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The Meaning of Ethics Today: A Critical Structure for Evaluating Modern Ethics

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The significance of ethical formulations, today, as in all times, is in their power for shaping attitudes and constraining behaviors. Ethics provide for a basic social need by defining the behaviors we expect and will accept from one another. In the ideal, our ethics allow us to live together, productively and in harmony.

But within our generation there is the appearance of a growing disregard for the ethical standards we have been given. The erosion of these ethical norms is a source of social anxiety, creating distrust and moral callousness. In order to prevent further deterioration of the underpinnings of our society, we must act to discover and remedy the sources for our growing moral confusion.

But I also believe we must act carefully and thoughtfully. As with any complex social problem, this ethical crisis will resist simplistic attempts at resolution. It is a mistake to equate a break-down in the function of the ethics with a deterioration of public morality. Our generation is not simply more self-centered or less moral than our predecessors. I contend that this appearance of moral degeneration is more accurately perceived as moral confusion.

When we ask why individuals act unethically, we must also be prepared to ask why it is that our ethics make it seem to be in the individual self-interest to do so. Because our common morality limits our freedom to behave in ways we might otherwise choose to, it is not enough to simply proclaim the wrongness or rightness of an act. In order for our ethical foundation to work, we must agree individually and together on the basis for those morals. Our ethics must provide understandings which help compel us to act with intelligence, compassion and understanding.
I contend that many of the ethical formulations of our time lack insight, scope and compassion. The confusion we are faced with is the result of having ethical forms inadequate to our situation. As we confront our crisis in ethics we must ask whether the ethical norms we are attempting to sustain have meanings for individuals which are empowering, meanings which, of their own force, compel us to believe that adherence is overwhelmingly in our common and individual self-interests.

The purpose of this paper will be to provide a framework with which to evaluate our ethics.

One of my concerns in ethical constructs is the tendency toward moral abstractionism. To help mitigate this tendency and to provide a vehicle for construction and demonstration of the framework, this paper used incest as its ethical topic. I decided on incest as a topic for two reasons. First, incest is unique in the unusual degree to which different cultures in different times have agreed to its wrongness and in the variety of positions which have been created to explain why incest is wrong. I believe these features make incest a particularly interesting topic with which to explore and test this ethical framework. Second, as a victim of childhood incest, I have a vested interest in incest ethics and I believe my experience provides me a depth of understanding useful to the exploration of this topic.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part I surveys the most prevalent ethical theories on incest. Part II introduces the ethical framework and Part III uses the framework to evaluate the positions which were surveyed.

Part I: A Survey of Prevalent Incest Ethical Theories The Biblical Argument:

The primary source for the Biblical tradition against incestuous relationships is to be found in Leviticus. Lv 18:6-7 sets the pattern for the series of admonitions against incest which follow:

None of you shall approach any one near of kin to him to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness.
The description of why these relationships are wrong vary slightly in language but have similar intent. Lv 18:24 commands: “Do not defile yourself with all these [Indecent acts], for with all these the nations have been defiled, which I am expelling before you…” Both sections of Lv conclude with the warning that the land will “vomit” the Hebrew people out should they engage in these prohibited relationships.⁴

In the New Testament, the only direct reference to incest is in Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians where he writes against the relationship of a man and his stepmother: “Let him who has done this be removed from among you... When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”⁵

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74):

Although other Western scholars addressed the ethics of incest, I have singled out Aquinas for inclusion because his positions have been particularly influential and his ideas have presaged several modern incest theories. His first argument is grounded in the notion of sexuality as inherently sinful:⁶

The maintenance of chastity in family life requires that sexual intimacy between its members not united to each other by marriage should be made especially unthinkable in order that the close proximity in which they live should not provide too great an occasion for sin.⁷

But Aquinas also used two other arguments against incest which have persisted. In the first of these, he cites a strictly pragmatic rationale:

The special prohibition teaches people to take no sexual interest in those within the family circle, and this causes them to look outside of it for marriage partners. There is great advantage in this for those who marry, for marriage multiplies for them the number of those to whom they are amicably related, and it also helps build up a social unity between men on a broader basis than that of blood relationship.⁸

This is what is now termed the exogamy argument.⁹ In his final argument, Aquinas draws on the notion of filial piety, writing that incest is also wrong because, “A violation of chastity committed
between close relatives is contrary to the reverence owed in piety by the sinning parties to their parents or common ancestor.” Little was added to these arguments until the scientific revolution which began in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Scientific Theories:

The Consanguinity Argument:

In the wake of Darwin’s evolutionary theories, attempts were made to explain the long-standing prohibitions against incest from a biological perspective. This argument held that offspring from parents who were too closely related would experience a greater risk of congenital defects. It was thought that those groups which had an incest taboo would, therefore, have greater survival rates than those which did not. Although the quality of research which was initially marshaled to support this theory was open to criticism, the theory nevertheless gained wide acceptance for a time and is still regarded by some as at least a contributing factor for the incest taboo.

The Social Argument:

Exogamy:

L.A. White (1948) contended that long-term group survival depended on interaction within greater and greater spheres of cooperative networks. These networks facilitated the exchange of important commodities and ideas as well as providing the organization and quantities of people necessary for common defense. Essentially this is the first Aquinas argument embellished with economic and evolutionary considerations.

The Psychological Arguments:

Natural Aversion:
This theory held that a natural aversion to sexual relations develops among those who live together from early childhood. Westermarck (1922) was responsible for the original version of this theory to which Fox (1962) proposed his psychological mechanism. Fox claimed that Westermarck’s aversion took place due to frustrated sexual feelings among the siblings. He believed these siblings would stimulate each other sexually through their regular interactions together and because these feelings could not be satiated by orgasm (within prepubertal children), a sexual frustration would result causing Westermarck’s aversion.\(^{14}\)

The Oedipus complex:

Freud, on the other hand, believed that children have a natural desire for incestuous relationships with their parents.\(^ {15}\) He held that this feeling is intense even in early childhood and remains throughout the life of the child as a repressed desire. The incest taboo, for Freud, was a parental device to help guarantee the repression of those inappropriate sexual desires.\(^ {16}\)

Incest Anarchy:

Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski maintained that the incest taboo was a social creation against the anarchy which he believed incest would naturally create.

Incest would mean the upsetting of age distinctions, the mixing up of generations, the disorganization of sentiments, a violent exchange of roles at a time when the family is the most important educational medium.\(^ {17}\)

He concluded that, “No society could exist under such conditions.”\(^ {18}\)

Part II: The Ethical Framework:

1. Creator(s): Who is constructing the ethic and what is their bias?
2. Perspectives: Whose points of view are being considered?
3. Definition: What is the problem?
4. Data: What information is being considered?
5. Situation: What is the context in which the ethic is being created?
6. Motivation: Why is the ethic being constructed?
7. Method: What is the process and how is it being used?
Part III: Evaluating the Incest Ethics

1. Creator(s) and 6. Motivation: Who is constructing the ethics? What is their bias?, and, Why is the ethic being constructed?

My experience of incest has significant implications for how I view or construct an ethical statement on incest. I have the advantage of understanding incest from the point of view of the victim, but my experience also creates a natural bias against other perspectives. My experience also interacts with my motivations within this topic and colors my conclusions. In the same way, it is essential to recognize that the experiences and belief systems of the creator(s) of any given ethic have considerable impact on the content of that ethic.

Using the Biblical argument as an example, it is significant that the Biblical prohibition against incest falls primarily in the book of Leviticus. Lv is part of the P document and the language reflects this. In the passage from Lv 18:6, for instance, “None of you shall approach any one near of kin to him to uncover nakedness.” The important Hebrew word is ?? (translated “nakedness”). Most of the instances of ??, are, in fact, found in these two chapters of Lv, and the language here is the same as that which is used in Ex 28:42 when Aaron is required to wear linen “breeches” to cover his “nakedness” when entering the “holy place”. Further, the consequence of failing to follow this command is ?? (to be “defiled”). The word, ??, is also drawn from priestly language, normatively being used to denote forms of ceremonial “uncleanliness”.

What becomes apparent is that this ethic was written by (male) priests for the primary purpose of protecting their ceremonial cleanliness. While this does not mean that their ethic does not have broader implications, it does help to explain why the wrongness in this explanation of incest is described only in terms of priestly defilement. No mention is made of consequences for the women or children who would also be involved.
Turning to Malinowski's incest anarchy argument, this section of the framework might be used to criticize the limitations of his theory based on the limited scope of his field. While I believe there is merit to his position, I think it is relevant to state explicitly that other aspects must be considered.

2. Perspectives: Whose points of view are being considered?

For something to be wrong, there must be an act which also means that there must be actors and those who are (wrongly) acted upon. For this reason the wrongness of an act cannot be adequately assessed without careful consideration of each of these points of view.

Freud's Oedipus complex makes a particularly interesting example because, almost a century ago, he had developed his process of psychoanalysis in which listening to his patients was an integral part. At the time, a psychoneurosis termed "hysteria" was considered a serious psychological problem among women. A number of his clients were diagnosed with this malady. During his psychoanalysis, Freud was finding a surprising degree of correlation between their hysterical symptoms and reports from these women of traumatic sexual experiences from their childhood or adolescence. He became more and more convinced that these sexual traumas were responsible for their "hysteria". Biographer Ernest Jones summarizes Freud's position at that time:

...he maintains categorically that the specific cause of all neuroses is some disturbance in the sexual life of the patient: a current one with the "actual neurosis" and the one in the past life with the psychoneuroses. More precisely, the cause in hysteria is a passive sexual experience before puberty, i.e., a traumatic seduction; this conclusion was based on thirteen fully analyzed cases.

Freud was an ambitious man who was beginning his career, and he was ecstatic about this finding. He said, “I believe this to be a momentous revelation, the discovery of a caput Nili of neuropathology.” He was convinced that his discovery would propel him into the scientific "limelight", and he was bitterly disappointed when his proposal met with a chilly reception from his colleagues.
As Freud considered this resistance to his ideas, he gradually came to believe that he had not
been careful enough in his evaluation of the ramifications of those conclusions. He wrote to a friend
the following year, that, in order for his theory to be correct, the fathers of all of these “hysterical”
women would have to have been “given to sexual perversions... indeed such behavior would have to
be much more common that the incidence of hysteria, since several adjuvant factors are needed to
culminate in this complaint.” He concluded further that, because in the unconscious there is no
criterion of reality, the truth cannot be distinguished from emotional fiction. He had decided that the
women he had worked with had not reported to him experiences of reality. This was the context that
led him to the Oedipus complex.

Part of what makes this example such a good one for clarifying this aspect of the ethical
framework is that Freud did carefully consider the women’s perspective in sexual-abuse. It might even
be argued that he did not abandon this perspective with the Oedipus complex. If this is true, how did
he go astray?

What is important to realize, however, is that, in order for these perspectives of women to fit
into the Oedipus theory, they required interpretation by Freud. He took their descriptions of the
sexual-abuses they had experienced and reinterpreted them as “emotional fictions”; figments of their
imaginations. In denying the validity of their collective testimonies, he effectively denied their
perspective.

Freud’s case also might be criticized on the grounds of improper motivation. When it became
apparent that his findings were being rejected by his profession he wrote:

The expectation of lasting fame, the certainty of wealth and complete independence, the thought of travel,
of sparing my children the heavy cares that robbed me of my own youth: it was such a fair prospect. All
that depended on the problem of hysteria being resolved.
It might be argued that Freud abandoned his original work, not on the grounds of its validity, but because he realized that it was not going to bring him the recognition he sought for.

3. Definition: What is the problem?

How incest is defined significantly affects how and why it is considered wrong. For example, the implications are much different if it is said that, “Incest is the crime of cohabitation between persons related within the degrees in which marriage is prohibited by natural and positive human laws” than it is to define incest as “The sexual use of a child by an adult for his or her sexual gratification without consideration of the child's psychosocial sexual development.” The first is concerned with the legality of incest, and it implies a level of mutuality between the participants with the word “cohabitation”. The second definition recognizes a developmental imbalance between adults and children. When the definitions are related to the ethics which follow, the relationship between them becomes clear. In the first, incest is wrong to the extent that it is a violation of certain laws. In the second, the wrongness of incest becomes based on the adult’s exploitation of the child’s psychosocial immaturity.

Adequate definition of the problem one of the most debilitating for the earlier positions on incest. Most made use of definitions which presumed incest to be rare when it is, in fact, becoming apparent that it is all too common. In the ten years between 1976 and 1986 there was a twenty-fold-increase in sex abuse allegations. The respected Russell survey (1983) of 930 women found that more than 1 out of 3 women admitted to having been sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday. 1 out of 6 women identified themselves as victims of incest during childhood. Equally surprising is the statistic that 1 out of 7 boys are also molested before reaching eighteen.

But many, like the consanguineous and exogamy arguments, also assume sexually mature participants where the consequences of reproduction were the motivating concerns. Based on
incidence, however, it is apparent that the incest problem we should concern ourselves with is the parent/child form.\textsuperscript{44} Statistics show that, “Most victims are between [the ages of] 4 & 12 with the greatest risk period between [the ages of] 4 & 9.”\textsuperscript{45} This statistic also tends to undermine the Westermarck-Fox position since it identifies incest as an adult/child problem rather than one between siblings.\textsuperscript{46} Aquinas’s filial piety argument that incest is wrong because it is “contrary to the reverence owed in piety by the sinning parties to their parents or common ancestor” can also be criticized as simply not being applicable to the current situation.\textsuperscript{47} In fact, the statistics hold parents\textsuperscript{48} directly responsible for their children’s sexual-abuse most of the time.\textsuperscript{49} 4. Data: What information is being considered? The quality of the information being considered in the development of a give ethic should be evaluated on two fronts.

First, the information used for the ethic should be checked for accuracy and fullness since the definition of the problem depends on this information. An ethic simply cannot be credible with an errant assessment of what the problem is. But the ethic will on some level be grounded in the nature of the consequences of the act. It is, therefore, essential that the nature of these consequences be adequately perceived and accurately represented. For instance, in the section above, the consanguinity argument was criticized as being misapplied. But this argument is also undermined by the quality of the data it drew on. The original data used in making the consanguinity argument was questionable\textsuperscript{50} and recent findings indicate that its conclusions were misleading.\textsuperscript{51} Second, I think it is equally important to recognize and evaluate the cognitive assumptions which underlie and influence the selection and valuation of the data being considered. In this instance, I think it is appropriate to consider the effects of the use of rational objectivity. Rational objectivity
creates an emotional distance between the subject observer and the observed subject for the purpose of recognizing an existence of the “object” apart from our “flawed” or incomplete individual perceptions of it. My concern is that this striving toward the “objective” may be distorting. I believe there is a correlation between rational “objectivity” and behaviors which treat other humans as sexual “objects”.

Let me be more specific. There is an interesting statement by Linda Gordon which points to a connection between alienation and incest:

...consider this contradiction: fathers living with their children might be expected to have more opportunity for an illicit sexual relationship. But, in fact, incestuous fathers were less likely to live with their children than other types of abusive fathers. Ninety-five percent of male nonsexual child abusers lived in the same household with their children, as compared with 68% of incest assailants. The best explanation is that fathers living with their children had more responsibilities for and intimacy with the children than absent fathers. (The reason that nonsexual rates remain higher among biological fathers is that it so often grew out of punishment, while sexual abuse did not.)

...If there is an incest “taboo” that prohibits not only mating but also nonreproductive sex, that taboo grows from nurturant attitudes toward children, constructed through internalizing a concept of the child’s own interest as distinct from an adult interest. This rendering of the “taboo” also explains why mothers do not molest children sexually. Mothers who fail to internalize the child’s interests are more rare than fathers.

A similar observation came out in an interview with Lloyd Sinclair, a therapist specializing in child sexual abuse cases. He believes that the more fathers spend time with their children, the less likely they will be to abuse them because they become invested in their children’s welfare through the process of consistent interaction.

This dynamic fits my own experience. My father was gone a great deal on business trips so that I rarely saw him as a child. When he did come home, the rule in our home was to have peace and quiet for him. We were to stay out of his way, to not disturb him. I can see how this lack of experience with me could contribute to his misconception of me as an object rather than as his son.

Although useful, nevertheless, I think this observation side-steps the real issue, which is love. Time spent together and “investment” in relationships are only imperfect measures of how much two
people care for each other. Looked at more clearly, I would say that my father could not have abused me had he cared more for me.  

What is significant to this discussion of rational “objectivity” is the recognition of the principle that is operating. What prevents parents from becoming perpetrators is their love for their children. It is this love which inhibits the ability of parents to treat their offspring as sexual “objects”. This love causes parents to “invest” in their relationships with their children. And this process of investment, in turn, causes a transformation of their perception of them. Their children become “sons and daughters” whose status and welfare become more important to the parents than their sexual appeal.  

My concern is that rational objectivity may promote the alienation which leads to abuse. In striving to isolate our feelings from our observations, objectivity removes or isolates us from the one perspective that will effectively prevent us from molesting our children. It is our feelings of love which prevent this wrong. And this love is not objective. 

5. Situation: What is the context?  

Any ethical statement is constructed within a time and place and is influenced by the character of that environment. The consanguinity argument is an example of this. Following Darwin, the enthusiasm for biological solutions created a prejudice in favor of this otherwise tenuous position.  

7. Method: What is the process and how is it being applied?  

Finally, a sound method is also crucial to the quality of the ethic. The exogamy argument, for example, can be criticized as being too speculative for this reason. Admittedly, during the time in which this theory was brought forth, incest was still considered a rarity. Still, this theory fails to incorporate any data which is specific to actual episodes of incest. This is an example where motivators have been selected based on plausibility rather than investigation.  

Conclusion:
Historically and culturally, agreement is overwhelming that incest is wrong. But the sad fact is that it still occurs with alarming regularity. For some reason, parents are motivated to abuse their children and we must face the truth that, as they are now conceived, our ethical positions on incest lack the necessary moral strength to prevent perpetration.

But what makes an ethic compelling? Mostly I have focused my attention on those elements of an ethic which detract from its power to direct action, biases, lack of scope, skewed definitions, incomplete and inaccurate information, improper motivations and unsound methods. But what underlies these considerations is a feeling. Compulsion is a feeling. Desire is a feeling. Alienation is a feeling. Apathy is a feeling. Caring is a feeling. Ultimately, in our ethics, we must face the power of these emotions. Poverty, sexism, joblessness, rape, incest, theft, murder, prejudice, abortion, war, hunger and the other varieties of alienation and hatred we participate in; these are all crimes of the heart. Until our ethics embody a language which helps direct our emotions in more caring ways, our ethics will have little meaning.
NOTES

1 I am using a functional definition of ethics.

2 Esp. Lv 18:6-17 and 20:11-23.

3 What follows is a listing of the relationships which are prohibited in this way (The list is adapted from one provided by E. Neufeld as found in McKenzie, p. 386):

   Mother: Natural, stepmother and mother-inlaw.
   Aunt: Paternal, maternal and paternal by marriage.
   Sister: Half sister, stepsister, sister-inlaw (Includes brother’s wife or wife’s sister during wife’s life).
   Daughter: Daughter-inlaw, stepdaughter, granddaughter, stepgranddaughter.

   Notably missing is a prohibition between father and daughter. McKenzie believes that this “...prohibition has fallen out of the list.” (387). Also lacking are prohibitions against father-son, etc. incest but it may be that any male-male sexual relations are assumed to be prohibited with Lv 18:22.

4 18:26 ff. & 20:22 ff.

5 1C5:1-5, RSV.

6 There is a connection between dualism and early Christian anti-sexuality. Paul Gebhard describes this attitude: “...sex in any form outside of marriage was unmitigated evil and, within marriage, and unfortunate necessity for procreation...” Encyclopedia Brittanica. 1984 ed. “Sexual Behavior, Human,” (16:599).


8 Miller, Ibid.

9 “...all societies exert control over whom one is eligible to marry or to have as a sexual partner. Endogamy, holding the choice within ones group, increases group solidarity but tends to isolate the group and limit its political strength. Exogamy, forcing the individual to marry to marry outside the group, dilutes group loyalty but increases group size and power through new external liaisons. Some combination of endogamy and exogamy is found in most societies.” Encyclopedia Brittanica. 1984 ed. S.v. “Sexual Behavior, Human,” by Paul H. Gebhard, 16:599.

10 Miller. Ibid. This argument is also cited by Damen as current: “The reverence due to parents, either directly in their own person or indirectly through the person most intimately bound to them by ties of blood, cannot be reconciled with sexual relation.”: 614.

11 The incest taboos.

12 Meiselman comments on Westermark’s work, “Westermark (1922), for example, cites the beliefs of some unnamed animal breeders and reports on the condition of inbred populations in remote areas of the world...” Karin C.

14 Meiselman, pp. 7-8.

15 More will be said in the following section about Freud’s work prior to this conclusion.


18 Ibid.

19 I am addressing motive out of sequence in order to combine it with the section on the creator(s) of the ethic since the two are so closely interconnected.

20 Actually the ramifications extend much farther since incest invokes broadly based issues such as trust and power.

21 E.g., the choice of language with “victim” and “perpetrator”.

22 The “Priestly” writings which reflect a more structured, institutional religion. Thought to be written 5th cent. BCE. McKenzie: 506; 657.

23 30x of 52 ttl: 58% The other examples are scattered throughout the Torah; Gn (5x), Ex (7x), and early prophets; Jes (2x), Ez (5x), Ho (1x), and Th (1x). Also Is 20:30 (1x). It is notably missing from the poetic literature.


25 Because it suggests that these actions create disharmony with God.

26 See p. 6

27 While this Oedipus complex, itself, did not comment on the states of incest, it did have a significant impact on them since it essentially buried the problem; a fact not lost on Alice Miller: “Do we owe anything to Sigmund Freud, psychoanalyst? Today I would say: 20 years of blindness toward the reality of child abuse .... In 1896, Sigmund Freud discovered the truth about the repression of childhood traumas and its effects on the adult. Unable to bear this truth, he finally decided to deny his own discovery. One year later, in 1897, he developed the psychoanalytic theory which actually conceals the reality of child abuse and supports the tradition of blaming the child and protecting the parents.” Cited in “Re-examining Freud” Psychology Today. September 1989, p. 49.

28 This was the diagnosis often given during this time for women who were considered to be “emotionally unstable”.

29 He developed these original findings and gave them as a paper in Vienna on May 2, 1896. These were published in expanded form as “The Etiology of Hysteria” later that year.

31 Ibid., p. 171

32 Krafft-Ebbling who was the chair at the Vienna Conference was quoted as remarking, “It sounds like a scientific fairy tale.” Ibid.

33 Fliess: 9/12/1897. Ibid., p.172-73.

34 Ibid., p. 173.

35 Jones reports, “...quite suddenly, he decided to confide to [Fliess] ‘the great secret of something that in the past few months has gradually dawned on me.’ It was the awful truth that most—not all—of the seductions in childhood which his patients had revealed, and about which he had built his whole theory of hysteria, had never occurred. It was a turning point in his scientific career.” Ibid, p. 172.

36 Ibid., p. 172-73.

37 Damen. Ibid.


39 The perception of incest has changed radically just in the past twenty years. As recently as the sixties and early seventies, incest was considered “as rare sexual perversion, a one in a million occurrences.” [Linda Gordon, Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston 1880-1960. (New York: Viking, 1988), p. 207. cites S. Weinberg, Incest Behavior,(New York, 1955) as an example]. Local therapist, Lloyd Sinclair, remarks, “there has been nothing short of a revolution in terms of people understanding that this is a pretty common problem...”. Sinclair is specializing in sex therapy at the Midwest Center for Sex Therapy, Madison (MSSW, SCSW, AASECT Certified). All quotes from interviews in October, 1989.


42 Cited by Michelle Morris in the 1984 Future Film, “Breaking Silence.” In more detail; “16 percent of women reported at least one incidence of intrafamilial before age 18; 12 percent reported at least one experience before are 14; 32 percent reported at least one experience of extrafamilial sexual abuse before the age of 18; and 20 percent reported at least one such experience before age of 14. When both categories of sexual abuse are combined, 38 percent report at least one experience before age 18, and 28 percent report such an experience before the age of 14 years.” Cited by Kempe & Kempe, p.18.


44 It should be noted, however, that even the best attempts at estimating the scope and nature of the problem have been crippled by the difficulties involved in obtaining reliable samples. Because of the dynamics of incest, only a few, often exceptional, cases are ever reported. The Russell study found that only 2 percent of the cases of intrafamilial sexual-abuse and 6 percent of extrafamilial sexual-abuse which they found were reported to the police (Kempe & Kempe: 6). Another reported that only 1 in 2 girls and 1 in 10 boys reported their experiences of sexual-abuse to their parents (Kempe & Kempe 14). The other major hurdle in determining the accuracy of the growing numbers is the believability of the children involved in the sexual-abuse. In most cases there is no reliable physical evidence which means the credibility of the sexual-abuse case is dependent solely on the testimony of the child. But psychologists
are strongly divided on the degree to which children can be believed on these situations. Psychologist Stephen Ceci who is involved in the issue of witness suggestibility, states; “One side says a child who has been molested never gets it wrong, the other says they get it wrong a lot” (Cited by Gelman: 99).

45 Denise J. Gellinas, “The Persisting Negative Effects of Incest,”. Psychiatry 46 (November 1 983): 313. Cf., also The Denver study reported 45 percent of sexually abused children are under 12 years of age and 16 percent are under 6 (Cantwell 1981. Based on reported incidence in that city). Cited by Kempe & Kempe: 15.

46 But refer to previous note concerning assessment problems.

47 This is not to say that his definition did not apply to the situation of his time. The lack of pertinent data may render this impossible to determine.

48 Or their substitutes.

49 Among perpetrators, one-third of reported cases involve natural fathers, or, at times, mothers; one-third, nonrelated parent substitutes (stepfathers or mothers’ live-in men friends); and the remaining one-third; nonparental perpetrators. This statistic from the federal government’s National Incidence Study (1981) and was based on a probability sample using a questionnaire sent to 26 counties in 10 states (out of 3,041 counties in 50 states). This study only incorporated reported cases. Cited by Kempe & Kempe pp. 15-16. The NIS study also showed that “Biological mothers were thought to be clearly accessories to their daughters’ involvement in incest in at least 43 percent of reported cases, at least to the extent that they knew about the problem and allowed it to continue, often for many years.” Ibid., p. 16.

50 See n. 12.

51 Lasker reports, “...adverse genetic effects in the off-spring of consanguineous unions is appreciable only in rare hereditary diseases...From the social, as opposed to the individual, point of view, close inbreeding does not increase the number of deaths from recessive disease; it merely precipitates these so-called genetic deaths in earlier generations....death for infant off-spring of consanguineous parents reduces the possibility for the next generation.” (5:32).

52 The reader should be aware that the term, “intersubjectivity”, is gaining acceptance in certain circles as a replacement for “objectivity”. The thinking is that it is impossible for humans to actually be “objective” since we cannot remove ourselves from our experiences, which are our sources of “knowledge”.

53 Ibid., p.209.


55 Sinclair (MSSW, ACSW, AASECT Certified) practices at the Midwest Center for Sex Therapy. Madison, WI. All quotes from interviews in October, 1989.

56 I am making the assumption that a compelling concern for my well-being would have overridden his desire to use me for his sexual gratification.

57 Although the availability of sound data was a contributing factor. See the consanguinity argument above.
WORKS CITED


