further observations on incestuous fathers

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The Illinois Revised Statutes (1967), Chapter 38, deal with the subject of incest as follows:

Art. 11-10. Aggravated Incest
(a) Any male person who shall perform any of the following acts with a person he knows is his daughter commits aggravated incest:
(1) Has sexual intercourse, or
(2) An act of deviate sexual conduct.
(b) "Daughter" for the purposes of this section means a blood daughter regardless of legitimacy or age; and also means a stepdaughter or an adopted daughter under the age of 18.
(c) Penalty
A person convicted of aggravated incest shall be imprisoned in the penitentiary from 2 to 20 years.

Art. 11-11. Incest
(a) Any person who has sexual intercourse or performs an act of deviate sexual conduct with another to whom he knows he is related as follows commits incest:
(1) Mother or son; or
(2) Brother or sister, either of the whole blood or the half blood.
(b) Penalty
A person convicted of incest shall be imprisoned in the penitentiary from one to 10 years.

The ancient taboo against incest, already recorded in the book of Genesis (where the daughters of Lot seduced him), remains so deep-seated that it even pertains to stepdaughters and adopted daughters under the age of 18. Perhaps primitive tribes observed the increasing incidence of congenital malformations in offspring born of incestuous unions, which thus reinforced incest fear and continued
as a mere matter of survival severely condemned this practice. Father-daughter
relations are the ones most frequently attracting the authorities’ attention. Usually
the daughter reports the abnormal relationship to her mother, who in turn initiates
legal action.

Raphling⁸ points out the seductive role of the daughter in father-daughter
incest. Weiner⁹ states in regard to his five father-daughter incest cases that
he found ego and superego defects among the fathers, but satisfactory intelli-
gence, and no psychoses and no specific psychological findings. The daughters
were not helpless victims, but sometimes active initiators; the mothers had
frustrated the fathers sexually. One is impressed in rereading Freud’s basic
writings³ that the son’s first sexual object choices, his forbidden mother and
sister, are incestuous. The growing younger eventually liberates himself from
these incestual strivings, but the neurotic adult at times remains unable to free
himself from them or returns to them (developmental arrest or regression). The
literature is replete with collusive wives hostile to their daughters⁸ and poor marital
environments as well as relationships.

One could easily assume that present-day female attire and crowded family
quarters might be provocative to a tempted father. This is an oversimplification.
The teen-aged or adult daughter parading scantily clad in front of the father
may, it is true, be a source of constant stimulation. If the mother is working,
her absence (particularly during the evening) increases the opportunity. The
overall dynamics of the incestual situation, however, go much deeper.¹³.⁶.⁹ The
secure and well-adjusted father will resist any incestual approach by the seduc-
tive daughter, and if the latter is emotionally well she will refrain from such
attempts.

The issue of incest, particularly that between father and daughter, is at times
dealt with in syndicated newspaper advice columns, indicating that the practice
does occur nationwide and that it is of grave concern to the public. Incidents
of brother-sister relations rarely come to the attention of the public or the
authorities; neither do the most dreaded cases, mother-son copulations. Yoruk-
gli¹⁰ does report a bizarre case of mother-son sexuality, maintaining that children
derive no harm from such practices, to which Ferenczi² objects. Rabin⁷ describes
a case of a professor in his mid-forties, a confirmed homosexual, who practiced
incest with his father, brother, cousin and son. Langley⁷ mentions a case of
father-son incest in which he felt that the father acted out his adolescent sexual
conflicts.

Interestingly enough, Illinois law, differentiating between incest and aggravated
incest, deals more leniently with mother and son than with father and daughter.
Apparently the adult male image is expected to display more strength and
abstain from this taboo more effectively than the woman, who is perhaps thought
to be weaker.

CASE STUDIES

The following four cases came to my attention between 1967 and 1970, partly
by court referral, partly on their own volition:

Case 1. The patient, aged 43, was examined in jail after his arrest for
aggravated incest with his 16-year-old daughter. His father, who was described
as brutal, had constantly treated the patient as an inferior individual though his
mother was described as “nice.” He was the second youngest of nine siblings.
The family led a marginal existence on his father's wages as a plasterer. He first left home at the age of 12, and though he returned to his family, he frequently relapsed into absenting himself and never resumed school. At the age of 15, he was sent to a reformatory after having stolen a car. Released after 10 months, he eventually joined the Army, but soon received a dishonorable discharge for having frequently been AWOL.

After a career of robberies and burglaries, he was sentenced to 30 years in the penitentiary, of which he served 15. He had been married for the first time at the age of 18, and in 1965, at the age of 41, he returned to his family. Three times this couple divorced and twice they remarried. There are four children of this union, the youngest (the victim) being 16 years old at the time of the incestual offense.

His wife stated that the four children resented the patient's return, particularly the 16-year-old daughter, who felt unduly disciplined by him; he felt unappreciated and unwanted by his family. The daughter-victim was described as "a flighty type with boys and could not care less if her father rotted in jail." Her mother did not hesitate to say that her daughter was a "selfish, spoiled brat who might very well have provoked the attack" as a means of getting even with him for trying to discipline her. This was the only incident of incest known to the wife. She had never refused herself sexually to her husband.

The victim rationalized her behavior of giving in to her father's desires as compliance with his wish to take her virginity "so that the boy friend would not do it and hurt her."

**DAUGHTER'S SEDUCTION OF WEAK FATHER**

The patient openly admitted that ever since his return from the penitentiary his daughter represented an object of sexual interest despite the regular sexual outlets he had with his wife. There was a general air of inadequacy about this man, and 15 years of containment had done their share in dwarfing his personality into that of an institutionalized person. He also gave a general attitude of "what cannot be helped, cannot be helped," and he felt guilty and depressed. No signs of a psychosis or of mental deficiency were discovered. One had the impression of an individual who could be easily led, who had a minimum of conscience and extremely poor control of his impulses.

The daughter's seductive role can hardly be questioned. Practiced on a weak father whose early development had been chaotic, who had a long record of antisocial behavior and whose values had undoubtedly become blurred during his confinement, the catastrophe occurred. He was subsequently given a sentence of another two to five years in the penitentiary.

**Case 2**  This man, a 40-year-old clerk, entered treatment on the advice of his divorce lawyer without having been in conflict with the authorities. His father had impregnated a woman outside the marriage and had left home when his son was 17; his mother was described as promiscuous. The patient had had a pathological relationship with his 15-year-old daughter involving oral sexuality for several months. His wife became extremely upset upon learning about it from the daughter and insisted on the patient leaving home and finding somewhere else to live. The marital rift was severe enough that a divorce was being planned.

The patient was an intelligent and educated individual who developed consid-
erable insight about himself and was able to recognize his aberration as an expression of emotional regression. Unusual strain at his place of employment, coupled with frequent sexual refusals by his wife and a rather impoverished ego which had not matured under the adverse home conditions of his youth, apparently had brought about his need for oral sexuality with his daughter. Treatment eventually resulted in a full reconciliation of the couple and his return home. No further aberrant behavior has been reported.

Case 3. This patient was an unskilled laborer who had practiced incest with his two daughters, ages 18 and 14. There were also two sons, 17 and 13. While the older daughter tolerated the relationship for four years, the younger one reported him to the authorities, rather than to her mother, after the relationship had lasted for about two years.

He was born as the son of a farmer, the second youngest of four siblings. He had a high school education. Having impregnated his wife-to-be, it became necessary for him to marry at 18 precluding the learning of a trade, a fact which gave him a life-long feeling of inferiority. After the birth of the youngest child, he underwent vasectomy. He denied that this operation had given him more courage to cohabit with his daughters or that it had given him an image of male inferiority. He admitted to being an extremely jealous individual.

A SEXUALLY DENYING WIFE

At the beginning of each incestuous affair, he was under the influence of alcohol. Allegedly his wife had frequently refused him sexually. There was guilt and moderate depression, the latter principally based on his fear of impending incarceration. His insights were excellent, but his self-image was poor. It developed during treatment that his oldest boy was mentally defective, and the patient rationalized that his worry might have contributed to his incestuous practices. He continued to work, but treatment efforts were hampered by his fear of imprisonment, which finally took place when he was confined for two years.

Of interest were contacts with the two daughter-victims. The older one was heavily made up and was narcissistically preoccupied with her appearance as an attractive woman; she was about to enter a course in cosmetology. She wanted her father back (i.e., not imprisoned). She rationalized her incestuous behavior as resulting from her fear of her father because he was stronger than she was (though she had been able to ward off her boyfriend, a well-developed youth of 18). The younger daughter was the more intelligent; one and likewise wanted her father returned to the family. She assured me that the relationship would not be resumed, and if it were, she would notify her mother rather than the authorities. She gave a general impression of passivity but good-heartedness and stated that she eventually wanted to become a counselor. Neither girl seemed to feel any shame or embarrassment, but they did not try to make the relationship look right.

Case 4. This 43-year-old mechanic entered treatment while out on bond after his arrest. His parents were divorced when he was four years old, and there was considerable shunting until he found a permanent foster home at the age of six. Eventually he was adopted by the foster parents and grew up as an only child. He was a high school graduate and a Navy veteran.

He was married at 21 and had five children. The marriage was maladjusted from the beginning; however, during the present predicament the wife had stood continued
fully behind her husband. The couple lost their first child when the youngster was three years old as the child fell out of a moving car when the father was driving. The wife never forgave her husband for this mishap.

Two daughters, ages 21 and 17, were the victims of incest. He claimed that in no way had he ever been sexually provoked by his daughters, that no penetration had ever taken place and that none of the parties had ever seen each other in the nude.

Undoubtedly the patient’s early development was disturbed by the frequent shifting and shunting, making for little security. This left him vulnerable in later life and interfered with a healthy masculine identification. Yet this man is otherwise what could be called a good provider and family man, as were cases 2 and 3. Rather than incarcerating him, the court placed him on a five-year probation. For the past two years he has developed considerable insight under treatment and has not relapsed into incestuous behavior. His employment continues, and the elder of the two daughters has married in the meantime.

**DISCUSSION**

Incest occurs in the American home, and the literature unanimously depicts the inadequacies of the incestuous father and daughter. Yet community mental health and its practitioners have hardly ever come to grips with this problem. The average mental health professional is in dire need of intensive knowledge and training in this area to deal with it unafraid and effectively. In view of this, courts frequently feel obligated to punish the male offender as a deterrent “so that the next father will not do it.” Treatment for this aberration in penal institutions is notoriously inadequate, and the family loses the provider. The incest taboo does not stop once the offender enters the penitentiary. Among the prisoners’ hierarchy he ranks lowest. Convicted murderers have been heard to say, “I would never do such a low thing to my daughter.”

Yet courts have lately become more lenient in less taboo-laden areas such as exhibitionism by referring such individuals for therapy rather than containing them. Family treatment of the incest situation can likewise be effective. There is at times no need to remove the offending father from the premises.

The behavior traits of some neurotics have been compared with those of primitive man. Freud clearly tried to demonstrate regressive behavior in such cases, dwelling on incest fear and strong incest avoidance among primitives. Among the Battas of Sumatra, a father may never be alone in the house with his daughter, nor a mother with her son. He concludes that in that particular milieu it is assumed that a solitary meeting between a man and a woman will lead to improper intimacy. Incestuous fathers see their daughters primarily as sex objects, not as their offspring. This represents regression to earlier levels of human development and even phylogenetically return to sexual behavior of higher mammals. In a psychosocial sense, it denotes incomplete emotional development.

All four cases had in common unstable conditions during early youth and development, preventing full emotional maturation; all four were ill-equipped to face strain and stress in later life. The seductive roles of the daughters in cases 1 and 3 have been described as has the overall hostility of the wives in cases 1 and 4. With the exception of case 1, the wives had frustrated their husbands sexually.
If the catastrophic incident of incest is to be avoided, preventive psychiatry holds the most promise. Creating early security during the formative years prevents regression under stress to animal-like behavior during adulthood. The real taboos should be the broken home and the inadequate parents of the future offender. Here community mental health meets its greatest challenge.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


