustrated by Penny Carson (neg., da-fa) who said, "My

father would fondle me, and afterward he'd ask me if I liked it. I'd hesitate,

then say, 'Yes.' Partly that was true, and partly it was just pleasing him. I mean,

it felt good, but it also made me uncomfortable. So I'd tell him it felt good,

but I'd keep the part about feeling uncomfortable to myself." Penny's father probably

thought his daughter found the incest completely positive. Penny had no difficulty telling me the negative parts.

And Michael Welch (neg., fa-da), one of the few men to acknowledge the incest

had been negative for his daughter, said, "Apparently it has been troubling my daughter

for almost twenty years, but I was unaware of this until a week or two ago. I received

a letter from her a few weeks ago, in which she talked about her feelings about it -

the guilt she had encountered as a result of our sex, and how it was affecting her

relationship with her husband. It came as a complete surprise to me - I'd had no idea."

In other cases enough specific examples were given to indicate that most of

the men's female incest partners had truly enjoyed the incest, which again suggests both

that more women find incest positive than the numbers reported by the women themselves

suggest and a smaller percentage of women find it positive than the numbers reported

by men would suggest.

Even with the negative sampling bias of the women I interviewed, the only type

of incest described by women as more negative than positive was male adult - female

child incest. Men described these relationships as positive by a ratio of 3 to 1.

(Male adult - female child incest includes father-daughter, stepfather-stepdaughter,

grandfather-granddaughter and brother^{or uncle} over 18 with pre-teenage sister^{or niece}.)

In all other types of incest in which women participated - mother-son,

older sister - younger brother, first cousins, niece-uncle, mother-daughter and

sister-sister - the positive relationships outweighed the negative-by as much as

thirty to one. In the mother-son category the ratio was twenty to one.

Despite strong societal pressure to view the incest as totally negative

nearly all the women said their incest experiences had some positive aspects. Those

who described the incest as generally negative were likely to add that they gained

a deeper insight into themselves, an understanding of others, a greater open-

mindfulness and/or a decrease in unwanted inhibitions, as a result of the otherwise

unpleasant incest experience. Women reporting generally positive incest experiences

most frequently mentioned the increased emotional closeness between themselves and

their incest partners as the most positive aspect of the incest. They were also

likely to mention the sexual enjoyment and an increased knowledge of sexual technique,

as well as an increased understanding of intimate relationships.

The tendency of the experience to develop an open mind was not uncommon. A

certain understanding and tolerance, a type of receptivity to hearing the abnormal

without assuming sickness, seemed to evolve from some of the participants whose lives

had been lived partially outside the rules and still considered themselves good,

together people. The experience tended to stimulate a clarity of insight both about

human relationships and the relationship between society and the individual that

had not been as sharply defined before the incest.

Wife's friends

Some of these insights evolved out of the process of rethinking their lives.

Some of the women who experienced incest went through in order to clarify the role of

the incest in their life. For example, Carla Williams broke down crying twice during

a portion of the interview where I asked her if she would play her father's

perception of the experience and his attitude toward her. She expressed his feelings

for some

Wife is reporting

Others seem to

as: "Mom wouldn't sleep with me much... I didn't plan to do it... I never have

touched mom or held her, not ever (Carla crying), not when I wanted to. I

thought she'd (Carla) like it. I thought she did like it. Women are like helpers

(he worked on a farm). I didn't even think about Marian (wife). I had no idea it

would make Carla feel as badly towards me as she did and I know she's never felt

the same toward me; I wanted to say something but never did; I know she has no use

for me now. She can't stand to look at me - I'm just a useless old man to her

(crying), but I want her to be able to talk to me - feel some affection for me."

Many non-incestuous father-daughter relationships are marked and marred by the

father's absenteeism, ignoring of the daughter and distant observation of growth.

The daughter is not directly harmed by the father, only indirectly harmed by the

lack of attention. With incest, a type of power seems to imbue the father-daughter

relationship - and although much of it is negative power, it appears to have a way

of creating a deeper understanding, empathy and involvement in the human condition.

Many of the daughters in both positive and negative relationships became social workers

or teachers.

*See source
WGU*

Most of the women said the incest was their first sexual experience. If the incest was not too negative, it often had the effect of serving as a type of rehearsal for the women's later sexual and intimate relationships with others. Because the women's partners were family members who knew them intimately there was no pressure on them to "perform", as in a dating situation. And unlike in most dating situations ~~for adolescents, the women and their incest partners, being already intimate,~~ were more free to question each other about how to sexually please each other. Thus, the women often felt the incest increased their sexual competence.

"My brother and I talked a lot, to find out what each other liked sexually," said Rachel Louchman (pos., sis-bro). "Then we'd try things out with each other. My

sexual relationships with others changed for the better after that. I became more sexually aware, and I enjoyed sex more." Or in Maria Stazia's (pos., cousins) words, "We grew up together and shared so much, so now we can be intimate and open."

"The incest helped me learn to be sexual without feeling guilty about it - which wasn't easy for a girl growing up in the fifties," said Elaine Bergman (mixed, sis-bro). "It helped me develop a sense of self, a sense of my being a sexual person, not just a girl who was too fat and got bad grades. Also, it educated me about men's physiology, and about what excited men. I learned how to be sexy."

Martha Hogan (pos., da-fa) was more explicit about how the incest "educated me about men's physiology." "Dad taught me how to give a blow job," she said. "I felt I knew something special. I enjoy semen."

The incestuous relationships were almost always between partners who had known each other intimately for years. So, the relationships not only improved many of the participants' sexual competence - it also sometimes taught them how to handle the intimacy of long-term relationships with sexual partners. This was true for both

men and women. In Talia Ogden's (pos., niece-uncle) perception, "Not only has he taught me a lot sexually - he's also taught me a lot about relationships."

"Our sexual relationship has made my sister and me much more at ease with members of the opposite sex," said Joel Miller (pos., bro-sis). "We don't have the pressure on us that other kids our age do. It's not such a struggle for us to build close interpersonal relationships."

Sometimes the women had been afraid of sex, and of men, and the incest helped them overcome their fears. William Harris (pos., fa-da) said, "When my daughter was fifteen some guy grabbed her in the hallway at school, and tried to do things to her. It petrified her. She wouldn't go out with guys, and didn't want to go to school. It was preoccupying her life.

"One day she told me I was the only man she could trust. I caressed her a bit, and she said if I could do it with her it might help her."

"The first time I was like a teacher to her. I tried to show her that not every guy is a monster. She felt much better afterward, but still felt afraid. So two or three weeks later she came to me and asked if we could have sex again."

"We had sex fairly regularly for two or three months. By that time, she had begun to feel okay about other men. So I figured it was time to stop. She's very happily married now."

Two other men reported very similar cases - a female relative who was afraid of sex and men, a strong affection between the relatives and soon-to-be-incest partners, a decision by both partners to have incest in order to overcome that fear, a positive incest experience followed by normalization of the woman's relationships with other men. None of the three men reporting these cases denied that they had also been motivated by sexual desire. All three, however, stated that they had been motivated

observed.

prevented boys from coming off too well next to him," Meryl Anderson (pos., da-fa) "I felt very calm and normal with my early dates, but my closeness with Dad

partner, and their adolescent classmates suffered by comparison. had grown accustomed to a sexually and emotionally experienced adult as a sexual did not begin dating until relatively late. One reason for this was that these women Women involved in positive sexual relationships with their fathers sometimes

a relationship, though." *also she depends on* Arnie Cohen (pos., fa-da) of his daughter. "I'm the only one she can depend on for mature than their daughters' other potential partners." "She dates others," said

Besides being more sexually experienced, the fathers were often more emotionally

they just want her to deep throat them."

intercourse with his daughter. She says other men aren't as understanding as I am - willing to please her," said Ron Nelson (pos., fa-da), who was the first to have "My daughter says that compared to others, I'm a lot more experienced, more

never found anyone who is his equal."

(pos., da-fa). "My first sexual experience was definitely my best experience. I've "My father is always interested in satisfying the woman," said Meryl Anderson

of first having intercourse with a man who is not sensitive to her physical needs. experienced partner. The women were spared the awkwardness and frequently the pain

positive effect: The woman's first intercourse was sometimes with a competent, the type most likely to be categorized as negative, they sometimes produced one

Although incestuous relationships between older men and younger women were

primarily by a desire to help their partners overcome a fear of sex and men.

"I had loyalty to my father," said Martha Hogan (pos., da-fa), explaining

why she rarely dated until about sixteen. "Anyway, I felt more advanced than boys

my age - they were like little boys, still jerking off in locker room contests.

So my early dates were boring, and I wasn't interested in dating much."

In only one case did the daughter's preference for her father continue beyond

adolescence in a way that made the break difficult. Meryl Anderson (pos., da-fa),

who was twenty when her father remarried and moved from California to New York, said,

"I really only dated other men when it was apparent that my father wouldn't be

available."

Eventually, women whose sexual relationships with their fathers were positive

made the transition to other relationships. Of the seven adult women in my study

only four self-reported

who had been involved in positive sexual relationships with their fathers and were now

at least twenty-one years old, five had ~~been~~ ^{been} married, and all five described their

marriages in predominantly favorable terms. (A fairly unusual statistic above-marriage!)

Negative Effects

While the differences in male-female perceptions of incest are very significant,

the retrospective differences are enormous. The women report being much more receptive

to societal messages of sexual guilt. (The equivalent for the man is his much greater

receptivity to guilt about not being successful.) And so the woman is still soaking

up the sexual guilt years after any possible intensity of enjoyment has disappeared.

Society may be saying "incest is bad, you were exploited" - a message not logically

translating into guilt. But she translates this message into "incest is bad, why did

I participate - did I enjoy it - why did it continue for four years?" The result?

Guilt. Nearly all the women reporting negative relationships felt extremely guilty

* Four reporting themselves, three reported by father.

through the use of her body, the potential for her losing self-esteem by never being sexual experience, if she senses that the only way she can get attention and love is The three are very much related. Even if the daughter physically enjoys the

enjoying sexual relationships, difficulty trusting men, and low self-esteem.

After guilt, the most common problems reported by the women were difficulty

step on his genitals and hurt him, because I knew he wouldn't do anything back to me." blackmail him, in a child's small way. When I got irritated with him, I would physically sense of power. As Debbie Hill continued she explained, "Eventually, I started to Daddy initiating something that was "wrong" also left many daughters with a

candy and other things as bribes..."

he talked about it, looking for places for us to hide while we did it, offering me Hill's (neg.) "Grandpa was always acting guilty - speaking to me in a whisper when and on the other their "sense" that something was wrong. Typical also is Debbie enjoyment of the sexual stimulation combined with their enjoyment of the attention most girls started feeling the conflict between on the one hand their physical something was wrong. I didn't need to keep anything else from Mommy." That was when they started feeling guilty "when Daddy said 'don't tell Mommy' - then I sensed almost any kind. But a more direct stimulus is secrecy. Daughters frequently say sexual with the daughter; a strict religious or sexually traditional upbringing of What causes the guilt? "Sex is dirty" messages followed by the father being

on, I feel guilty and bad."

an effect on my relationship with the man I'm living with - every time I get turned their sexual relationships. Penny Fraizer (neg., sis-bro) said, "The incest has had In some cases, the women had generalized their guilt, feeling guilty about all over having taken part in an incestuous relationship - even if they called it rape.

certain whether the basis of her worth extends beyond her body is established.

"My stepfather's treating me as a sex object made me feel I wouldn't be able

to win as a person," Sandra Joyce (neg., step-da-step) said. "My biggest problem

is a lack of self-esteem - the idea that I'm not worth knowing except sexually."

"I need to feel good for you to be good - noble admiration"

While ninety percent of the women described their male partners as attractive,

it was almost exclusively the women, rather than the men, who felt they had been

used, and whose self-esteem was lowered as a result. Women, unlike men, tend to

experience society threatening to define them almost totally as sex objects, and

so when the first or second man who cares about them (i.e., father or brother)

also relates predominantly sexually, it is much more difficult for the woman to

know it she is valued in any way other than sexually. *Women tend to identify sex with sexual love - noble admiration*

Tied into this experience is some of the basis for the mistrust of men common

among female children involved with adult parents. For example, generally the

father and mother are not having a satisfying sex life. The daughter senses a

certain "overdesire" seeming to stem from the father's sexual desires not being

met elsewhere. It sets her up for not quite believing her father when he says he is

"teaching" her. When this is combined with "...but don't tell Mommy" the basis for

mistrust is laid. If she has some misgivings, and either feels unable to express them

or finds her expression of misgivings overcome by persuasion, or met with an authori-

tarian-type response, she can begin to find herself starting to keep those fears to

herself, adapting, and entering into sexual behavior she is not ready for. Or, at

best, that she has very mixed feelings about.

A common example is the daughter's being asked to suck a penis or take come

in her mouth while her father, wanting the sex, is not being sensitive to the signals

she is giving of dislike, or lack of preparedness to do that sucking. The experience

leaves a bad taste in her mouth, both figuratively and literally, and she is left

they would otherwise choose to do for the purpose of getting the attention that derives into athletic or success objects - that is, participating in something beyond what goes fishing, participates in sports or is successful, is part of what makes men It should be understood, of course, that a brother getting attention when he gets sex. If there is an "incest exchange" in male adult - female child relationships it is usually attention for sex. The female child gets attention, the adult male

with my father." "my brother got to go fishing... I liked the exclusiveness of attention when I was attention outside of the sexual arena. As Priscilla Redarth (neg., da-fa) put it, to the receptivity to a relationship with a father who shows little affection or to the relationship as an effect of the relationship. It may especially contribute and relationships. Yet, the low self-esteem is as likely to be a factor contributing incest experience, since it affects so many other dimensions of a person's life Perhaps the loss of self-esteem is the most central negative effect of a bad

life at the time. very basis of her judgment and the relationship with the most important man in her for outside comments, the influence of society is likely to make her question the particularly secure or both trusting of her father and well-prepared by her father sensitive, loving experience into guilt, confusion and mistrust. Unless she is not previously feeling guilty or confused, she is likely to translate even a good, society that this is the worst possible thing that can be done, even if she was cared about, or most hated, and a general confusion. As she later picks up from really have wanted it to some degree), a mistrust for the man she may most have ability to give direct signals). She is left also with guilt (feeling that she must with bad associations with penises, sex, men and herself) (for her doubt about her

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from that. It is that quality - of extending the activity beyond choice for the purpose of another reward, that threatens to objectify a person. With Priscilla, she was receiving the message that she would receive the attention if she was involved sexually, which makes it difficult for one to know when she was involved in sex for its own sake and when for attention's sake. That's part of what creates a sex object.

In my work with hundreds of men's groups that led to writing The Liberated Man,

~~one of the confusions in men's minds is the feeling that doing something together~~

~~means communicating intimately. Sex (doing something), therefore, is also seen by~~

~~many men as the closest they know how to communicate intimately. Ironically, the~~

~~traditional male communicates most intimately through the means the traditional~~

~~female learns in her early life is dirty.~~

What makes the desire for ~~the~~ attention so strong? In almost every negative

incest experience neither the mother or the father showed much affection. In the

positive cases, most fathers did show affection, fairly well:

In the negative cases, the father was slightly more often that not described as

the warmer parent. Among daughters with negative relationships, the most frequent

adjective used to describe their mothers was "cold." "Critical" was probably the

second most frequent. There is a significant difference between the two: while

"critical" is an occupational hazard of the parenting role, "cold" is not. "Cold"

therefore, is probably a more separating characteristic of mothers whose daughters

get involved sexually with their fathers in a way that turns out unsatisfactorily.

This "chill factor" so to speak, seems to be a factor that is associated with

a double dynamic: the father turning to the daughter (he does not receive enough

affection from the mother) and the daughter being at least somewhat receptive to

female learns in her early life is dirty.

the father (she does not receive enough affection from the mother). This does not

mean that incest between the daughter and father is the mother's fault. The father

is usually also unaffectionate in negative relationships, and usually expresses his

affection only through his sexuality. And the father must take the responsibility

for the incest he initiates even if there are factors that help us understand his

motivations.

For some of the women it is likely that the father's attitude toward his daughter

~~in general~~ was more damaging than the incest, or would have been damaging independent

of the incest. As Peggy Ellison (neg.) put it, "I am still fighting his 'put downs'

of me as a girl. At times I feel crippled by it - wondering whether I am capable of

doing the things I have done (such as finishing college, moving to N.Y. and so on)."

The put-downs of the female child seemed to hurt more than any other type of

criticism. When they came from the incest partner, though, the closeness of the

sexual relationship seemed to leave the female child with even less self-esteem.

Most frequently cited were slurs that she was stupid, inferior or a whore. Many of

these women cited depression, thoughts of suicide and interpreting all their experiences

with men as ones in which the man was trying to use her.

Some women found difficulty trusting only certain types of men. Jennifer Arsenaux

(mixed, grda-grfa) said, "My relationship with my grandfather made me uptight around

older men. I'm still that way."

Yet incest is often blamed for what it may or may not have caused. For example,

Gaylene Brown (neg., da-fa), who came from a black family, said, "I can have an

intellectual relationship with a black man, but not a physical relationship - I

get scared. I couldn't get interested in men my age, either. Only older white men

could turn me on. I identify all black men with my father - even my brothers."

Gaylene is only attracted to older men - men like her father. Yet she says

Does 'most imply liberation?

terrible shame. I couldn't even talk about menstruation."

had said, 'Sex is okay,' then it would've been okay," she said. "I lived a life of

sexually repressive atmosphere of the household in which she grew up. "If someone

able to cite a sexually repressive family background. For example, Rosalind Kolman (neg; str; da-fa) at first related her pain to the incest, but later described the

Women who related the incest to sexual repression or even pain were also generally

on my daughter for wearing anything at all suggestive."

recently - I think I feel an enormous distrust of men. And I find myself coming down

Michelle Haggerty (neg., da-fa) said, "I've had no sexual feelings at all

myself off when I felt myself letting go."

sex with a man because when I was with my father I established a mechanism of cutting

For example, Nancy George (neg., da-fa) observed, "I don't get any enjoyment from

and/or intimate relationships with men was a repression of their sexual feelings.

A second defense mechanism some of the women had developed in avoiding sexual

thick-skinned."

too close to men - it literally puts layers between you and men, and makes you

all fat," said Ophelia Henry (neg., stpda-stpfa). "It's a protection against getting

"I know a number of other women who've had incestuous relationships, and we're

a reaction to the incest.

women with negative incest experiences, the tendency toward overweight was clearly

reporting positive relationships said they had a weight problem. And with some of the

reporting negative relationships said they had a weight problem. None of the women

themselves from forming sexual and/or emotional attachments. Almost half the women

Some of the women developed defense mechanisms, such as overeating, to prevent

Father.

she cannot have sexual relationships with black men, because they remind her of her

On balance of numbers and severity, risks seem to outweigh advantages.

addicts.

to have negative experiences, and definitely unlikely to become prostitutes or drug children from sexually open and loving homes in which incest took place are unlikely. There is data, from this study, the Ramey study and the Kinsey data that suggest that homes in which incest took place are likely to become prostitutes or drug addicts.

Do you
know
in form

To date, there are no statistics saying that children from sexually open and loving nothing about incest except that it exists among families in this type of setting. Statistics on incest which suggest a relationship between drug addiction or prostitution and incest that do not also clarify the relationship of the child to the family as a possible causal factor for the prostitution or drug addiction, prove

up when a man came near her. independent of the incest and could easily be accountable by themselves for stiffening a half he tried to stab me. My mother rescued me each time." These behaviors were "he also tried to twist my neck and spine, break my neck, and when I was one and incest, tried to suffocate her when she was a baby and again when she was six, and Closer examination, though, finds that Caryn's father, independent of the

not the same

really independent?

by-the-incest. have my first orgasm until I was twenty-two," it would appear to have been caused and I couldn't speak. Although I first had intercourse when I was fourteen, I didn't my mouth, arms and hands would stiffen when I became aroused. I couldn't breathe with her father and later in life reported, "When I first had sex with my boyfriend other variables. For example, if we heard that Caryn Castle (neg., da-da) had incest life as a prostitute, drug addict or sexually unresponsive person and ignore the upbringing. In cases of incest, it is tempting to skip from the incest to the later eliminate the incest totally and predict a negative outcome based on a traumatic In almost all cases in which "the reaction to incest" was traumatic, one could

"I used to be seductive and flirtatious, but I would stop men just before sex," said Kerry Austin (mixed, sis-bro). "I got blasted, and justifiably so, by several men for my behavior. I never dated much, but I would tell the men that I dated that I was weird. Now I'm very concerned about whether or not I can ever form a permanent relationship with a man. My relationships with men have been much more hot-and-cold

used as a sex object."

sexual relationship - otherwise, I feel inadequate. But I hate the idea of being And Sandra Joyce (neg, stpda-stpfa) said, "I feel secure with men only in a

for me, the desire to have a close relationship without it being sexual." Cynthia Shaw (neg, da-fa) said. "So I flirted, but mostly with safe men. There was, "When you can't get anything from a man except by flirting, you learn to flirt,"

sexual partners.

As a result, the women sometimes gave out erratic, mixed messages to potential sometimes made these women view sex as their only means of receiving any attention. possibilities. Yet, the same low self-esteem, and a view of themselves as sex objects, negative incest experiences shy away from intimate relationships which had sexual Low self-esteem, lack of trust in men and fear of sex often made women with

percent of the whole, (depending on what is included in that category).

Among a sampling of both patients and non-patients they constitute from one to three. These are the type of cases that get reported to either authorities or therapists.

I always turned the fellows down. I just didn't feel comfortable about it."

viewed her. "I never dated during school on a one-to-one basis - I was asked, but with any man or woman except my father," said Betty, who was forty-one when I interviewed her. "I've never had any sexual experience fear of sex was to completely abstain from it. "I've never had any sexual experience her finger and separating her shoulder in the process. Her way of dealing with her Betty Hallie (neg, da-fa) reported that her father forcibly raped her, breaking

Promiscuity and Intimacy

than my relationships with women."

A number of women stated it was easier for them to communicate with other women than with men. In some cases, feelings created by the incest were one reason. But cause and effect must be examined here as well. Since the surfacing of the feminist movement, the problem of communicating with men, probably always existent, has been recognized and verbalized as ubiquitous. It is not unique to products of incest relationships although incest may aggravate or stimulate the problem. Men and women, called the "opposite sex", often find they communicate from opposite perspectives whether or not there has been incest.

The patient literature frequently links incest to promiscuity. But promiscuity is a highly subjective term. Women are sometimes labeled promiscuous for certain behavior, while men exhibiting identical behavior are labeled normal, healthy males. The tendency toward promiscuity so often cited as an effect of incest in the patient literature also has very little support among the non-patient population, and some support, but not the extent cited in the literature (usually focusing on the more traumatic and dramatic examples) among the patients I interviewed.

My definition of promiscuity is, "Compulsive sex that is motivated by feelings of personal inadequacy that the sex is designed to eradicate, but never does, because of the inability to create constructive emotional attachments even when desired." (By this definition I would evaluate more men than women as promiscuous.)

This definition fits the way incest has been linked to promiscuity in the patient literature. This literature frequently indicates incest has a severely

* Men with whom they'd had intercourse, or women with whom they'd had genital stimulation with intent to orgasm.

In generally favorable terms. Asked what they perceived as their major problems, these themselves as physically attractive, and over five-sixths described their personalities

Over four-fifths of the women reporting positive relationships described

characteristics of the two groups of women:

In much less time. To fully understand the implications of this, consider the

So, women reporting positive incest experience usually had many more partners

positive relationships averaged being only 25. *How many will turn negative with time?*

averaged being 31 years old at the time of the interviews, while those reporting

all women, the median number was 15). Yet women reporting negative relationships

25; for those reporting negative relationships, the median number was eight. (For

The median number of partners for women reporting positive incest experiences was

The women were asked how many sexual partners* they'd had in their lifetimes.

Positive is does as positive

of partners than were the less secure women.

attractiveness and personal self-worth, were more likely to have had sex with a variety

a poor self-image. In fact, women in my study who were secure about their physical

narrow and repressive definition. They certainly did not generally seek to bolster

But the vast majority of the women did not seem promiscuous by any but the most

for men.

were a direct result of the incest. Other factors make these attitudes fairly normal

they may have fit this pattern. None of the four women stated her sexual attitudes

Only four of the eighty-four women I interviewed indicated that at one time

worthy.

having intercourse with any man she can in order to prove to herself that she is

negative effect on the woman's self-image, causing her to "take to the streets,"

women acknowledged a variety of problems, but never saw themselves as having

problems with sexual adjustment. *Provenance*
∴ good incest must be a terrific

Almost three-fourths of the women reporting negative relationships described

themselves as physically unattractive, and almost two-thirds described their

personalities in generally unfavorable terms. Sexual difficulties were frequently

perceived by women reporting negative relationships as their major problem.

In my study, most women who had sex with a wide variety of partners did not

do so in a desperate attempt to reassure themselves of their own self-worth. Instead,

they usually had sex with different partners because they found both the sex itself,

and their emotional relationships with their partners, very pleasurable.

Asked what she considered to be her major sexual hangups, Jenny Sloan (pos.,

da-fa) replied, "I just get so much pleasure from sex, it doesn't feel 'hangup-y'."

It was not uncommon for the women to state the incest had decreased their

sexual inhibitions. While she described her sexual relationship with her father as

generally negative, Ilene Caine (neg., da-fa) said, "The way my father handled me

to be uninhibited sexually. I enjoy sex." And Marcia Ferry (pos., niece-uncle) said

of her incest experience, "It gave me a broader outlook on life, and it helped me

realize that sex is not wrong." This is obviously different from promiscuity.

Since the incest was the first sexual experience for most of the women, those

reporting positive relationships usually found their first sexual experience pleasurable,

while those reporting negative incest experiences usually had unpleasant initial sexual

experiences. This may be one reason women reporting positive relationships were

usually more willing to seek a variety of sexual partners.

The women's early sexual relationships support this theory. Most women reporting

their first sexual relationship was a positive incest experience said they had

intercourse with another partner within a year or two of the first incestuous sex. Those whose first sexual relationship was a negative incest experience waited an average of nine years before having intercourse with anyone else.

To some extent, the logic may also move in the opposite direction. Perhaps

women who have had sex with a large number of sexual partners are more likely to

enjoy sex and therefore to have enjoyed the incest.

It was not characteristic of the women to be psychologically compelled into

a certain sexual pattern. They were usually able to change their sexual lifestyles

at will. Martha Hogan (pos., da-fa) said, "I've slept with forty or fifty men,

including many one-night stands. But that was all within a two-year period in my

early twenties. I stopped doing all that when I met my husband. We have great

intimacy and an exciting sex life, and he's definitely my best friend, as well."

In some ways, incest often seemed to work against casual sex. The incest partners

had usually known each other intimately for years before having sex with each other,

and the incest partners' sexual relationships lasted an average of five years. The

women often saw their sexual relationships with their incest partners as a natural

outgrowth of love.

Barbara Miller (pos., sis-sis) said of her sexual relationship with her sister,

"It was a true love that became sexual."

"He has very deep feelings for me, and I have very deep feelings for him, and

now we're letting them out," Talia Ogden (pos., niece-uncle) said of her relationship

with her uncle. *implies ongoing relationship - not same tests as retrospective. Ask any love-struck teenager.*

Men, as well as women, were apt to appreciate the sex as a part of an overall

closeness. Tony Marchete (pos., fa-da) said, "My office is connected with the house,

and I literally spend every spare minute with my daughters. We talk, read to

each other, things like that. For me, the sexual relationship is just part of that

intense sharing. It's beautiful." *How close is too close?*

Should make better distinction re: intergenerational vs intragenerational

One of the things women said they most enjoyed about the sex was that it

strengthened their emotional bonds with their incest partners. "During intercourse

we were a part of each other, and after that we shared more of our experiences,

and became more aware of each other's feelings," said Louise Gardner (pos., sis-bro)

of herself and her brother.

"I've always been friendly with my cousin," said Maria Stazia (pos., cousins).

"Since we've had sex, our intimacy has increased very much - very much, yes. Whole

new perspectives have opened up for us."

Men also noted the incest was apt to increase their closeness with their incest

partners. "Since we've had sex, my daughter and I have become much closer friends,"

said Sean Kelley (pos., fa-da). "I've come to appreciate her wit and her relaxed

sense of humor. I see her as a full human being." *What would the da say?*

The women frequently said the sexual relationship was enjoyable specifically

because it was not casual sex, but sex within an intimate relationship.

"I felt a special kind of closeness with my father," said Estelle Kenyon (pos.,

da-fa). "When he held me I felt warm and safe - it was like, not only would nothing

ever hurt us, but he would never hurt me."

In almost all the positive cases (and many of the negative ones, as well), the

incest partners loved each other. For many, this was what made the incestuous sex

special.

Effect on Marriages
Why women?

Women almost never felt the incest had an impact on their marriages. While

the marriages of women with positive experiences were much more likely to still be continuing (seventy percent to forty-five percent), the women generally felt

that they had happier home environments (including happier marriages of parents,

more affection between family members, less authoritarianism, less sexual repression, etc.) than did the women with negative experiences.

of course

In at least a few cases, however, the women did feel the incest had an effect

on them. Adrian Greenberg (neg., da-fa) said, "Memories of Dad and me interferred with

my sex life with my husband. For about four or five months, I couldn't make myself

touch my husband's penis." However, Adrian felt her sexual relationship with her

husband had now improved to the point where she said, "On a scale of one to ten, I'd

say it's about an eight."

Occasionally the tendency to withdraw from sexual involvement encouraged the

women to marry men with very low sex drives. "I chose a husband who has little interest

in sex, and we have sex about once every six months," Millicent Baldwin (neg., da-fa)

said. "I feel incest harmed my capacity for relating to all people, but more to men."

Did women with incestuous relations with their fathers then choose father

figures for their husbands? Ironically, only the women with negative relationships

tended to repeat the mistakes with father surrogates.

of course

After describing her sexual relationship with her stepfather, Ophelia Henry

(neg., stpda-stpfa) said, "My husband could've been a duplicate of him, in size,

shape and attitudes. They both thought women were made to be beaten on, and to wait

on men hand and foot. During the marriage, he wasn't working and I was. He was very

violent, too. I came out of the marriage with a lot of bad feelings about myself

as a person and as a woman."

Millicent Baldwin (neg., da-fa) said, "Sometimes when my mind is tired, I get my husband and my father confused."

Tony Wayne, who reported a negative relationship with his daughter, made a comment that was revealing about both his daughter and himself. "She married a guy who's a lot like me," Tony said. "I can't stand him."

Had this occurred after a good incest relationship the only "bad effect" would be the possibility the daughter limited her alternatives.

The pattern of relating to older men might be stimulated by some fathers

treating their daughters as wives (usually when their relationships with their own wives were poor). My father would constantly ball my mother out. I was supposed to be the wife - take care of him, cook, have no friends at school... "Cynthia Shaw

(neg., da-fa) evaluated in retrospect.

Other women, rather than choosing father-figures, married men as unlike their fathers as possible. Ironically, by trying to escape their fathers in this way, the women only extended their fathers' influence.

A negative incest experience did not preclude a subsequent happy marriage and enjoyable sex life. Audrey Trendlee (neg., sis-pro) said, "I didn't have sex with anyone other than my brother until I got married. But strangely enough, I enjoyed sex very much. I had orgasm on my wedding night, and I'm still highly orgasmic. My husband and I are really hooked on each other."

While negative incest experiences sometimes seemed to hurt the participants'

chances of later marrying happily, positive incest experiences sometimes seemed to assist successful sexual relationships - including marital ones. For example, Art McNeill (pos., pro-sis) felt "By getting to understand our own sexuality, my sister and I were spared some of the traumas our friends went through. For instance, like

some of our friends who married the first person they had a sexual interest in, or else the first person who had a sexual interest in them."

The patient literature occasionally indicates incest participants have difficulty making the transition from family attachments to forming outside relationships. While this was occasionally true, the incest was more likely to help the participants form selective outside relationships, by making them more competent and experienced in sexual and intimate relationships. None of the eighty-four women I interviewed said they hadn't married because of a preference for their incest partner. And of the one hundred sixteen men I interviewed, only Roger Schnell (pos., so-mo) said his incest partner was unlikely to marry because of the incest.

Is Incest Monogamous?

Seventeen of the eighty-four women I interviewed reported having had incest with more than one partner. Women with negative relationships were about as likely to have had a relationship with another family member as women with positive relationships. But five of the six women reporting negative stepfather relationships had previously had sexual contact with another relative - two with the actual father. The distinction between someone reporting a negative relationship and still having others, as opposed to the significance of someone reporting a positive relationship and having others, is significant. For example, if a daughter has a negative experience that she repeats with other family members there might be something else operating besides the father victimizing the daughter. If, in a negative case it is the father having other incestuous relationships, it may serve as a signal to question further his motivations.

with a history

Loretta Marchello (neg., da-fa, others), for example, said her first incest experience was traumatic - her father raped her when she was twelve. But she later

Therapy and Sexuality

had sexual relationships - each of which she initiated herself - with two brothers, two cousins and an uncle. She said, "I told my older brother, 'If you can hypnotize me, I'll go to bed with you.' I led him to believe he'd succeeded. We did this every time before going to bed. With my younger brother, I invited him to get into bed with me on a night when there was no heat in the house, because I had an electric blanket."

Almost three-fourths of the women said they had been in therapy at one time

or another. But when asked why they entered therapy, less than one-fifth mentioned their incest experiences as even a contributing reason. Much more frequently, they said they entered therapy because of marital difficulties, sexual problems or feelings of depression. In some cases the incest contributed indirectly to the women's difficulties in these areas, but if the women's reports of their own analysis is to be given credence, even this was not usually the case.

*often not uncovered
nor explored.*

A number of the incest participants complained that the moment they mentioned to a traditional therapist any type of incestuous contact "the therapist used it as a convenient hook to hang my troubles." The women often felt the power of the incest then diverted attention from the more fundamental problems (such as not feeling cared for, not being assertive, etc.) of which the incest was at worst a symptom. In many cases, when the incest was considered positive, the woman felt pressured into having to feel exploited and used, which she felt only contributed to her lower self-evaluation (that is, it made her feel less loved by her parents, cut off from the support and sense of identity that support allowed, and self-doubting for having complied for an average of four and a quarter years).

Of the women who had been in traditional analysis, less than one in ten said they had benefited from the analysis. But most women who had been involved in non-

traditional or "humanist" forms of therapy, whether gestalt, transactional analysis, peer group counseling, consciousness-raising, or almost any other form, felt they had benefited from their therapy. Social workers who were women were mentioned frequently as having been beneficial to the women. And every form of therapy except traditional psychoanalysis was reported as more helpful than harmful.

An example of the complaints about traditional analysis was voiced by Colleen

Kennedy (neg., da-fa). "When my mother told a psychiatrist about my incest, the

psychiatrist said, 'She can never be normal - put her away in a home. When I finally

got to the psychiatrist's office, he said, 'You'll never be a normal girl.' I said

'fuck you.' I guess that didn't change his mind!"

One of the most frequent dilemmas of persons involved with therapies or therapists

that consider incest as categorically destructive was the self-fulfilling prophecy.

"I read in a book that anyone who has incest was a lesbian or homosexual," Ruby Gillis

(neg., sis-bro) said. "After that I couldn't work for two years. I was unbelievably

vulnerable. It took me until this year to figure out that I wasn't a lesbian." (While

this was probably a misinterpretation, the "you'll never be normal" tone was

probably not a misinterpretation.)

A sampling of the comments from women who felt positively about the way their

therapy contributed to feeling better about their sexuality follows:

"When I was younger I felt tremendous sexual guilt," Rosalind Kolman (neg.,

stpa-stpa) said. "Analysis helped me see I seduced because it felt good, and that

I shouldn't be ashamed of it."

Marlene Bronstein (neg., niece-uncle) reported "I spent a year overcoming the

guilt complex I'd had as a result of the incest," she said. "As a result of the

analysis, I learned to have a vaginal climax through intercourse. Before that I

was unable to completely function sexually.

"My analyst had me build up tension by not having oral sex for two months. Also, I learned to think of a penis as a sword touching all parts of the vagina, rather than just touching part of it - like with a doughnut and a pencil."

In a couple of other cases, however, therapy had the exact opposite effect on women's sexuality. "I had always been multiorgasmic during sex," said Carleta Moreno (mixed, grda-grfa). "But I haven't had orgasms with men any more since I've been in therapy. I only get orgasms through self-masturbation now."

And Eve Blake (neg., da-fa) said, "I used to want sex all the time - that was one of the major problems I had. But since entering primal therapy, I find I no longer have any sexual appetite at all."

Jenny Sloan (pos., da-fa) credited a peer co-counseling organization with

helping her accept her positive feelings about the incest. "They helped me stop

feeling there was something wrong with me for not hating the experience with my

father," she said. "Society seemed to be telling me I should've had strong negative feelings about it. Now I've gotten to the point where I can say to people, 'I

can understand why you could feel I shouldn't enjoy a relationship with my father, but I have to know I did enjoy it and feel fine about it.'"

Ophelia Henry (neg., stpda-stpfa) said of her experience in transactional

analysis, "TA helped me straighten out my ideas about men. I used to think men were gods, better than me, and that I was made to serve them. Now I've come to see that

men are just people."

The client and patient literature suggest a strong relationship between incest and homosexuality - in a tone that suggests both are sicknesses. In a sampling

really

Client centered non dogmatic

Including non-patients, this was not true. The great majority of persons with negative experiences still identified as heterosexuals. But among the persons with positive experiences, the much greater sexual openness encompassed an openness toward sex with both men and women. None of the women, though, were exclusively gay, and less than twenty percent of the women reported liking sex with women better than sex with men.

Persons reporting negative incest experiences were usually much more uneasy with the idea of homosexual relationships. "I've thought about having sex with a woman," Michelle Haggerty (neg., da-fa) said. "But I fear I'd find it so pleasant I'd give up men, and I don't want relations with women to be a reaction against men." (Ironically, society socializes many women to compete with and to some extent, hate other women, in the attempt to get men. Few ever conclude that they would prefer not to develop relations with men until they are certain those relations are not a reaction against women.)

Beyond the question of homosexuality, a few men who reported having had incest with their daughters said they were afraid they might interpret any normal problem of adolescence in general that was slightly unique to their daughter as a reaction to the incest. Were their daughters showing too little interest in boys? In sex? Too much? Were they not obeying? Overly obedient? Too attached to them? Not attached enough? Is therapy needed, or will sending my daughter to a therapist only communicate that there is a problem?

Incest - Passing It On?

About half the women said they would not permit incest among their own children, under any circumstances. About one-fourth said they would welcome incest among their own children, while about one-fourth said they didn't know, or that it would depend on the situation. Among the women whose incest experiences were negative,

the reaction to their children having incest ranged from cautiously positive to violently negative.

Caryn Castle (neg., da-fa), for example, responded "Incest in my family? I'd murder the man!" And Caryn's sister, Eve Blake (neg., da-fa) said, "Anyone who tried incest with my kids wouldn't be around very long."

And Carleta Moreno, who reported a mixed relationship with her grandfather and a negative relationship with her uncle, said, "I'd totally kill anyone who had incest with my children - if I had any. I know sexuality and sensuality are natural, but it's bad to act out a need with a child." While almost everyone acts out their needs or desires with children (including the need/desire to have children), when sexuality is mentioned the emotional response is on a different level.

Those categorically opposed to incest involving their children were usually women who, as children, had been sexually approached by adult males (women initiating relationships always considered the incest positive).

(Self-serving)

Asked about parent-child incest involving her children Michelle Rosenau (mixed, da-fa) said, "I wouldn't permit it. The power inequity is just too big. Among brother and sister it would be okay."

An attitude typified by Melissa Gavitz (pos., cousins) was "If one of my daughters was involved in incest, I wouldn't be too upset - unless it was with their father."

Some persons who were able to deal with their own relationships without strong negative reactions felt their children might not be able to do the same. "I was lucky enough not to let it bother me," said Carol Kaufman (neg., grida-grifa) of her incest experience. "But it was something I would not want to happen to even my worst enemy, let alone my daughter."

Jenny Sloan described her sexual relationship with her father as a positive experience. Yet, when asked whether or not she would initiate sex with her son, she said, "Wow, that brings up the prude in me... I guess I feel, well, that it's just not something a mother should do."

Why does a person with a positive incest experience not want to share the experience? For the same reason that most fifty year old parents who felt fine about their own premarital sexual experiences warned their children against them. As a parent there's a desire to not have one's children take risks or deviate from societal norms - both out of a desire to not see them hurt and out of fear of being judged as a bad parent.

Yet, a few persons whose own incest experiences were negative seemed open to

incest involving their children. Occasionally they were even open to initiating sex with their children themselves. "My son loves to touch me, and likes to sleep with me," said Anne*(neg., da-fa). "But I really don't know how I'll deal with his sexual upbringing. I'm afraid having sex with him might be unfair to him, and I don't want to use him. But I've been thinking about it lately."

Gaylene Brown (neg., da-fa) said, "I would welcome incest among our children, to show my son how to please a woman. My husband thinks it's fine as long as no children result. We walk in the nude around the house with the children."

Most of the persons who approved of incest for their own children were those

whose own incest experiences had been positive. Typical was Maria Ferry's

(pos., niece-uncle) response, "If my child had incest I certainly couldn't condemn her, since I've done it myself. I'd be able to talk to her about it because of my own experience."

* Tes=his or her (part of human vocabulary introduced in The Liberated Man)
* Anne did not use a last name since it meant taking on a "male" last name.

referred to part

Conclusions

When women said they initiated the incest none reported a negative experience: No matter who the incest was with. When women reported that the men initiated the incest the experience was very likely to be reported as negative: No matter who the incest was with. Women did initiate some relationships that became negative, but they never reported them. The men reported these cases (as well as a number initiated by women that they felt were positive). Ten women reported positive relationships in which an older male relative initiated sex.

Most of the women reporting negative incest described their partners as men at least a generation older than they - a father, stepfather, grandfather or uncle - and all but three of the rest reported their incest partner was an older brother or cousin.

When the women had sex with younger men, or with other women, they almost always described the relationships as positive.

Relationships initiated by women were almost always reported as positive by men too. Men, in fact, usually described their incest experiences as positive, regardless of the circumstances under which the incest was initiated.

While women reporting negative incest almost never said they initiated the incest, they are speaking with hindsight about a bad experience. It is possible that a few of the women played a fairly active part in initiating the incest, but since the relationship turned out badly, they chose not to acknowledge to me (and perhaps to themselves as well) that they helped initiate the incest, and thus were partially responsible for it.

Still it seems almost certain that most of the negative relationships reported by the women were, in fact, not initiated by them.

Why is the initiation of incestuous sex by older men with younger women

usually a negative experience for the woman while when women initiate sex with a

younger man, the result is almost never negative for either partner? If it were

just the power difference of male-female added to the additional power of who

initiated, it would suggest men should not initiate any heterosexual sex lest the

power difference be reinforced. If it were just the power of the parent as opposed

to the child, that would not account for mother-son incest being positive by a 20

to 1 ratio. Also, the mothers are generally the initiators.

The power of initiator, male and parent combined is clearly part of the reason

for the negative outcome. Yet the reasons extend beyond these. Incestuous sex

initiated by older men with preteenage women is almost always negative or mixed

according to the women's reports, but the women report almost 100% positive or mixed

experiences if they are sixteen or above when the sexual contact begins. So the

parent-child factor may not be as important as the male-female factor and adult-

preteenage factors combined (or adult male - female child). This is reinforced by

both mother-son and father-son incest experiences being almost one hundred percent

positive, even when they are with preteenage sons. In other words, male adult does

not by itself cause a problem. Neither does male parent. Or parent-preteenage child.

Or male parent - preteenage child. But male adult (even if adult brother) - female

child is a problem.

Why is this combination so deadly when a father-son relationship also involves

the role of male, parent and initiator? A major reason appears to be the difference

between male-female absorption of sexual guilt. The most frequent negative effect

of relationships is incest-related guilt, and women were almost ten times as likely

as men to report strong incest-related guilt. But women who initiated the incest

or were above sixteen always knew the risks and the societal view beforehand, and

so almost never reported feeling guilty afterward. So the most frequent negative

Yes

effect of incest was almost totally eliminated from the relationships initiated by women or involving women above sixteen.

Preteenage females who reported relationships with adult males almost always perceived the adult male as caring very little for her except sexually - a factor strongly contributing to any male-female relationship being negative. They almost always came from a family in which sexual attitudes were fairly traditional ("sex-is-dirty-or-good-only-after-love-or-marriage"). This contributed to any male-female relationship becoming negative.

Assuming that the power difference between the initiating adult male and

the non-initiating preteenage female is the only factor also disregards an important further dynamic of incest - the power gained by the woman over the adult male, and especially over the father, in an incestuous relationship. An excerpt from the interview with Jenny Sloan (pos., da-fa) illustrates this:

WARREN: WHEN DID THE RELATIONSHIP BEGIN TO PROGRESS BEYOND THE CARESSING IN BED?

JENNY Probably once when we were in the woods (Before we had ever had sex). He

hugged me real tight. When we got home, I said to Mommy, "Daddy scared me...

he hugged me real tight." Mom said to him, with a look in her eyes, "I know

what happened." I got a surge of "I have something on him." It gave me a real

sense of power.

To not acknowledge the power the woman gains is to not understand part of what

keeps the woman hooked into the relationship.

While there are clearly factors that make a relationship predictably positive

or negative (but none that guarantee positive results), different persons' attitudes

toward very similar experiences can have a strong effect on the impact of that

experience. For example, to look more closely at Jenny Sloan's incest experience,

we can see it conformed to the pattern of the negative relationships in many ways.

Jenny's father initiated the sexual relationship with her while she was still a preteenager, climbing into bed with her the morning after she first had her period; he emphasized the need for secrecy with her; and he showed her very little affection, and in fact gave her very little attention, outside the sexual relationship.

But Jenny described her incest as a positive experience. She did not feel she had been exploited, or used as a sex object. "It was the way he was best able to say to me, 'I care,'" she said of the incest. "I recently wrote a letter to my parents, in which I told them I felt they both loved me, but that they showed their love in different ways."

Asked what advice she would give to other incest participants, Jenny said, "If it happens, appreciate it if you can. Don't just negate it, and don't spend your whole life dwelling on it."

My data emphatically suggests men should not initiate sexual relationships with female relatives who are much younger than they are. That although the female child may be participating happily at the time, the societal norms of guilt catch up with her later.

However, my data suggests that with the exception of relationships between older men and preteenage women, incest is rarely harmful to participants, and is often helpful to them in their later relationships. *much less critical of positive data than negative*

The findings have implications for a reexamination of the law. In sixty-eight of the seventy-one negative incest cases reported to me, the person initiating the relationship could have been prosecuted for statutory rape, and in two of the other three cases, prosecuted for forcible rape. Only one of the eighty cases of incest between mutually consenting adults above 16 reported to me was negative.

My data also strongly indicates we need to reshape our thinking about incest.

In regarding incest as categorically destructive, we actually encourage incest participants to feel traumatized - and sometimes, we make them feel guilty for having even partially enjoyed the experience. This is true of society in general, and specialists working with incest participants in particular.

"When the social work agency got involved, that's when everything became shit," said Jenny Sloan (pos., da-ta), swearing for the only time during a series of interviews lasting over four hours. "They made me feel like I was obligated to feel bad about the incest and hate it, and what was wrong with me anyway, not hating it?"

A more open approach to incest does not preclude a woman who was truly

victimized from seeing her incest experience that way, and receiving sympathy, help and support. It does not preclude disciplining and/or treating persons who initiate incestuous relationships for exploitive reasons, sometimes committing statutory and/or physical rape in the process. It does, however, give the woman

the option of viewing the experience as beneficial to her, if that fits with her perceptions of the particular circumstances. She need not feel obligated to be a victim, or feel guilty over having experienced sexual pleasure. If she needs help,

help should be available; if she prefers to treat the incest as a beneficial growth experience, that option should also be available. As of now, the latter option is only available to the very independent and strong-willed. A more open approach to incest allows the participants to trust their own perceptions of how the incest has affected them, rather than forcing their perceptions to fit a societal mold.

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