

## FATHER-SON INCEST: A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF REPORTED INCIDENTS

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*ABSTRACT:* A review of the literature on father-son incest reveals both fewer case reports and much less adequate data as compared to that on father-daughter incest. However, there are suggestions that the psychosocial history and personality of the father who engages his son sexually is a dominant factor, while dysfunctional family interaction seems central in molestations of the daughter.

Although the sexual abuse of sons by their fathers has, in the literature on incest, usually been considered to be rare, a different picture has begun to emerge in the past two decades. Statistics drawn primarily from child protective sources, hospitals, police reports and general surveys indicate that substantial numbers of boys in the United States are victims of child sexual abuse by their fathers. For example, Finkelhor's (forthcoming) analysis of data derived from 5,809 substantiated cases of child sexual abuse reported by child protective agencies in thirty-one states indicated more than one-half (57%) of the 757 boys in the group were abused by their fathers. Furthermore, it is very probable that father-son incest is underreported owing to the twin taboos of incest and homosexuality.

Actual or potential incestuous behavior in the family is generally difficult to assess accurately. As a type of socially deviant behavior that has been little discussed, the study of father-son incest can enlarge our understandings of other types of incest. Most important, the comparison of father-son incest with father-daughter incest might provide an appreciation of family dynamics and personality characteristics that predominate in each type of incest. As will be demonstrated here, some fathers engage both their male and female children sexually, so additional diagnostic issues are raised. Also, an eco-systems perspective of the father whose sexual acts are both homosexual and incestuous can highlight

values within the family matrix and the larger community, especially homophobia, and their impact upon both fathers and sons.

Father-son incest reported in the clinical literature provides an opportunity to gain some understanding of the circumstances in which this phenomenon occurs.

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Clinical studies of father-son incest are few and the reported case histories often lack data sufficient to develop descriptive models. Frequently the case reports indicate the child's age at time of first sexual contact with the father, coincidence of the sexual act with physical abuse, and the initiator of the act (always the father). Usually the duration of the sexual contacts is stated directly or can be inferred from the data. It is surprising, however, that many cases presented do not describe the nature of the sexual contact. Additional examples of information that are often available in cases of father-son incest are: the number of siblings and birth order of the victim, age and sex of siblings, and whether sexual contact had occurred between the father and more than one child. The role of the mother in the family and the dynamics of family interaction are reported less often. Studies of father-daughter incest, by contrast, often produce substantial information on numerous key variables which promotes deeper understandings of this type of incest than is possible in cases of father-son incest. This issue will be explored in a later section.

In the literature on incest, criteria vary for the determination of the act of incest. Is a sexual act, for example, mere touching of the child's genitals? Or should it be defined as any contact by the adult with the child's body which leads to sexual excitement and orgasm?

Berry (1975) has reported a case of father-son incest, summarized below, which illustrates the difficulty of establishing guidelines for the definition of incest.

A young adult male entered psychotherapy with presenting problems related to career issues, conflicts with his parents and concern about his social isolation. He reported that between the ages of three and eight he showered frequently with his father and while washing his son the father would often insert his finger in the child's anus. After age nine another activity replaced the mutual showering: early every morning the son would climb into the parental bed on the father's side and curl up against the father "spoon" fashion with the father's penis pressed against his buttocks. His mother never interfered, but in his fifteenth year the son decided to discontinue the morning visits.

Berry defined this case as an example of father-son incest. The pre-

vailing definition of incest by psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers is that incest is any intimate physical contact that is sexually arousing between nonmarried members of a family. In the review of cases of father-son incest that follows, I have accepted the authors' assumptions that incest has taken place even in those cases in which the sexual act has not been described.

### THE CONTEXT AND CIRCUMSTANCES

The circumstances of sexual contact between fathers and sons vary considerably. Case histories of father-son incest that display similarities are grouped here for discussion and summarized briefly. Cases of sexual contact between stepfathers and stepsons are excluded from this review to maintain conceptual clarity, although some authors discuss these pairings as incest.

Several cases have been reported in which sexual contact between father and son occurred in an apparently disorganized family situation in which impulsive, physically abusive behavior by the father was the norm. These fathers were exploitatively involved with their families, usually pansexual in orientation and often sexually abused both sons and daughters. The age of the son(s) at point of initial sexual contact was usually prepubertal.

Bender and Blau (1937) in what appears to be the first report of a case of father-son incest, described a situation depicting this situation. Calvin, age six, claimed that his sister usually initiated sex play with him and that they both acquired the habit from their father. He confessed bitter feelings and considerable fear regarding his father. He was very devoted to his mother and sister. He stated that his 10-year-old brother had refused the sexual advances of his father, but that the father had thrown hot coffee on him and burned him. Calvin seemed more fearful of the physical assault than the sexual. He knew that his sister had spent a long time in the hospital after her sexual experiences with her father.

Fear for his or her life in the presence of a father with this type of behavior is understandable when one reviews more recent case histories. For example, Dixon, et al. (1978) reported the behavior of a father who repeatedly sodomized his 3-year-old biological son and sexually and physically abused his stepson and stepdaughter. The father was described by the mother as violently explosive and expressed fear that attempts by her to curtail his behavior toward the children would be dangerous to her. He had a record of convictions for manslaughter, boot-legging, and sale of pornography. The police determined that he had promoted sexual relations between the two oldest children and himself

and his stepdaughter for pornographic purposes. The intrafamilial sexual activity had existed for one year at the time of the father's arrest for moonshining and selling liquor to minors.

In another case these authors depict a similar type of father. The eldest child in a family composed of mother, father, and six children (four sons aged 8, 10, 12, and 15 and two daughters aged 13 and 14) confided the family secret to his therapist that his father had sexually molested all six children over a period of ten years. He often beat the children in combination with the sexual abuse. When the father was in a bad mood the oldest son or daughter would offer himself or herself to protect the younger children. Although the mother had been instrumental in bringing the situation to the attention of professional helpers, she had been aware of her husband's activities for some time. After the father divorced the mother, he remained in the neighborhood and continued to interfere in the children's lives.

Reichenthal (1979) described a patient of his whose father's behavior was similar: "Another patient, a 4-year-old boy, had a history of having his genitals fondled, sucked, and burned by his father, who also required Richard's seven-year-old half-sister to perform sexual acts on Richard" (p. 122).

Alcoholism of the father is an outstanding feature in some cases. These fathers often appear to be homosexual in orientation, but do not appear to regard themselves so. Awad's (1976) report of a case of this nature is representative. There were three sexual involvements over a period of a week between the father and his 14-year-old son that ranged in activity from genital fondling to anal penetration. The sexually contacted son was the youngest of four sons, but older than his two sisters. The father was the initiator of the sexual activity and was drunk during each episode. The marital situation had worsened over the years to the point of an almost complete breakdown in communication between the parents. There was no evidence of a special relationship between the father and the son, except that this son had challenged his father's authority, violating the norms of this working class family. The father and son both denied any previous homosexual encounters, fantasies or desires.

Dixon, et al., (1978) report a case of an alcoholic father who, similar to the father described above, dominated and acted aggressively toward family members (wife, four sons and a daughter), and made sexual contact with only one of his sons. The sexually contacted son was the second eldest in the family and the father initiated sexual activity when the son was approximately 10 years old and continued it until the family came to the attention of social service authorities when he was age 16. The marriage had always been characterized by conflict. It was a working class family, but the father had been unemployed for several

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years. Despite the fact that the father had been sexually involved with other men before his marriage (his brother and his current brother-in-law), he explained his longstanding sexual relationship with his son to be a consequence of the poor sexual relationship with his wife.

Medlicott (1967) has written about three cases of father-son incest in which two of the three fathers are described as alcoholic (unfortunately the two fathers are not identified). The author defined the fathers as passive in relation to the dominance of their wives. He speculated that the fathers were probably not appreciative of what they were doing with their sons and that the seduction of the sons was motivated primarily by a desire to retaliate against their wives who cherished their sons.

Rhinehart (1961) has described an alcoholic father who initiated two sons to homosexual activities with himself and with each other, but the author has provided no additional information on the circumstances.

Another set of cases that have an apparent similarity are those in which the father is described as having some positive emotional investment in the son with whom he has had sexual contact. Aggression does not appear to accompany the sexual act. The sons of these fathers have reached puberty in most cases. The fathers either identified themselves as oriented toward homosexuality or, oppositely, denied that the incestuous act was homosexual in nature or that they identified themselves to be homosexually oriented.

Four cases in a clinical sample studied by de Young (1982) represent fathers who have disclaimed homosexuality. The cases are not presented individually, but the author's recordings of the father's statements convey the quality of their perceptions:

"It's different when the kid's your son," Mr. Logan explains. "I mean to say that if I molested a boy in the neighborhood or a boy that's a stranger, then I'd be a homosexual. But that kid's my flesh and blood and so it's different."

"I'm sure outsiders would call it homosexual," offers Mr. Harris, "but I don't. What I did with my son was an expression of love. It may not have been the best expression, that's true, but it is love. And when that occurs between a father and a son, one could hardly correctly call that homosexual." (p. 74).

Three of the four fathers confirmed that they had had homosexual contacts prior to or during their marriages. All the fathers viewed homosexually oriented men contemptuously, defining them stereotypically as effeminate and weak. One father had had incestuous contact with his own father.

At the other end of this continuum, Langsley, et al., (1968) have reported a case of a boy who, at the age of 12, was induced to exercise with

his father with the father's rationale that he needed to build his body. At the end of each exercise session mutual masturbation would take place. This practice continued for a year and a half. In their study of this family the authors concluded that the incestuous acts were motivated primarily by unresolved sexual conflicts rooted in the father's childhood, rather than patterns of family interaction. The genesis of the father's sexual and emotional infatuation with his son was thought to be a carry-over from an adolescent crush. The father was raised in a family that practiced a fundamentalist religion and his mother had often condemned sexual expression openly. At age 12 he was seduced by a 19-year-old uncle and his report of the event to the family brought disbelief and anger. In his teens he became enamored of an 8-year-old boy named Dave. There was no sexual contact and he was grief-stricken when his family moved to another community. He decided that when he married he would name his first son for his "first love." After his marriage he did, indeed, name his oldest son "Dave." Three additional children were born, including two sons, but there was no sexual contact between the father and his other children.

Caprio (1955) has described a father who was apparently engaged in a homosexual lifestyle throughout his son's childhood. The mother had died in the child's infancy and the son and his sister had been placed in an orphanage. The reported history of the incestuous relationship is unclear and somewhat contradictory, but it appeared that there was brief oral-genital contact between father and son when the boy was 4 years old and that it was resumed when the boy was 11 years old and maintained on a constant basis. Friends of the father also engaged in sexual acts with his son. The sexual contacts between father and son occurred in the father's home and at the orphanage. The son also engaged in homosexual acts at the orphanage.

Two cases of father-son incest are unique in that the son had engaged in homosexual activities with others prior to sexual contact with the father and the father was aware of the son's pre-incest sexual behavior. Raybin (1969) reported a case that involved three generations of father-son incest. The father was a professor and theater director. He had been sexually involved with his own father and brother for many years during his youth in a family in which this behavior appeared to be accepted. He had one son in his own marriage. At age 20 the son revealed to his father that he had had previous homosexual experiences. The son had suspected for many years that his father was homosexual. The father propositioned his son and, although his advance was declined initially, they subsequently slept together and the son passively submitted to the manipulation of his genitals.

Gregerson mentioned to this author a case drawn from a survey of sexual practices of heterosexual and homosexual persons engaged in

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sado-masochistic sexual practices (personal communication unpublished). The respondent, a middle-aged Hispanic, reported that he was seduced by his father at age 18, and he had maintained that sexual liaison until he left home to join the Air Force. Prior to his sexual contact with his father he had had sexual relations with males as early as age 12, including his maternal uncle and a boy scout master. He led an open homosexual lifestyle during his teenage years. He welcomed his father's advances and described him as his "best lover." The mother lived in the home, and the father did not engage in incest with his other son and three daughters (respondent was the oldest son and second in birth order). The nature of the sexual contact with the father is not known.

Two reports of father-son incest indicate that in extremely disorganized families in which psychosis is present in one or more family members, incestuous behavior may become part of the family's interactional pattern. Weiner (1962) has described a family in which the father, a schoolteacher, had had incestuous relationships with his 10-year-old daughter and his 9-year-old son. Both the mother, who was aware of the father's sexual activities, and the son were eventually hospitalized for psychotic episodes. Meiselman (1978) has described briefly an alcoholic adult who listed father-son incest and repeated hospitalizations of his mother for psychosis as early childhood trauma. Reports of father-son incest related to very young children may also indicate the presence of severe pathology in the father. For example, in two cases reported by Dixon, et al., (1978) one child was only 2 years old and the other 4 years old.

In the cases described above there was no evidence of homosexual pedophilia in which the father engaged in sexual activities with children outside the family. Edwards (1972) has reported the case of a physician who, prior to his marriage, had had sexual contact with the 4-year-old son of a friend. His marriage was strained from the outset and, after the birth of his three sons, he became sexually active with them (age of initiation not indicated) continuing this activity over a period of several years. Sexual activity consisted of rubbing his penis against the buttocks of the boys to the point of orgasm. The mother had known of this activity for two years and acted against it at the point in which the father asked the eldest son to penetrate him anally.

#### DISCUSSION

Attitudes and behaviors of fathers who have sexual contact with a son(s) vary considerably. This, combined with incomplete data in most of the cases, limits analysis. Nevertheless, comparison of these cases with numerous and often well researched clinical reports of father-

daughter incest provides contrasts suggesting questions for future exploration about the nature of father-son incest.

### *Father-daughter Incest*

Clinical studies of father-daughter incest have focused primarily on the family as a system and the personalities of the family members involved, analyzing the dynamics of the deviant behavior. In his review of these studies, Taubman (1984) has discussed family behavior and behavior of individual family members. In the former,

Sexual estrangement between parents, estrangement and role reversals between mothers and daughters, and a high level of psychosocial stress are commonly found among incestuous families; (p. 37)

while unfulfilled dependency needs and low self-esteem underlie personality traits, in which

incestuous fathers, for example, are often either authoritarian, dependent, infantile, or generally irresponsible. Mothers in incestuous families often are either weak and submissive, frigid, promiscuous, or indifferent to the needs of others, and daughters who have been victims often fear rejection or desertion, convey a kind of pseudo-mutuality, use seductive behavior to gain attention and affection, and feel a need to rescue the family and particularly the father. (p. 38)

There is, of course, no direct cause-effect relationship between these factors and consummated incest, but many experts believe that these factors generate high levels of stress prior to initiation of the incestuous act.

A well-known study of incest conducted by Justice and Justice (1979) describes this profile. The behaviors of 112 families in which incest had occurred were analyzed to determine personality and family dynamics (five cases of father-son incest were identified, but case histories were not reported). They concluded that the fathers could be divided into four groups: (1) symbiotic personalities, (2) psychopathic personalities, (3) pedophilic personalities and (4) other, including those in which the practice is part of the local culture. For example, Dr. Bert Weinblatt (personal communication) reported to this author brief therapeutic contact with a male patient, raised in a large Appalachian family, who seduced and maintained a sexual relationship with his father.

The symbiotic father was, by far, the most common type identified. He turned to the daughter for nurturing, love, and comfort. The authors identified several subtypes including the "introvert" who is socially isolated and sets this style for the family, the "rationalizer" who justifies



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his sexual activity with his daughter on the basis of showing her what "love" is, the "tyrant" who enforces strict discipline in the family and relies on intimidation to gain his daughter's affection, and the "alcoholic" who uses drink as a "lubricant" for getting closer to people. In these cases the marital relations were strained and the role performance of the mother had become dysfunctional.

#### *Symbiotic Profile*

In the review of father-son incest cases, some of the fathers appeared to have a positive emotional investment in their sons. Yet a profile of a "symbiotic" relationship between father and son does not emerge in the case descriptions. There is no evidence that these fathers sought nurturance from their sons. Although most of the cases provide little information on the dynamics of family interaction, in the cases that do describe the triadic relationship between father, mother and son, the father's incestuous behavior appears to be unrelated to the quality of his marital relationship. A possible exception would be the cases presented by Medlicott, (1967) but his conclusion that the father-son incest may have been motivated by the father's wish to retaliate against his wife was not documented.

In those cases in which there was evidence that the father had positive feelings toward his son, the son had reached an age in which he may have entered puberty (this factor was not clarified in most instances). Justice and Justice (1979) suggest that changes that may occur in a family that increase the risk of incest include the sexual maturation of the daughter. Maisch (1972), in his study of 78 cases of incest in Germany, found a very close connection between signs of biological maturity and the age of the victim at the start of incest. Thus, the entrance into puberty of the son may be a factor that operates in some father-son incest.

What may distinguish the cases of father-daughter incest identified as "symbiotic" by Justice and Justice from cases of father-son incest in which the father appears to have formed a positive attachment to the son, however temporary, is that this father seeks to meet sexual needs that the wife cannot fulfill. Furthermore, due to social stigma, some of these fathers appear to be afraid to express or actualize their homosexuality outside the home, as, for example, the fathers described by de Young (1982).

#### *Psychopathic Profile*

Cases reported by Bender and Blau (1937) and Dixon, et al., (1978) portray fathers who demonstrate character traits that would be defined as "psychopathic" by Justice and Justice (1979). They sexually molested

both sons and daughters, physically abused them and appeared to act without moral restraint in relation to all family members. Initial sexual contact with both sons and daughters was prepubertal, and the question arises as to the reason for their choice of the sexually immature child. Perhaps the choice may be based simply on the availability of a child, whatever the age. Further, in their assessment of the weaknesses of others who can be exploited, fathers may gravitate toward daughters who have internalized cultural prescriptions for submissiveness in relation to the male and to sons who are too young, immature, and physically weak to offer resistance.

Although there are few references to psychopathic behavior in the clinical literature on father-son incest, surveys on the sexual abuse of children indicate that this type of father may be common. It is noteworthy that the median age of victims of father-son incest is lower than in father-daughter incest, according to Finkelhor's (forthcoming) analysis of National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect data. Furthermore, boys are less likely to be abused alone than girls, especially if the abuser is a parent. In 65 percent of the reports, the girl will be the only victim, while 65 percent of the boys are abused with another victim, usually an older sister. As pansexual behavior is often characteristic of fathers deemed "psychopathic," one interpretation of this statistic could be that a higher percentage of boys may be abused by this type of father in comparison to girls.

#### CASE REPORTING

The reporting of sexual abuse of boys to public agencies is substantially less than that for girls. Finkelhor (forthcoming) has reviewed several general surveys and clinical studies, finding that the former indicate high rates of abuse of males which implies that the sexual abuse of boys is not coming to public attention in any proportion near its incidence, nor are professional services being provided to the same extent as the sexual abuse of girls. He argues, further, that abuse of boys is underreported owing to social and cultural factors, especially the male ethic of self-reliance, combined with the fear by the child that if he reports an incident his independence and activities might be restricted. Further, because all studies indicate that most abuse of male children is by a same sex partner, a double stigma emerges in the violation of the heterosexual norm as well as the prohibition of the use of a child as a sexual partner.

If the victimizer of the male child is the child's father, it could be argued that the incest taboo would increase further the child's reluctance to report the experience. The following case is illustrative.

At the age of 36 Christopher entered psychotherapy, but discontinued after a few sessions with the explanation that he had "run out of anything to say." Two years later he completed a course in assertiveness training and re-entered treatment with this author. He described a "block" that he experienced in relating to others that involved withdrawal whenever he felt the need to express a feeling. In the sixth session, with expressions of panic and fear, he stated that his father had forced him to engage in sexual relations (masturbation and oral-genital contacts) from ages 6 to 10, the practice terminating with his threat to expose his father. He had not divulged this information to anyone previously. He had one sibling, a younger sister who had had a physical disability since birth and who was hospitalized briefly for mental illness in her late adolescence. To his knowledge, his father had not molested her. Although circumstantial evidence pointed clearly to the father's deviant behavior toward the son, the mother ignored it. Both parents, who were allied on all issues, treated Christopher sadistically, the father beating him severely "with a smirk on his face" whenever he resisted sexual advances, and the mother disparaging him, as by referring to him frequently by the name of the family's dog. This upper-middle-class family lived in a wealthy community in which there were ample social and recreational resources. Christopher spent as much time as possible away from home participating in sports and social clubs. During his adolescence he had several homosexual contacts with a cousin his age. In college he dated several women, but after graduation he confined his sexual activities strictly to men and pursued a career as a professional sportsman. At the time he entered therapy he had recently ended a romantic relationship with a man that had lasted 5 years. The patient's revelations of his "secret" produced fantasies that he might be punished, if not destroyed, or that, in the footsteps of his father he, too, might become insane (patient was informed by his mother that his father had been diagnosed as "dangerously psychotic" by a company physician upon his retirement).

It is clear that Christopher had to weigh the potential gains and losses if he had reported his father's abuse to public authorities while living with the family. Would anyone believe that his father, a successful professional person married to a woman who socialized frequently with other housewives in the community, committed incest? Would his father, a violent man, retaliate and how? Would his activities outside the home be restricted? How would his peers, teachers and others regard him if they knew his circumstances? Thus, a child in this situation is faced with an exceedingly painful dilemma.

That boys are reluctant to report any type of sexual molestation is reflected in a survey conducted by Landis (1956). Only 16.5 percent of the victimized boys reported the incident(s) to their parents compared to

43 percent of the victimized girls. In regard to homosexual incest, many of the authors of studies of father-son incest have described a strong reluctance on the part of the son to confide in others his relationship with his father. The patient described by Caprio, (1955) for example, described his relationship with his father to his therapist by letter.

### EFFECTS OF INCEST

Follow-up studies of reported cases of incest are rare. Bender and Grugett (1952) collected information in 1951 on cases of sexual abuse of children reported by Bender and Blau (1937) in 1937. They concluded that the overt sexual behavior these children had experienced, including father-son and father-daughter incest, did not forecast maladjustments in adult life specifically rooted in the earlier victimization. In contrast, however, studies of adults engaged in certain types of deviant sexual behavior, e.g., sexual molestation of children or prostitution, suggest that large percentages of the cohorts were sexually abused as children. For example, a study of female prostitutes by Silbert and Pines (1983) determined that 60 percent of the subjects were sexually exploited as juveniles, often by their fathers or relatives. In his impressionistic study of boy prostitution in the United States, Lloyd (1976) observed that these boys display weak self-concepts and are often the products of homes in which they had been victims of sexual and physical abuse. One example of father-son incest is reported. Regarding predisposition of male children toward a homosexual orientation as a consequence of sexual contact with a male adult, little knowledge is available. Finkelhor (1981), in his study of college students, did find that boys victimized by older men were over four times more likely to be currently engaged in homosexual activity than were nonvictims. A recent study by Bell and Weinberg (1981) indicates, however, that only 5 percent of homosexual men reported childhood sexual experiences with adults. Furthermore, current literature on adult homosexual behavior suggests that in many cases it has roots in early childhood or perhaps may even be genetic inheritance.

In their comparison of different types of homosexual incest, Kaslow, et al., (1981) found that the predominance of psychopathology reported in father-son cases was higher than all other combinations with the exception of sister-sister incest. They defined psychopathology as reports of psychosis, depression or suicide in any of the participants. Their review of father-son incest cases does not cover all the cases reported in this article, which is assumed to be comprehensive. The association of father-son incest with serious psychopathology, however, does appear to be the pattern in this type of incest. Also, during the period of victimiza-

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tion or shortly thereafter, the son often displays behaviors indicating serious emotional disorders. For example, accident proneness appeared to be life-threatening to the son of one abusing father (Dixon 1978). This included a gunshot wound in the chest deliberately inflicted by a friend, burns from lying on a register, a fall from a roof, and assorted hand and knee injuries.

It may well be assumed, that the short range consequences of father-son incest would be the creation of stress for the child in which the development of self-identity and self-esteem would be in jeopardy as the child attempts to negotiate the taboos of incest and homosexuality. The boy is confronted with a demand for role performance inappropriate to his age. He is aware of culturally prescribed norms for masculinity and these are negated by his father's behavior. He must re-evaluate his relationship with other family members, especially the mother, with whom his bond may be threatened.

### CONCLUSIONS

An understanding of the interplay between intrapsychic and environmental factors in incest, as in other life problems, guide professional diagnosis and treatment. Analysis of circumstances of incest indicates the psychosocial history and personality of the father who engages his son sexually is a dominant factor while dysfunctional family interaction appears to be the key variable in father-daughter incest. The cases of father-son incest presented indicate that some fathers act on impulses which are pansexual; other fathers appear to be motivated by homosexual strivings. This finding points to differential approaches in designing interventions.

Fathers who exhibit sociopathic character-disordered or psychotic behavior are likely to act impulsively and destructively in the nonsexual spheres of family life as well. Therefore, incest represents but one aspect of a larger picture of family dysfunctioning. In contrast, fathers who act on homosexual impulses appear to be more emotionally stable and to hold more conventional values including, in some instances, homophobia. These men appear to be socially isolated, incapable of negotiating their needs effectively within and outside the family. In some cases a history of multigenerational incest, with their own fathers or other relatives, is a factor which may isolate the incestuous act, thus dispelling social stigma. It is essential that these fathers and their sons experience nonjudgmental professional assistance that will enable them to sort out issues related to sexual orientation and to manage less dysfunctionally the erotic components that exist in the interactions between family members. Family therapy may also be required to assist

all family members to cope with the consequences of father-son incest.

The impact of incest upon the son often results in severe pathology during the period of sexual contact or subsequently. A recent Public Health Service guideline for professionals concerned with child sexual abuse asserts that most professionals believe that the child will be better protected if the case results in court proceedings (Thomas, et. al., 1985). Comparison of father-daughter and father-son incest indicates, however, that father-son incest arising from the acting-out by the father of his own sexual conflicts is usually of much shorter duration (de Young, 1982). Many of these cases come to the attention of professionals and authorities long after the incestuous behavior has ended. This suggests that programs for public education and training of public officials and professionals be instituted to counteract homophobia. By creating greater social tolerance, individuals and families may be less fearful of seeking assistance when potential or actual incest between fathers and sons emerges.

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