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Source: *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (May, 1995), pp. 265-281

Published by: [National Council on Family Relations](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/353682>

Accessed: 10/04/2011 19:50

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We Shared Something Special: The Moral Discourse of Incest Perpetrators

The concepts of justice and care provided the framework for the analysis of narrative accounts of incest perpetrators. Informants were 10 men and one woman interviewed an average of six times each. The analysis was guided by the procedures of modified analytic induction. Most striking about informants' accounts was that almost all of them defined incest as love and care and their behavior as considerate and fair. In several instances, they described their experience of incest as mutual romantic love. Yet, their professed care, love, and sense of fairness were contradicted in many ways, such as their refusal to stop when children wanted to stop. Within their narratives were several other gender-based discourses found in the wider culture.

At first glance, suggesting that incest perpetrators have moral perspectives on incest seems like an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Yet, incest perpetrators are embedded in cultures that view incest as morally repugnant, and laws make incest illegal. Along with other members of their cultures, incest perpetrators are socialized in varying degrees to understand the proscriptions against incest. Consequences for perpetrators can involve

repugnance and shame heaped upon them, social ostracism, loss of family relationships, and legal sanctions. In addition, for victims and other family members, incest brings great harm (Armstrong, 1978; Briere, 1992; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1993; Friedrich, 1990; Gilgun, 1990, 1991; Herman, 1992; Rush, 1980; Russell, 1983; Wyatt, Newcomb, & Riedelle, 1993).

Self-interest, fairness, and concern for doing no harm, especially to persons in close family relationships, would appear to provide sufficient motivation to deter incest for those who might consider it. Yet, incest occurs in 1 in 6 families in the United States (Russell, 1983, 1986), and about 100,000 new cases occur each year (Williams & Finkelhor, 1992). Perpetrators are members of victims' nuclear and extended families. These figures demonstrate the ineffectiveness—for a large number of persons—of moral repugnance and consequent sanctions as deterrents. These figures also suggest an ability of incest perpetrators to suspend, reinterpret, or neutralize moral principles that enjoin them to promote the welfare of others and to avoid incest.

In this article, I use the concepts of justice and care to analyze the narrative accounts of incest perpetrators. These concepts are fundamental ideas in moral philosophy and theories of moral development and were brought to widespread attention by the work of Carol Gilligan and her colleagues (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988; Lyons, 1983).

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Key Words: discourse analysis, justice and care, incest perpetrators, modified analytic induction, moral discourse.

Data were gathered through open-ended life history interviews. Through narrative accounts, informants give meaning, value, and coherence to a sequence of events, or stories. Their moral values are infused in their accounts (Tappan, 1991). The method of data analysis and interpretation is modified analytic induction.

MORAL DOMAINS

Justice and care are central concepts in moral philosophy and theories of moral development (Bloom, 1986; Manning, 1992; Noddings, 1984). Though sometimes considered a set of prescriptions based on conceptions of justice (Kohlberg, 1984; Smetana, Kelly, & Twentyman, 1989), morality also is associated with a capacity for care. Controversy exists over whether care or justice is morally preferred and represents a higher level of moral development (Cortese & Mestrovic, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 1988; Kohlberg, 1984; Manning, 1992; Noddings, 1984). Gender enters this controversy because a perspective emphasizing justice is associated with men's moral decision making while care is associated with women's decision making (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988; Larrabee, 1993). Currently emerging is the perspective that orientations toward justice and care are complementary. The integration of both perspectives characterizes not only morally mature and responsible individuals (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 1988; Manning, 1992), but also morally sensitive policies and a political system that, in the words of Bloom (1986), "contributes to the personal, intellectual and moral growth of its citizens" (p. 97). Criteria for making moral judgments often are implicit and involve interpretations of whether behaviors are just and caring in their intent and consequences and whether individuals take responsibility for the acts and for consequences (Bloom, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 1988; Manning, 1992; Noddings, 1984; Smetana & Kelly, 1989).

Care

Care encompasses concern, loyalty, and love for self and others (Gilligan, 1982; Dewey, 1908/1980; O'Neill, 1989). Grounded in relationships and responsiveness, care arises, in the words of Manning (1992), from a "sympathetic identification with others" (p. 67). She continued, "When we see someone suffering, for example, we feel the suffering almost as if it were our own. Our de-

sire to do something to relieve the suffering springs naturally from this empathic response" (p. 67). This view has wide support in moral philosophy. Bloom (1986) wrote that what Gilligan and colleagues mean by *care* and *response*, what the Chinese mean by *jen*, and what he means by *empathy* all involve efforts to connect with unique and concrete others in deeply personal ways and thus to identify with them and to understand them. This level of identification leads individuals to resist hurting others, to protect vulnerability, and to actively promote the welfare of others in the others' own terms (Bloom, 1986; Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988; Lyons, 1983). Care, then, is more than simply showing concern in particular situations, but represents responsiveness based on principles (O'Neill, 1989). Awareness that interpersonal acts have consequences for networks of care, such as families, is part of the care framework (Manning, 1992).

Taken to extremes of either too much or too little, caring can be defective because of its negative consequences. In a discussion of "intelligent sympathy," which is an analogue to care and empathy, Dewey (1908/1980) pointed out that sympathy can degenerate into "immediate indulgence of a dominant emotion," which overcomes concern for consequences for the self or for others (p. 107). Showing love and empathy in a self-centered way—that is, without considering what others might need and want—is an example of "immediate indulgence." Not considering the impact of behaviors on others exemplifies too little caring. Tendencies to provide too much or too little care are tempered by principles of justice, such as adherence to rules and to fairness. In moral conduct, then, care does not stand alone, but is joined with notions associated with an orientation toward justice (Houston, 1990).

Justice

An ethic of justice is grounded not in connection and empathy but in duty and obligation (Lyons, 1983). Fairness, equal treatment, respect, rights, impartiality, and the applications of abstract principles and procedural rules are associated with a justice orientation. Status variables such as age, gender, sexual orientation, and race are important because they render persons vulnerable to unfair treatment—for example, oppression. Emphasis on fairness necessitates the modification of procedural rules to accommodate ability and other attributes related to status. For example, laws

throughout the United States now are being modified to accommodate child witnesses in courts.

Some moral philosophers view rules associated with a justice framework as a sort of safety net when caring cannot be mustered. Manning (1992) stated that rules represent "socially recognized moral minimums" to be applied when "moral attention flags" (p. 82). Below that minimum, conduct is morally condemned. Rules can provide some protection for the rights of vulnerable others in societies characterized by "large-scale selfishness and inattention" (p. 82).

Finding a balance between care and justice for self and for others is an ongoing challenge (Dewey, 1908/1980; Gilligan, 1982; Manning, 1992). Dewey argued that theories of moral behavior recognize "the necessity of acting sometimes with especial and conscious regard for oneself" while simultaneously being accountable, responsible, and "responsive to the needs and claims of others" (p. 170). In Dewey's (1908/1980) framework, seeing the continuity between individual acts and long- and short-term consequences is the basis of moral decision making, while the isolation of acts from consequences suggests a tendency toward evil. In Dewey's words, "Every act has *potential* moral significance" (p. 11) because of its possible consequences. Moral significance of individual acts emerge, not in abstract discussion, but in terms of consequences for concrete persons in concrete situations (Bloom, 1986; Dewey, 1908/1980; Manning, 1992).

Moral Philosophy and Family Relationships

Moral philosophers rarely have addressed interpersonal relationships, especially family relationships (Manning, 1992; Okin, 1989). Traditional Western philosophy has focused on the ethics and morality of the public sphere, such as medicine, war, apartheid, discrimination, and the obligations of the state. The more private spheres of friendship and family have not been identified as involving moral problematics.

Within psychology, moral developmentalists have been of two minds. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hower (1984) represented the view that relationships are not the proper domain of moral inquiry, although they are of concern to women and girls. Piaget (1932), on the other hand, stated that there would be no morality without relationships. Recently, feminist scholars from several different disciplines (e.g., Houston, 1990; Miller, 1986;

Noddings, 1984; Okin, 1989; Ruddick, 1989; Tronto, 1987) have begun to address the moral dimensions of family relationships. Many of these scholars have posited a gender bias in choices of moral problematics.

Moral Dimensions of Incest

It is ironic that family relationships are not part of traditional moral theorizing and are sometimes overlooked and even undervalued in research on human development. Families are permeated with inequalities in terms of age, size, gender, developmental level, status, knowledge, and power. Children, in particular, are vulnerable to abuse of power because of their unequal status in relationship to adults. When parents and others with authority over children choose to disregard principles related to justice and care, children have few resources with which to prevent harm to themselves. Their behaviors and verbal protests have impact only on those who are receptive to them. They need both care and respect of their rights as persons in order to develop to their full potential. Moral considerations may be factors in constraining parents and others who have power over children from committing incest and other forms of abuse of children. The absence of a public discourse on the moral dimensions of family relationships may account partially at least for the common occurrence of incest.

Philosophers are not alone in ignoring the moral dimensions of families. Research and theory on incest also have paid little attention to these domains. For example, a recent and otherwise informative study of incest perpetrators (Williams & Finkelhor, 1992) and a review of research (Williams & Finkelhor, 1990) did not touch upon moral dimensions, nor did a well-received edited volume on incest-perpetrating fathers (Horton, Johnson, Roundy, & Williams, 1990). The one place where moral considerations are present, at least implicitly, are in definitions of incest. These considerations have been consistent over the recent history of child sexual abuse research. For example, the definitions of Groth (1979) and of Wyatt, Newcomb, and Riederle (1993) recognized the inequality of children and adults and the disregard of adults for the impact of sexual abuse on children. Other than implicitly in definitions, however, the moral dimensions of incest are slighted. A major missing piece in our understanding of incest is how perpetrators apply—or

avoid applying—principles related to justice and care to their incestuous acts.

Definition of Incest

For this research, incest is defined as sexual behaviors between family members who legally are prohibited to marry. Prohibitions are based primarily on age differences and biological and legal ties. Incestuous behaviors include touching the sexual body parts of children and inducing or forcing children to touch perpetrators' sexual body parts. These body parts include the vulva, vagina, anus, buttocks, breasts, testicles, and penis. A comprehensive definition includes non-touch incest, such as looks and talk. In the present research, both types of incest occurred in many cases, and touch incest was present in all cases. Perpetrators are assumed to experience sexual gratification through incestuous acts (Gilgun & Connor, 1989; Williams & Finkelhor, 1990, 1992).

Given the inequalities that characterize families, children cannot give informed consent to sexual relations, except perhaps in cases of mutually agreed-upon explorations between generational equals. Their status as children and their lack of understanding of the nature and consequences of sexual behaviors preclude informed consent. Their freedom of choice is further compromised and the probability of covert coercions is present because of the authority and physical size of the older person. In this definition of incest, family members include the following: adults who are biological and adoptive parents; other adults who have parental roles with children; and brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. A male perpetrator—adult, adolescent, or child—and a younger female child is the most common configuration. Although figures vary from study to study, fathers and stepfathers may account for about one-quarter of all incest, uncles may account for another one-quarter, and the other 50% may be committed by brothers, sisters, cousins, grandparents, and aunts, with women infrequently identified as incest perpetrators (Russell, 1986).

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study were derived from the literature on justice and care and were shaped by my assumptions about incest. The hypotheses are: (a) Incest perpetrators have special regard for themselves and do not have regard for the impact

of incest on their victims, and (b) incest perpetrators are not morally integrated, and, if they have a moral focus, it will be on justice.

The first hypothesis draws heavily on notions of care and uses the language of Dewey (1908/1980). It assumes that children suffer when they are victimized incestuously and that perpetrators disregard this suffering. Furthermore, this hypothesis assumes that incest perpetrators are selfish and inattentive to others, language borrowed from Manning (1992). As discussed earlier, notions of care include identification with the suffering of others, resisting hurting others because of this identification, responsiveness, loyalty, the protection of vulnerability, and the active promotion of the welfare of others.

When persons are morally integrated, they apply principles of both care and justice in their moral decision making. The second hypothesis assumes that incest perpetrators are not morally integrated, and, if they have any moral perspective on incest, they will focus on justice. In moral conduct, when caring fails, justice provides a safety net. In incest, caring appears to have failed, and notions of justice do not take up the slack. The assumption that justice will be emphasized is based upon widespread findings that men are more likely to emphasize justice and women to emphasize care. Since most incest perpetrators are male, I assumed that they would emphasize justice in their discussions of their own incestuous behaviors. As discussed earlier, notions related to justice include fairness, equal treatment, attention to rules, and respect for status variables such as age, gender, and race.

METHOD

Modified Analytic Induction

The method used in this research is based upon the procedures of analytic induction. Similar to grounded theory (Glaser, 1992, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in some methodological procedures, analytic induction differs in the timing of the use of concepts. Both stem from the Chicago School of Sociology. Rather than preselecting hypotheses and the concepts on which they are based, grounded theory seeks to discover them through processes of emergence, which occur over the course of data analysis and interpretation. The procedures of analytic induction are also based on emergence over the course of the analysis. In ana-

lytic induction, however, researchers develop hypotheses, sometimes rough and general approximations, prior to entry into the field or, in cases where data already are collected, prior to data analysis. These hypotheses can be based on hunches, assumptions, careful examination of research and theory, or combinations. Hypotheses are revised to fit emerging interpretations of the data over the course of data collection and analysis. Researchers actively seek to disconfirm emerging hypotheses through negative case analysis, that is, analysis of cases that hold promise for disconfirming emerging hypotheses and that add variability to the sample. In this way, the originators of the method sought to examine enough cases to assure the development of universal hypotheses.

Originally developed to produce universal and causal hypotheses (Manning, 1991; Robinson, 1951; Znaniecki, 1934), contemporary researchers have de-emphasized universality and causality and have emphasized instead the development of descriptive hypotheses that identify patterns of behaviors, interactions, and perceptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Denzin, 1978; Gilgun, 1992). Bogdan and Biklen have called this approach modified analytic induction. Several classic qualitative studies produced by members of the Chicago School of Sociology (Bulmer, 1984) used analytic induction (e.g., Angell, 1936; Becker, 1953; Cressey, 1953; Lindesmith, 1947). This method rarely has been used in contemporary studies of families.

The present research used modified analytic induction. My goal was to test hypotheses derived from the literature on care and justice and to modify them to fit in-depth subjective accounts of incest perpetrators. I assumed that the concepts would serve to sensitize me to concrete indicators and processes related to justice and care. While research based on analytic induction is guided by hypotheses and concepts, researchers assume that through processes of emergence, they will discover concepts and hypotheses not accounted for in their original hypotheses; in fact, that is the point of analytic induction.

Informants

Informants were 11 incest perpetrators, 10 men and one woman, recruited on a volunteer basis from maximum- and medium-security prison sex offender treatment programs and from snowball sampling from among persons in community

treatment and self-help groups. They ranged in age from 32 to 54, and they were predominantly working- and middle-class Whites. Nine were married at the time of the interview, and two were divorced. They had abused both boy and girl children. Several had abused brothers and sisters and other relatives such as cousins and nieces during adolescence.

As adults, they primarily victimized their biological children, with two cases of stepfather-stepchild incest and one case of abuse of a niece. The woman perpetrator stopped abusing children in adolescence. Some abused children inside and outside of the families, but all were incest perpetrators. The variability of informants provided several opportunities to do negative case analysis, which, as explained earlier, seeks to disconfirm emerging hypotheses and creates samples which have major variabilities. For example, the woman perpetrator, the man who abused his nieces when he was an adolescent and his son and daughter when he was an adult, and the four men who abused children to whom they were not related, as well as those to whom they were related, added variability to the sample. In terms of their relationships to the victims, the gender of their victims, and the ages during which they perpetrated, they are fairly representative of identified incest perpetrators (Abel, Becker, Cunningham-Rathner, Mittleman, & Rouleau, 1988). I was not seeking to develop universal hypotheses, but the variability in the sample suggested that the hypotheses might be illuminating in several types of incestuous families. Informants signed a detailed informed consent, were encouraged not to answer any questions they did not want to answer, and were assured they could withdraw without prejudice from the research at any time, procedures approved by the institutional review board of the university with which I am affiliated.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through open-ended life history interviews. I interviewed each informant an average of six times each for an average interview time of 12 hours per informant, except for the woman perpetrator for whom there was only opportunity for one 3-hour interview. This totals more than 120 hours of interview time. I conducted all interviews. Although a general topical interview guide was used, the timing and wording of each question was individualized in order to capture the perspectives of informants in their

own words. The interview was primarily a dialogue, during which I frequently checked my understandings and interpretations of the informants' words and meanings. I introduced my interpretations by saying, "I want you to know how I'm thinking about what you're saying. Let me know if I'm not understanding what you're saying." This approach, in combination with the length of the interview process, resulted in an in-depth look at the subjective interpretations of informants.

The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded using the framework of the concepts of justice and care. I compared the conceptual definitions and hypotheses with concrete indicators in the data. I analyzed each case individually, identifying themes, codes, and dimensions of the concepts of care and justice. I carefully noted variations within each of the dimensions, and I sought to challenge each emerging finding with other findings. My intent was to create as complete a picture as possible of the moral discourse of the perpetrators in this study. Two research assistants worked with me. Not only did they reanalyze several of the cases, but we discussed in depth the possible meanings and interpretations of the data.

The data were collected and transcribed before I applied the framework of justice and care. The analytic framework alerted me to instances of care and justice, distortions of justice and care, the absence of considerations of justice and care, and findings that were not part of the care-justice framework. The framework was sensitizing (Blumer, 1969/1986) because its concepts gave me a sharply focused intellectual context, or template, on which to place the informants' narratives (cf. Campbell, 1979). It guided the entire analysis.

RESULTS

A defining procedure of analytic induction is the modification of hypotheses during the conduct of the research. To fit the perpetrators' narrative accounts, I reformulated the hypotheses to such an extent that I generated new sets of statements. They are not relational hypotheses—that is, hypotheses positing clear and possibly causal relationships between two or more concepts—and only loosely can be called descriptive hypotheses (cf. Kerlinger, 1973).

Most striking about the perpetrators' accounts was that almost all of them defined incest as love and care. The types of love they expressed ranged

from sexual and romantic to care and concern for the welfare of the children. These were unanticipated findings. I did not hypothesize that perpetrators would view incest as caring and as romantic love. Rather, I had assumed that incest represented lack of care and, implicitly, an inability to love. It did not occur to me that perpetrators would equate incest and romance, or even incest and feelings of sexualized caring. From previous research cited earlier, I did assume that incest perpetrators would experience profound sexual gratification through incest. Ironically, their professed love of whatever type was contradicted by many other aspects of their accounts, such as continuing the incest when the children wanted to stop, withholding permission to do ordinary things until the children submitted sexually, and letting others think the children were lying when the incest was disclosed. These perpetrators, therefore, did not view incest as harmful to victims, did not reflect upon how they used their power and authority to coerce children to cooperate, and even interpreted their behavior in many cases as forms of care and romantic love.

Care

The first hypothesis as originally formulated was that incest perpetrators have special regard for themselves and do not have regard for the impact of incest on their victims.

As a result of the analysis, I reformulated the hypothesis as follows: (a) Perpetrators have special regard for the deep pleasure they find in incest, (b) concepts of romantic love and mutuality are prominent in many but not all incestuous relationships, (c) many perpetrators interpret their behaviors as promoting children's welfare and not hurting them, and (d) the sense of love and caring that many perpetrators express for the children are contradicted by behaviors which are sometimes unresponsive and cruel.

Dewey's (1908/1980) phrase of "immediate indulgence of a dominant emotion" (p. 107) fits all 11 perpetrators. This notion is one of several that I found to be sensitizing during analysis of the data. The idea of perpetrators having special regard for themselves held up throughout the analysis. While there were nuances of difference in how informants described their experiences, the emotions in which they indulged represented degrees of pleasure in incest. "Bliss," "thrilling," "exciting," "rush," "high," "fix," "good feelings," and "release" are words they used. One example

of an informant's discourse in this regard is that of a father talking of his sexual relationship with his 13-year-old daughter:

To me, it's not the same as having an orgasm. I mean, it was thrilling, and it was exciting, but it wasn't what I was looking for. . . . Bliss is the word that I would identify with that. There's a really satisfying feeling of everything is kind of relaxed. There doesn't seem to be any pressure. It's a real nice place to be.

Love. For most, the perpetrators' high pleasure extended to considering the incest love. Four different patterns relating to experiences of love emerged during the analysis: expressing no love, expressing sexualized affection, believing themselves to be in love, and experiencing an intense drive for connection. The rarest style was having no feelings of love, and this occurred with an incestuous father who also abused his nieces for about 5 years when he was a teenager. He said, "They were just something to use, really," adding "It [the sexual behavior with his nieces] was the only thing I could use as a safe release, you know." These children, then, were objects, not persons to be cared for and treated in just ways.

The perpetrators experienced degrees of caring and affection for the children. Even the man who expressed no caring for his nieces expressed concern and caring for his children, sentiments which he said "took second place" to the good feelings he got from the incest. A typical statement of affection is the following, provided by the sister about her two brothers, younger than her by 5 and 7 years, whom she abused for about 4 years, when she was 12 to 16: "Fondling, just touching, sleeping with, touching, sort of a nurturing thing" is how she talked of her incest with them. An uncle perpetrator said, "I felt close to the kids while I was doing that." The expression of care, in these cases, appeared to be sexualized and experienced in contexts where notions related to justice—such as respect for differences in status variables—had no place.

Some of the fathers and stepfathers saw themselves as in love, two of them to the extent that they often thought of running away with the children to start new lives. A stepfather said: "I know there were points there where I thought I could leave my wife and take my daughter with me, and we would go off to wherever. It was like I had two wives." He abused his stepdaughter for 11 years, from age 5 to 16, and he was 25 years older than her. Another stepfather described a "love affair" with his stepson, whom he abused when the

boy was 12 to 14 years old: "To me, to me, when I was having my relationship with my son, it was a love affair. It really was. It was, it was real."

A biological father said he had a better relationship with his 3-year-old daughter than he did with his wife. He was, however, talking about the nonsexual parts of his relationship, which he described as playful and affectionate, consisting of spending time with her, reading her stories, and playing with her "at her level." He talked of his sexual abuse of his daughter as separate from the playful, affectionate parts of his relationship. Sex with his daughter was a high, something he sought intently. Toward the end of his abuse of this daughter, he experienced feelings of high intensity and a drive for connection. This is a fourth pattern related to love. This father said:

The feeling was, it's not a feeling—it's a thought. The thought was so doggone strong about making that connection with my daughter, that she understand that this is love. . . . Wow. It was strong. . . . I meant it with every fiber in my body. It was really important that she understand, and I make some connection from her to me, too.

He reported this happening the last few times he abused his daughter. Afterward, but not during the incest, he reported feeling confused and scared about these feelings.

Though not accounted for in my original hypothesis, notions of affection and romantic love are prominent in the discourse of the incest perpetrators in this study. Care, as it is discussed in moral philosophy and theories of moral development, does not encompass romantic love, although caring and promotion of the welfare of others can be components of romantic love. The perpetrators apparently experienced what they thought was caring. For some, the caring was sexualized affection, for others romantic love, and for still others a drive for connection so deep and powerful it scared and confused them. While using the discourse of care and romantic love, the perpetrators in this study were disconnected from the implications of their status variables—age, gender, size, and role in family—for the power they had over children.

Mutuality. About half claimed that the love was mutual. Words such as "we were close," "we shared something special," "I loved her—she loved me," "mutual care," "he enjoyed it as much as I did," and "I trusted them and they trusted me" characterized all but a few accounts. Some

were concerned that the sex be mutually enjoyable. A stepfather said, "Sometimes I would feel guilty because Mary [not her real name] didn't have an orgasm."

The stepfather who said he had a love affair with his son provided several examples of what he considered mutuality with his son, such as the following:

When I got home, he always had the heater in, you know, the shed going, and it's the first thing he'd say when I'd come in the house. He'd say, "Dad, I've got the heater plugged, plugged in." He just as well said, "Dad, I'm ready to go make love."

He abused the child in the tool shed in back of the house. The sexual acts, too, he interpreted as mutual love:

There was caring there, you know. I, we, used to talk while we were doing it, and I'd ask him if he enjoyed this or that. He'd say, "Yes, Dad, I love it," and I'd say, "Do you want to quit? Do you want to stop?" He, he'd say, "No," and when he would masturbate me or fellate me, he would tell me, "I'm going to make you feel good."

He reported that Jack [not his real name] used to wait for the mail each day for a letter from his biological father, who never wrote or sent presents for birthdays and holidays. This stepfather did not see Jack as vulnerable, as craving affection and attention from a father figure, and he did not interpret his own behavior as taking advantage of this vulnerability. When he told me that Jack currently was suicidal, he said that Jack's depression was related to Jack's enjoying sex with him and not being able to handle that the love was homosexual. He could not see all the other possible factors leading to Jack's suicidal thinking.

Of those who discussed mutuality related to sex, some conceded that while the children loved them, they might not have liked the sex. As a father said:

It was the love and affection she was getting from me is what she liked. It might have been the acts she didn't like. . . . What was between Beth [not her real name] and I was something real special, something that was just ours.

This emphasis on mutuality can be challenged by notions related to justice. Relationships can be mutual when parties to the relationship are equal in status or, if differences exist, when respect is paid to the implications of these differences. In incest, age, experience, and authority related to

role in the family are the status variables of interest. In the present study, gender could have played a significant role for the victims as well, since most of the perpetrators were male and most of the victims were female.

When status differences are taken into account, mutual relationships are possible between persons who are not equal in status variables. Mutually loving relationship between parents and children and mutually respectful relationships between professors and students are examples. In these cases, persons in authority make appropriate demands on those with less authority and are vigilant about the potential for abuses of authority and the power that goes with it. Incest perpetrators, on the other hand, do not take into account the differences in status variables and the implications that these variables have for freedom of choice and autonomy, and, thus, mutuality. From the perspective of an orientation toward justice, the perpetrators' constructions of their relationships with children as mutual can be challenged.

Promoting the children's welfare. Many not only saw incest as love, but stated they were promoting the children's welfare. Words such as "teaching her," "satisfying her," "showing her," "trying to make her aware of what boys do," "making her a better lover than her mother," "showing her I loved her," "comforting," "consoling," and "helping kids out of their own mess" are some of the words informants used. The following quote from a biological father demonstrates the theme of consolation:

I honestly believe that during the abuse that I was showing, that I was feeling sorry for Beth, because of the way Margaret [child's mother and wife, not her real name] used to nag and bitch at her all the time, and it was like I was comforting her at the same time she was comforting me. That, oh, I was showing her a type of love.

The language of this perpetrator is infused with notions related to care. Empathy and responsiveness to suffering are implicit, while he was explicit about the comfort he believed he was giving. Yet he took these notions, sexualized them, and then evaded the injustice of his behaviors by stating this was a mutual sexual relationship.

The theme of "helping kids out of their own mess," emerged when some informants said they showed children that sex could change their sad and depressed moods and make them feel better. For example, a biological father gave his daughter a vibrator, not only to help her alter her moods,

but to satisfy herself sexually and to keep boys away. He said:

I gave her the vibrator, that was one of the things I said, you know, you can use this when you want to be sexual, and you don't have to go out and get a boyfriend and pick some guy up in school or whatever. You can use this instead. If you wake up at night—I taught her some things—if you're feeling frustrated, or you feel angry, this will always calm you down. I recognized it at that time, that some of those things can be satisfied through sexual means, and I told her that, and I showed her how to use it.

In the guise of showing compassion for suffering and promoting his daughter's welfare, certainly important components of care, this father was encouraging his daughter to use masturbation to cope with stress and to avoid peer heterosexual relationships.

Using cognitive-behavioral theory, researchers on child molesters found that perpetrators develop cognitions and beliefs that support their behaviors (Abel, Becker, & Cunningham-Rathner, 1984; Stermac & Segal, 1989). Yet, as poststructuralism points out, these perpetrators also can be viewed as shaping language to fit their behaviors. For example, Leahy (1994) noted that poststructuralists see persons as "molding and creatively adapting discourses as they act" (p. 48). The incest perpetrators of this study, then, co-opted and molded the language of care while pursuing their incestuous relationships. Human beings, however, live in community, and there are limits to the freedom that persons have, both in how they act and in how they use language to mold their interpretations of their behaviors. The moral philosophers cited earlier would interpret incestuous behaviors as short-sighted and selfish, having immediate positive consequences for perpetrators and negative consequences for the children, and as violating principles of justice and care—despite perpetrators' self-descriptions as caring and their love as mutual.

Promoting the welfare of others as a component of care is an example of another sensitizing concept in the framework for the analysis of these data. The justice-care framework helped me to identify within informants' narratives those stories that showed distortions in the promotion of children's welfare.

Unresponsiveness to children's attempts to stop. While all but one informant professed having great care for the children, all betrayed some of

the fundamental principles of care. Not only were the perpetrators unresponsive to the children's attempts to stop the incest, but they often were cruel in trying to keep the children from telling anyone. They appeared to disconnect from their professed deep caring. Self-interest, regardless of the consequences for the child, took over.

Unresponsiveness appeared in most of the informants' stories. A biological father who abused his daughter in his bedroom cajoled her out of her resistance:

I'd go into Beth's room at night, you know, and I'd ask if she'd want to come in to watch TV, you know, in my room. Sometimes she'd say, "Yes," and she'd come. Sometimes she'd say, "Well, I don't know." I'd tickle her, you know, and goof around with her a little bit, and then I'd pick her up and carry her into our room.

Several were coldly manipulative and deceptive. A stepfather said his stepdaughter learned in school that a father should not have sex with his daughter. Many times she said,

"We shouldn't do this," and I'd tell her, "Yeah, I know that. I'm sick, and someday I'll get help," and that was being a con. If I'd tell her that, then she would usually leave her guard down and we'd. . . . [He didn't finish the sentence.] I think I told her it was wrong because that's what she wanted to hear. I didn't really feel it was wrong.

Responsiveness as a component of care identified by moral philosophers and developmentalists was yet another instance of a sensitizing concept. In the cases just discussed, informants showed an absence of responsiveness.

The incest perpetrators in this study were similar to many other men in our culture in their lack of responsiveness in the tactics they used to gain sexual access to the objects of their choice, in their case, children. For example, in her study of fraternity gang rape, Sanday (1990) discovered the term "working a yes out," used by men to describe their manipulations of women with whom they wanted to be sexual. In addition, as widely reported in the national press, a study released in 1994 reported that almost one-third of the women surveyed stated they engaged in first intercourse against their will, either by being pressured or through physical force (Greeley, 1994). The unresponsiveness in the discourse and conduct of the incest perpetrators in this study were consistent with models of behavior and language that are part of some wider gender-based cultural practices.

Cruelty in keeping the children from telling. Some were cruel in keeping the incest secret. Instilling fear in the children, such as warning that their mothers would leave if they ever found out, was a common tactic. One man let his daughter believe that if she told, her mother—and his wife—would kill him:

A couple of times, [my wife] would say, "If I ever found you you were touching the girls, I'd kill you". . . . saying that in front of the victim and the abuser, and the victim feeling close to the abuser, and [the victim] kind of says, "I ain't, I sure ain't going to say anything because, if I say anything now, Ma will kill Dad."

The professed caring of these perpetrators was contradicted by their behavior. As Manning (1992) pointed out, when caring fails, then the rules of justice provide a safety net. This did not hold true for the incest perpetrators in this study.

Sexual relationships between clients and therapists often have been compared to incest (Bates & Brodsky, 1988; Luepker, 1989; Smith, 1989; Twemlow & Gabbard, 1989). Abusive therapists may view their sexual relationships with clients as love and as promoting the welfare of clients. Basing their estimate on a review of research, Twemlow and Gabbard (1989) stated that the "lovesick therapist" is the most common type, conservatively representing about half of all abusive therapists. Like the incest perpetrators in this study, abusive therapists often view the relationships as therapeutic and healing—in short, as promoting the welfare of clients (Pope & Bouhoutsos, 1986; Smith, 1989; Twemlow & Gabbard, 1989). These researchers observed that, in actuality, despite their professed love and care, therapists were satisfying their own drives and acting in their own self-interest, while denying and overlooking effects on clients. Researchers have also pointed out the innate cruelty of therapists' exploitation of clients; while, on the one hand, professing great love, they may be behaving cruelly and sadistically in maintaining sexual contact with clients.

The experiences reported by the incest perpetrators in this study, then, are analogous to experiences of therapists who perpetrate against their clients. Like the incest perpetrators, abusive therapists take advantage of the trust and dependency that characterize many therapeutic relationships. Taking advantage of others while using the discourse of care, then, are occurrences that go beyond parent-child relationships and may be issues

in any relationship where there is an imbalance of power.

Justice

My second original hypothesis was that incest perpetrators are not morally integrated, and, if they have a moral focus, it will be on justice. Almost immediately, I found this hypothesis inadequate. It was based on Gilligan's (1982) thesis that men tend to focus on justice and women on care and on my assumptions that incest perpetrators are unlikely to integrate justice and care. Because all but one of the perpetrators were men, I assumed that they would emphasize the justice aspects of their moral understanding of incest, particularly incest as the breaking of a major social rule. Instead, beyond stating that they knew incest was wrong, informants were almost inarticulate about the meaning of breaking the social rule against incest. Their interpretations of justice were embedded in their stories. For example, rather than respecting age as a status that renders children vulnerable to exploitation and oppression, they took advantage of children's vulnerability. As shown in the earlier discussion of care, they interpreted their sexual exploitation as romantic love and care. As will be discussed below, some also said what they were doing was not incest but love. About a third of the informants, possibly to avoid seeing themselves as exploiting children, asked children's permission to continue with the incest.

To respond to these findings, I formulated three statements related to justice: (a) Incest perpetrators are aware that incest is wrong, (b) incest perpetrators take advantage of children's vulnerability, but many do not see their behavior this way, and (c) some incest perpetrators try to diffuse their authority and responsibility by making children the pseudo-gatekeepers of the incest.

Incest as wrong. Incest perpetrators are like other members of their culture in their understanding of proscriptions against incest. The evidence is both direct and indirect. The direct evidence can be found in their statements that incest is wrong. Indirect evidence came from the precautions they took to avoid detection. Furthermore, about half stated that what they were doing was not incest. Most stated explicitly they knew incest was wrong and others implied that they knew. Some explicit statements include: "I knew incest was against the law," "The incest taboo was a big thing for me,"

"I knew if I continued this way, I'm going to prison," "Morally and religiously, I knew it was wrong," and "I knew I'd get locked up if I got caught." Informants provided many more examples of implicit recognition that incest is wrong. A stepfather avoided eye contact with his stepdaughter during the abuse because he was afraid he would lose his erection. Other examples include informants who made sure no one was around when they perpetrated, such as husbands who waited to be sexual with their daughters and sons until their wives went grocery shopping and the stepfather who took his stepson camping in remote woods accessible only by a 2-hour walk. He said, "I knew we were alone and everything. So I wasn't worried about that [being discovered]."

A few informants, however, were inconsistent in their statements that incest is wrong. The stepfather who said he "conned" his stepdaughter by agreeing incest was wrong but who "really didn't feel it was wrong," also said he felt guilty about having sex with a child. The man who took his son to the remote woods had other contradictory thoughts, such as, "The incest taboo was a big thing to me" and "My son and I had a love affair." He saw the wrongness in his relationship with his stepson as "teaching him the wrong kind of love," meaning homosexual love. Yet, he also said that "knowing it was wrong made it more exciting."

Like the man who had a "love affair" with his stepson and also thought it was wrong to be teaching him homosexual love, other perpetrators were confused about what was wrong in their sexual behavior. Reflecting on his divided self as a teenager, an informant was aware of his confused ideas. Speaking ironically about his own beliefs, he said, "It wasn't okay to bring *Playboy* into the house, but it was okay for me to be sexual with my little sister."

Not incest. Some informants explicitly stated that their sexual acts with the children were not incest. One father said incest perpetrators should be hung, shot. Another father said:

I viewed it as, what was between Beth and I was something real special. . . . The guy next door was a police officer, and he abused his daughter. It came out in treatment that he abused another daughter in a previous marriage, too. I found it real disgusting.

When other fathers had sex with their daughters, that was incest, said another informant. "What I was doing was different. I was making love to my

daughter. . . to my son," he said. Yet another informant reported, "We never had penile intercourse. I don't know why. I had it stuck in my brain that I couldn't have that. That was incest to me."

Other researchers have found that perpetrators against children differentiate their behaviors from others whose behaviors are similar. McCaghy (1967) noted that child molesters often thought that other offenders were "weak," "off their rockers," "very different from myself," and "had no excuse" (p. 67). McCaghy called these interpretations denial. The present study has an additional perspective; namely, that incest perpetrators are like other members of their culture and share cultural proscriptions against incest. Like others who abuse their power, incest perpetrators redefine their behaviors. In their minds, what they were doing was not incest but love and care.

These perpetrators showed a split awareness or fragmentation, where they held inconsistent and logically incompatible views, without making connections between their multiple perspectives. This phenomenon is mentioned in early research on child sexual abusers (e.g., Apfelberg, Sugra, & Pfeffer, 1944; Weiner, 1962) where terms such as "schizoid" and "split" were used but not elaborated. The fragmentation may be a partial response to conflicts between the moral proscriptions against incest and the tremendous pull they experienced toward committing incest. Like others in their culture, these informants believed incest was morally repugnant. Moral considerations, then, may have resulted in contradictory discourses and behaviors. Ptacek (1988), who found similar contradictions and inconsistencies in the accounts of men who batter women, came to a similar conclusion. Following Scott and Lyman (1968), he wrote that the men's contradictory accounts were attempts at "face-saving or avoiding judgment" (p. 149).

Children's vulnerability. In their drive to keep the incestuous relationships going, incest perpetrators took advantage of children's lack of knowledge, trust, and dependence, and therefore misused their authority. There are many facets to informants' taking advantage of children's vulnerability. Some told the children that incest is okay, while knowing they were using children's naiveté and trust. The following illustrates this pattern:

To me, she was accepting that [incest] being okay. She was only 13, very easy to think that, to make her think that what she was doing was all right, because she doesn't have a whole lot up there yet at that age.

Another father said, "In your daughter's eyes, Dad can do no wrong, you know. If Dad says it's okay, it's okay."

Some not only consciously used children's trust, but experienced a sense of power stemming from the trust: "She was so willing. It's like the control that I had, sense of power, or whatever. She trusted me."

A few misused their authority and bargained to keep the children involved sexually. A stepfather said:

When she started to resist, it was more, it turned into threats and manipulation with money, or "You're grounded," or "You're not going to get anything," or "You can't go there if you don't do this for me."

Peters (1976) also found that some incestuous fathers relied on their authority to keep the incestuous relationships going.

A sense of entitlement also came through in a few of the narratives. An informant "once or twice" had thoughts of being entitled to sex with his daughter: "She's my daughter. She needs to take care of my needs." The incestuous father who, as an adolescent, also abused his younger sister, starting when she was 3, said: "She's part of the family. What I'm doing is not wrong." Like other informants, he immediately said, "I knew it was wrong," again illustrating the characteristic fragmented sense of right and wrong. Some men's belief in their entitlement to sexual access to females has been noted in feminist writing about male sexual abuse of females (cf. Armstrong, 1978; Bart, 1983; Rush, 1980; Sanday, 1990). Researchers on male batterers have pointed out similar patterns of entitlement (Ptacek, 1988). Rich (1979) believed that male entitlement is embedded in the discourse of the general culture.

Children as gatekeepers. Not only did the informants violate principles of an ethic of justice by taking advantage of children's vulnerability, but many abused their authority by asking the children to be gatekeepers for the incestuous acts. The perpetrators, as adults and parents and parent figures, clearly had the authority in these relationships, and to delegate their authority in circumstances where children had virtually no freedom of choice had to be highly confusing to the children, as well as unfair and harmful. As one man said to his stepson, "Anytime you want to quit, we'll quit." At another time, he said, "If like he, if he had said, 'No, Dad, I don't want to do this,' we

wouldn't have done it." In response to his daughter's protests that incest was wrong, an informant developed the following convoluted reasoning:

She began to realize as she got older, how wrong it was, you know, and I had [done] a bad thing. I had told her, you know, that it come to a point where I was afraid that it was going to come to actual intercourse, and I told her at that time that if I made any advances to her that she was to reject them.

A few gave authority over the incest to the children and then took it back. As a stepfather said:

I'd just say, I don't want to do this anymore. Now matter what I do, just say no or something like that . . . but I'd talk her into it somehow. A couple of weeks later, or a month later.

Placing the authority with the children is a form of role reversal; in age-stratified systems, older persons have authority over younger. In this case, the older person gave pseudo-authority to the younger.

Placing responsibility for gatekeeping sexual relationships on the weaker person is a theme in our culture. In child sexual abuse prevention programs, for example, almost all of the attention is placed on teaching children how to avoid being abused, and little, if any, emphasis is placed on the responsibility of potential perpetrators not to perpetrate. In dating relationships, too, women are taught to feel responsible for putting the brakes on male sexual advances. This realignment of the gatekeeper function becomes a "technique of neutralization" (deYoung, 1988; Sykes & Matza, 1957)—that is, a way of evading responsibility for one's own behavior. The discourse of incest perpetrators, then, is part of the larger social discourse on female responsibility for male sexual behavior.

In some cases, perpetrators neutralized the age discrepancies by experiencing themselves as the same age as the children. Either they thought of the children as older or of themselves as younger. One man said incest with his daughter was like being a kid again. A stepfather said:

I was having a sexual affair that I'd never had before. You know, that age was important to me because I hadn't had a girlfriend then, and I think—I think I started looking at that as a relationship instead of just how fucked up it was.

For him, the 20-year age gap and his daughter's preadolescent status was not an issue, except that it compensated him for something he earlier had wanted and did not acquire.

Incest perpetrators violated every aspect of justice discussed in the moral philosophy and moral development literature. Rather than seeing the children as meriting special consideration because of the status variables of age, they took advantage of status differentials. While they were in incestuous relationships, they sometimes realized that what they were doing was wrong, but they could not articulate why. Knowing that it was wrong did not stop their behavior.

DISCUSSION

The incest perpetrators in this study gave contradictory, inconsistent, and fragmented accounts, which could accurately reflect their experiences. The drive for deep pleasure and, for most, their experience of incestuous sex as love and care impelled them to override the constraints of the incest taboo and the moral principles of justice and care. Conflicted, they knew they were breaking a highly sanctioned rule. In response to this conflict, they co-opted some of the discourse of justice and care and invoked discourses characteristic of perpetrators of predatory behavior toward women. Their fragmented and contradictory accounts belied and distorted the moral principles woven into their accounts.

The narratives provided enlightenment on experiences of incest. Informant after informant defined incest as romantic love and testified to the deep pleasure, bliss, and sense of intimacy they sought and found in incest. Incest as romantic love was an unexpected finding, and it provides new insights. This finding may help would-be perpetrators and active perpetrators recognize that what they are thinking of doing or are doing is still incest, no matter how much meaning and peace it may bring to their lives. In addition, part of the pleasure could be linked to the power of the secret that incest is pleasurable. Making this private pleasure public could diffuse the power of the secret. Shock, horror, disbelief, and our own taboos about talking about incest as pleasure or even bliss are barriers to this public moral discourse. Researchers on therapists' sexual exploitation of clients also have found widespread denial to be barriers to understanding and prevention. They recommend public discourse and education of therapists as remedies (Pope, Sonne, & Holroyd, 1993).

These narratives also suggest that we may lack a public moral discourse on children's vulnerability and the power that older persons have over

children. Some informants appeared not to understand that incest takes advantage of children's vulnerability and that it brings great harm. Many seemed to think they were in a mutual relationship and believed they were being fair because they did not physically force children. There is no magic in being able to do what we want with children. Not only are children raised to obey adults, they are aware of possible dire consequences if they disobey (Gilgun, 1986). Force, therefore, is more than physical and can arise from authority stemming from roles in the family, from gender, and from physical size. These considerations generally are not part of the moral discourse on families and might not be well known among those who have hegemony over children.

Analytic Induction as Method

The procedures of analytic induction in conjunction with my reading of the justice and care literature provided a useful map through the complex narratives of the incest perpetrators in this study, as well as an intellectual template for the analysis. Had I begun the study with an interest in moral discourse but without an immersion in the literature—in other words, as a grounded theory study—I might have arrived at similar findings. I would have been reading the literature simultaneously with data analysis and interpretation. Taking this approach made little sense, however, because moral reasoning, though a vast field, centers around the two main concepts of justice and care. In retrospect, I think the analysis was made more efficient by my prior knowledge of the notions of justice and care. Equally important was developing hypotheses prior to the analysis. Incest is highly charged, emotionally, and to attempt to do research as if I had no prior hypotheses about the moral discourse of incest perpetrators seemed impossible. Those hypotheses, while based on the literature on care and justice, also represented my personal perspectives.

Finally, I have found that using analytic induction did not preclude discovery, a major reason that researchers are interested in grounded theory. Like grounded theory, the procedures of analytic induction are based on openness to new understandings. I was anchored by my knowledge of the relevant literature, while at the same time I found I was discovering information I did not anticipate. Analytic induction, then, combines the discovery aspects associated with grounded theo-

ry while anchoring research processes to prior research and theory.

Hypotheses and Descriptive Statements

Modified analytic induction has the goal of developing descriptive statements of relationships among concepts and makes no claim of universality. As formulated, the hypotheses are analytic generalizations (Gilgun, 1994) that, though stated in universalistic language, are not intended to account for all incest perpetrators, but only for the perpetrators in this study. These hypotheses may illuminate and perhaps help in understanding other incestuous situations and will be useful in theory development, policy, primary prevention, program development, and family therapy. When applied to other similar situations, they may have to be modified. The current findings, then, are open ended, subject to reformulation in other circumstances, but useful at the same time for the new insights they provide. The theoretical generality of the findings has been increased through showing how the discourse of incest perpetrators is part of many other social discourses, such as therapists' abuse of clients and male college students' manipulations of young women for sex.

Future Research

In the narratives of incest perpetrators, this research unexpectedly discovered a discourse of romantic love interlaced with discourses related to male manipulations of women to gain sexual access and interwoven with vocabularies of care and justice. As research on abusive therapists suggests, these discourses may be found in other abusive relationships. For example, Levinson (1989) quoted a "love" poem that extolled physical violence as life giving and unifying. A piece of it reads: "If you kick me, it is my pulse and rice/The more you beat me with your shoes/The more we are united" (p. 9). Research on other types of abuse might help clarify whether the use of the language of justice, care, manipulation and pressure, and romantic love are generally found in discourses on abusive relationships.

Another possible approach to research on the discourse of power relationships in families is to use a framework focusing on the vocabularies of motive. Briefly, the principles of investigating vocabularies of motive direct researchers to analyze the meanings of speech used by persons in "delimited social situations" (Mills, 1940, p. 904).

By accounting for the meanings of vocabularies of motive that are typical in several specific contexts, we can contribute to a sociology of knowledge. Examples of a vocabularies of motive approach can be found in sociological analyses of deviance, such as rapists (Scully & Marolla, 1984), child molesters (deYoung, 1988), and parents who kill their children (Margolin, 1990). The present research, though not by intent, appears to be within the vocabularies of motive research tradition.

Postmodernism offers yet another potentially fruitful perspective that can be applied to research on incest perpetrators in particular, as well as to research in the more general area of abusive power relationships in families. The fragmentation in the discourse of incest perpetrators fits well with postmodern views of the world as paradoxical, ambiguous, and inconsistent. An explicit postmodernist analysis of narratives of persons who commit incest or other abusive acts could illustrate and elaborate this aspect of postmodernism, whose components, as Graham and Doherty (1992) pointed out, remain open to further elaboration.

A second reason to undertake a postmodernist analysis of narratives of persons who commit abusive acts is the potential to demonstrate the limits of the plasticity of discourse. For some, postmodernism leads to solipsism, where "anything goes" and universal standards of truth or moral conduct cannot exist. Rosenau (1992) termed this trend a position of "skeptical postmodernists," while she called those who posit standards independent of individual interpretations "affirmative postmodernists." Feminists such as Baber and Allen (1992) and Hare-Mustin and Maracek (1990) fit into the "affirmative postmodern" category when they challenged this slide toward solipsism by stating that oppression is oppression regardless of how some persons interpret it. To my knowledge, the limits of individual interpretations within a postmodern framework have yet to be demonstrated within a research report. The present study touched upon these issues, but much more can be done with these ideas.

Finally, much of the research done on families, especially research that involves in-depth interactions with informants, such as interviews and observations, can be emotionally evocative for researchers and informants. Dealing with incest perpetrators in long interviews was emotionally challenging to me and, at times, to the informants. An important next step may be for researchers to

write about reflexive processes in their research, closely tying accounts of reflexivity with sections of the narratives that were evocative. While reflexivity and subjectivity have been viewed with both alarm and intrigue for their implications for the meanings of findings, there is a great deal more we can understand about subjectivity and research.

NOTE

An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual conference, National Council on Family Relations, Research and Theory Section, held in Baltimore, MD, November 10-15, 1993. This research was supported by a grant from the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station. The author thanks Emma Foss, Laura McLeod, Susan Murphy, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this paper.

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