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# SEXUALLY VICTIMIZED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

S DAVID FINKELHOR

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SEXUALLY VICTIMIZED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

BY

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B.A., Harvard College, 1968

Ed.M., Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1975

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
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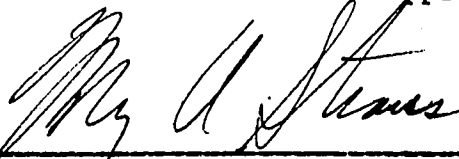
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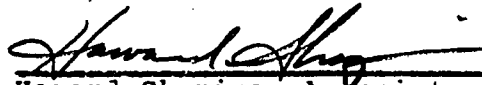
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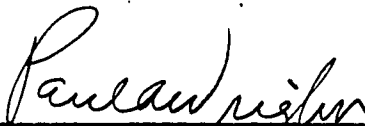
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
ABSTRACT .....	xi
<b>Chapter</b>	
I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM ...	1
Feminists and Child Advocates	
Sexual Abuse and Rape	
Sexual Abuse and Physical Abuse	
The Historical Context	
The Debate on Family Sexuality	
The Scope of this Study	
The Plan of the Dissertation	
II. WHY ARE CHILDREN SEXUALLY VICTIMIZED? .....	36
Theories about the "Offender"	
Theories about the "Victim"	
Theories about the Family Context	
Social and Cultural Sources	
The Consequences to the Victims	
III. A SURVEY ON CHILDHOOD SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION .	62
Rationale for a Survey	
Designing the Survey	
Survey Procedure	
Data Analysis	

Description of the Sample  
Volunteer Bias  
Validity of Responses  
Defining the Concepts  
Defining Childhood "Sexual" Experience  
Defining Victimization

IV. THE EXPERIENCES DESCRIBED ..... 102

Incidence  
Relationship to Partner  
Duration of the Experiences  
Age at Time of Experience  
Kinds of Sexual Activity  
Initiation and Force  
Reaction to the Experience  
To Tell or Not To Tell  
Experience of Boys  
Conclusion

V. OLDER PARTNERS ..... 135

Myths of the Child Molester  
The Male Monopoly  
The Female Minority  
Homosexual Partners  
Adolescent and Adult Partners  
Conclusion

VI.	ALL IN THE FAMILY .....	157
	Defining Incest	
	Incidence of Incest	
	Father-daughter Incest	
	Sibling Incest	
	Mothers and Other Relatives	
	Some Discrepancies	
	Conclusion	
VII.	THE SOURCES OF TRAUMA .....	184
	Age Differences	
	Closeness and Trauma	
	Trauma and Particular Sex Acts	
	Trauma and Force	
	To Tell or Not to Tell	
	Multiple Regression Analysis	
	Conclusion	
VIII.	SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS .....	206
	Social Isolation: Theory	
	Subculture: Theory	
	Social Class: Theory	
	Findings	
IX.	FAMILY BACKGROUNDS .....	220
	Marital Conflict and Disruption: Theory	
	The Importance of Mothers: Theory	

Marital Conflict and Disruption: Findings  
The Importance of Mothers: Findings  
Large Families and Overcrowding  
Ordinal Position of Siblings  
Conclusion

X.	COMPARISON OF THE FINDINGS .....	242
	Is Sexual Victimization Increasing?	
	Reported and Unreported Cases	
XI.	CONCLUSION .....	265
	Findings Reviewed	
	Directions for Future Research	
	Policy on Family Sexuality	
	APPENDIX: THE QUESTIONNAIRE .....	286
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	310

## LIST OF TABLES

## Table

4-1. Girls' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Much Older Persons.....	103
4-2. Boys' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Much Older Persons.....	103
4-3. Experiences of Girls and Boys with Older Persons.....	106
4-4. Age of Children at Time of Sexual Experiences with Older Persons.....	109
5-1. Age of Older Partners.....	137
5-2. Experiences with Male and Female Older Partners.....	147
5-3. Experiences with Adolescent and Adult Partners.....	155
6-1. Sexual Experiences with Relatives.....	165
6-2. Sibling and Cousin Incest Experiences.....	181
7-1. Trauma by Age of Child, Age of Partner and Age Difference.....	188
7-2. Trauma by Sex of and Relationship to Partner..	191
7-3. Trauma by Most Serious Kind of Sex Act Performed.....	195
7-4. Trauma by Force Used, Was Someone Told, Frequency and Duration.....	196
7-5. Regression of Trauma on Characteristics of Childhood Sexual Experiences.....	203
8-1. Girls' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Older Partners and Incest for Selected Social and Demographic Characteristics.....	214
8-2. Boys' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Older Partners and Incest for Selected Social and Demographic Characteristics.....	214
9-1. Girls' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Older Partners and Incest for Selected Family Characteristics.....	226

9-2. Boys' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Older Partners and Incest for Selected Family Characteristics.....	226
10-1. Incidence (per 100) of Childhood Sexual Victimization of Women as Reported in 3 Studies.....	244
10-2. Mean Age of Victim in Selected Research Reports of Childhood Sexual Victimization....	257
10-3. Relationship of Female Victim to Offender in Selected Research Reports of Childhood Sexual Victimization.....	258
10-4. Age of Offender in Selected Research Reports of Childhood Sexual Victimization.....	260
10-5. Use of Force or Threat of Force in Selected Research Reports of Childhood Sexual Victimization.....	262

## ABSTRACT

SEXUALLY VICTIMIZED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

by

S. DAVID FINKELHOR

University of New Hampshire, 1978

The author conducted an exploratory survey of nearly 800 students at 6 New England colleges and universities on the subject of childhood sexual victimization. A large number of students reported such experiences. Nearly one in five women and one in eleven men said they had had a sexual experience as a child with a much older person. The experiences cut across social class and ethnic lines and included children of all ages, although preadolescent children were the most vulnerable.

The perpetrators against both boys and girls were mostly men, more often young men than old men. Contrary to the image of the child molester, the majority (75%) were friends and relatives to the children they victimized. For the girls, 44% of the partners were relatives and 22% were members of their nuclear family. About one and a half per cent of the women had had an experience of father-daughter incest. Indeed, incest as distinct from sexual victimization, was also quite common, 28% of women and 23% of men reporting an incest experience.

The study found that the sources of trauma in such experiences were not so obvious as many have thought. Based on respondents ratings of the experiences, neither the duration of the relationship, the seriousness of the sexual activity nor the degree of family closeness of the partner directly related to the negative perception about the experience. The factor that produced the most trauma was the use of force. Next to force was the age of the partner; the older the partner, the worse the experience.

The study confirmed various long-standing impressions about the kinds of backgrounds most commonly associated with sexual abuse. Social isolation was connected to victimization, as demonstrated by the large percentage of victims among those who grew up on farms. People from low income families were more often affected. At least one ethnic group -- the Irish -- displayed high rates of victimization for boys, indicating that some subcultural factors may contribute to a child's vulnerability.

A child's parents played a crucial role in affecting a girl's likelihood of being sexually victimized. Girls whose mothers were absent, sick or poorly educated ran a particularly high risk. Similarly, having a stepfather increased a girl's chances of being sexually abused, not just by the stepfather but by other persons outside the family. Where the parents' marriage was unhappy, rates were also high.



Comparing this study to some earlier ones, the researcher presents evidence that the sexual victimization of children has not increased in the last thirty years. Offenses involving actual physical contact have stayed at about the same level over this period, while the number of experiences with exhibitionists has probably declined.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Child protective workers from all over the country say they are innundated with cases of children who have been sexually abused. A mother calls to report that she thinks her husband is sexually molesting her daughter and she does not know what to do. A seventh grade boy tells his school guidance counselor that a neighbor down the street has been giving him money to pose naked for pictures; he wants the man to stop; but he is afraid to tell his parents. A three year old girl brought to the emergency room with stomach pains is discovered to have gonorrhoea, and she tells the doctor her 17 year old brother has been "making me lick him" while her mother is off at work. These are illustrative cases.

Public outrage, which has for several years focussed on stories of bruised and tortured children, is shifting to a concern with children who are sexually exploited. Between 1977 and 1978 almost every national magazine had run a story highlighting the horrors of childhood sexual abuse. A national campaign against the making and sale of child pornography exploded into political prominence in a matter of weeks, and in record-breaking time obtained the passage of protective legislation, despite the qualms of some civil

libertarians. From the point of view of public awareness, what we have been witnessing amounts to nothing less than the discovery of a "new" social problem.

It is the purpose of this introduction to try to situate this "new" social problem, the sexual abuse of children, within a number of perspectives. It will describe the social movements responsible for the current publicity about the problem. It will try to distinguish sexual abuse from two closely related other problems to which it is often compared: physical abuse and rape. It will try to account for why sexual abuse is emerging as a public issue at this particular historical moment. And it will try to anticipate some of the important ideological controversies that may arise out of the new attention drawn to this problem.

#### FEMINISTS AND CHILD ADVOCATES

New social problems usually imply the emergence of new constituencies whose interests and values these problems reflect. In the case of sexual abuse, this appears to be precisely what has happened.

Representatives of two ascendent social movements have striven hard to raise public awareness about childhood sexual abuse. The child protection movement, which has for at least five years, mounted a campaign about the problem of physical child abuse, has recently turned its attention to sexual abuse. A second force, the women's movement, has also taken a strong interest in the issue, in large part

because so many of the victims are girls.

Each movement has assimilated this new problem to the framework of old problems around which it has successfully campaigned. For child protection workers, the phrase "physical and sexual abuse of children" has become the cliché that defines their combined concern. Sexual abuse is only another facet of the child battering problem with which these workers are already familiar.

The women's movement, on the other hand, looks at the sexual abuse of children as a particular kind of rape. It has been especially successful in recent years in making the public, legislatures, the criminal justice system and even the academic research community more attentive to the problem of rape. Childhood sexual abuse fits comfortably into the program of hot lines, crisis centers and consciousness-raising groups that have grown up around the rape issue. Indeed the speed with which the problem of sexual abuse has risen to national attention may be largely due to the fact that it fit into the agenda of two social movements which already had large national networks.

Sexual abuse of children really does belong at the juncture between these two concerns -- physical abuse of children and rape. As a social phenomenon, it shares aspects of both other problems. But it also has features unique to itself. It is the purpose of this study to describe some of these distinguishing features. As a form of victimization, it is not just another kind of rape, nor

is it just another kind of child abuse. It is important for the sake of discussion and research to distinguish sexual abuse carefully from these other two problems to which it is most often compared.

#### SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE

##### The Similarities

Some of the similarities of childhood sexual abuse to rape are obvious. 1) It is a sex crime (although not necessarily a sex-motivated crime). That is, it involves the genitals and sexual regions of either the offender or victim. 2) The offenders are almost all men. 3) The victims experience a kind of trauma unique to sexual offenses. They feel humiliated and stigmatized. They wonder whether they are at fault for their own plight. They often fail to tell anyone about the experience because of the shame and doubt. And both experiences can have serious consequences for a person's sexual adjustment (Burgess et. al., 1978; Hilberman, 1976). 4) Finally, society has in the past treated both offenses similarly: in effect, denying that they were important and blaming the victim for their occurrence (Brownmiller, 1975). In these ways childhood sexual abuse shares much with rape.

### The Differences

On the other hand, some aspects of the sexual abuse of children make it very different from rape. 1) The victims are male as well as female. Although among reported cases, boys make up only a small portion of the total, the research reported here and other research show that boys are frequent victims. Rape does occur to men, most notably in prisons, but in the general population its incidence is infrequent, so that rape is almost entirely a crime against women.

2) People who sexually abuse children are more often friends and family members of their victims (Peters, 1976). Rape is not so entirely different from this as many people think, but it is different. Unfortunately rape has been stereotyped as a crime committed only by strangers in deserted alleys. This is misleading: much rape is committed by men known to their victims. Still, over 50% of reported rapists are strangers to their victims, and only a scant 7% are actual family members (Mulvihill and Tumin, 1969, Vol. 2, p. 217). By contrast the vast majority of reported sexual abusers of children are friends or family: 30% relatives and 45% acquaintances according to one survey (De Francis, 1969). The pattern for sexual abuse is typically one of much closer relationship between offender and victim than is the case for rape.

3) Childhood sexual abuse more often than rape consists of repeated incidents, a friend or relative taking advantage of a child on several occasions (DeFrancis, 1969). It is

not uncommon for relationships to start for a child at an early age and to reoccur continuously or at intervals over a period of five to ten years without being discovered or broken off. Rape, in contrast, typically occurs only once. At least a woman is likely to be raped only once by a given offender. The exception to this, of course, is marital rape, where the offense can occur repeatedly because many women are legally and economically trapped in their marriages. However, we know fairly little about marital rape, so comparison is difficult. Perhaps to be cautious, we should only say that among reported cases at least, childhood sexual abuse is much more often than rape an offense of multiple occurrences.

4) The sexual abuse of children involves less physical force and violence than rape (Peters, 1976). Rape is fairly commonly accompanied by a physical assault. Often victims are threatened with lethal weapons. Such coercion is much less common in childhood sexual abuse, however. Children are small and compliant, and many of the same results can be achieved without violence. The authority and power of persuasion held by an adult are usually adequate to establish the sexual contact.

5) The sexual act that occurs in the sexual abuse of children is usually not intercourse, but rather fondling of the genitals, masturbation and exhibition (Peters, 1976). In contrast, a rape almost always involves sexual intercourse. In most legal jurisdictions rape means sexual

intercourse, and if intercourse fails to occur, some other charge, like attempted rape, is brought.

Other kinds of sexual offenses not involving intercourse do occur to adult women and with some frequency. If we consider sexual harassment rather than just rape, we would probably find that attempts at intercourse constitute only a small proportion of all the sexual coercion against adult women too. However, on the basis of the available, admittedly sketchy evidence (Peters, 1976) it still appears likely that intercourse is more often the goal of sexual coercion directed against adult women than children. We can also say that rape, as it is currently defined, i.e. independent of sexual harassment, involves intercourse more often than does the sexual abuse of children.

6) Childhood sexual abuse implicates a larger social context in its dynamics. Rape typically involves one or several assailants and a victim. The fact that many rapes are group affairs has been emphasized recently (Amir, 1971). Nonetheless, the main protagonists are only the victim and the offenders. By contrast, because the sexual abuse of children often takes place in the context of a family, many others are usually involved besides offender and victim. Most research has shown that when childhood sexual abuse occurs, even with persons outside the family, other family members are intimately implicated in the occurrence of the offense (De Francis, 1969, pp. 108-112).



7) Childhood sexual abuse engages a different set of social agencies. Rape reports usually go to the police, or lately to rape hotlines. Responsibility for dealing with sexually abused children is more diffuse, but social agencies generally play an important role. There are serious questions about whether the criminal justice system has the tools to cope with childhood sexual abuse (Zaphiris, 1978). On the other hand, advocates of rape prevention seem to believe that better police protection and more expeditious court action, things of little help in sexual abuse, can ameliorate the rape problem (Sheppard et al., 1976).

#### SEXUAL ABUSE AND PHYSICAL ABUSE

Curiously, some of the very features of childhood sexual abuse that distinguish it from rape are features that make it similar to physical abuse. It is in this sense that sexual abuse is situated at the juncture of both problems.

#### The Similarities

1) Both physical and sexual abuse take place between children and the adults who have responsibility for taking care of them: they are family problems. 2) Both physical and sexual abuse involve patterns that go on over extended periods of time. In fact, there is some evidence that not only do abusive relationships continue for many years, but also both can be transmitted in the process of socialization

from generation to generation within the same families (Greene, 1977; Summit and Kryso, 1978). 3) Both physical and sexual abuse fall into the domain of the child protective worker, who must negotiate in the interests of the child, among the family, community and court system.

### The Differences

There are also some striking differences between physical and sexual abuse which have been insufficiently acknowledged, particularly by child care workers. The result is that many of the assumptions made about and interventions made into cases of sexually abused children on the basis of experience with physical abuse have been mistaken.

1) Sexual abuse and physical abuse of children do not tend to occur simultaneously. De Francis (1969) found only 11% of sexual abuse cases involved physical abuse. Gil (1973) found only 0.6% of the physical abuse cases involved sexual abuse. Very important differences exist in the family dynamics surrounding each phenomenon (Zaphiris, 1978).

2) The trauma of childhood sexual abuse is primarily psychological, not physical. Physical abuse by definition causes pain. It also leaves evidence in many cases. But most importantly, physical abuse is life-threatening. Childhood sexual abuse does sometimes result in physical damage to the genital area. There are increasing reports of

childhood gonorrhea as a result of sexual abuse. But the lives of such sexual abuse victims are rarely in danger, unless of course, the sexual is combined with physical abuse (Peters, 1976, p.411). At the time that the abuse occurs, some child sexual victims are only dimly aware that they are in jeopardy.

3) The motivations behind the two kinds of abuses are different. Although some sexual abuse of children is like rape and expresses a hostile, coercive, and sadistic attitude toward the victim (Burgess et al., 1978), that is not typical. Sexual abuse usually emerges out of a desire for sexual gratification, even in some instances from a genuine affectional impulse, however misguided (Gebhard et al., 1965). Physical abuse, however, even though it may come from a parent who loves the child, expresses at the moment a desire to harm the child, an impulse that does not figure importantly in the motivations of most sexual offenders against children (Gil, 1973, p.7).

4) Social attitudes toward the two kinds of abuses are different. In its overt ideology, at least, our society is much more intolerant of behavior which resembles sexual abuse. Sexual behavior of any sort is only approved in highly restricted contexts and sexual behavior with children not at all. An adult even talking to a child about sex is considered provocative.\*

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\*Next to this overt condemnation, there is a covert approval of some kinds of sexually abusive behavior toward children, as is indicated by the popularity in some segments of the population of so-called "kiddie porn". Where this attitude exists it is at least hidden or repressed and subject to disapproval by most of the rest of society.

Violence, by contrast, is overtly approved in many more conventional situations, one of the most common being for use in disciplining children (Steinmetz and Straus, 1974). Social approval of violence in discipline is so widespread that many adults are only vaguely aware of what the difference is between so-called "strict discipline" (a code phrase for the liberal use of physical punishment) and abuse.

5) Finally, the children most vulnerable to sexual abuse are preadolescents (Queen's Bench, 1976), whereas the children most vulnerable to physical abuse are young children and small infants under 6 (Maden and Wrench, 1977). Of course, vulnerability to both kinds of abuse extends over the whole range of childhood. Infants have been used for sexual purposes (Sgroi, 1975) and even adolescents may be beaten or killed. But the most frequently beaten and severely injured children are infants, whereas the peak vulnerability to sexual abuse occurs from ages 8-12.

This inventory has not been undertaken to prove that sexual abuse is a more serious or less serious problem than rape or physical abuse. It is a different problem. It has its own characteristics. In some ways, it could be described as a conjunction between the two. However, because it is different from each, it needs to be studied from its own distinct vantage.

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The sexual abuse of children is not really a discovery of the 1970s. Many serious scholars and researchers from Kinsey, to Freud, to Havelock Ellis, have devoted attention to the matter dating back to the turn of the century and before. But objective research that might allow for an honest assessment of this problem has been scarce. Why has it taken so long for the serious study of this problem to come into its own?

Some observers emphasize the role that vestiges of Victorianism have played in the avoidance of the issue. In spite of the gradual sexual liberalization of the last century, it has still been extremely difficult for people to discuss openly many sexual topics. The vast majority of people who have had such childhood sexual experiences have probably in the past kept them secret even from their closest confidants (Armstrong 1978; Landis, 1956), many living lives burdened by shame and guilt about it. The difficulty of discussing the matter has certainly inhibited research.

Only in quite recent times have the moralistic attitudes about sex abated enough that discussions of sexual anomalies of various sorts have become acceptable. This atmosphere has no doubt encouraged many people who have had experiences of childhood victimization to "come out of the closet," leading to a general increase in public awareness of the problem. Since many such people are middle-class and

sometimes in positions of power and responsibility, the problem has acquired a credibility which problems often do not have when they are widely thought to be isolated cases or restricted to the lower class.

#### Freud's Contribution

Others say there is more than just Victorianism behind the fact that sexual victimization has taken so long to surface as a social problem. These critics cite some specific acts of intellectual cowardice, and perhaps even dishonesty, on the part of scientists who were in a position to have drawn more attention to sexual abuse, but didn't. One of these of course, was Freud, a figure who must be placed at the center of any account, critical or complimentary, of the history of research on childhood sexual victimization. It was Freud, whose theories of childhood sexuality, if nothing else, brought this subject out of the total darkness of the Victorian era into the arena of contemporary scientific discussion. But, even if he did unveil the issue, there are many among the contemporary commentators on the problem who feel that Freud did much more to distract from and derail serious study of the problem than he did to further it (Herman and Hirschman, 1977; Rush, 1977).

Childhood sexual experiences played a key role in Freud's early theories of neurosis. Confronted by a large number of his patients -- young, tormented Viennese women --

who reported having been sexually approached at an early age by fathers and brothers, he promulgated the idea that childhood sexual trauma was at the root of adult psychological problems.

He later changed his mind, however, and decided that the stories he had been hearing from his patients were fantasies, not true experiences. This led him to the formulation of the famous Oedipus complex, which postulated a strong impulse in the child for sexual union with the parent, leading to fantasies and sometimes overt acts on the part of the child. Psychopathology stemmed now not from sexual trauma with adults, but from failure to "resolve the Oedipal situation," to give up the fantasies and transfer sexual impulses to more socially acceptable people.

Feminists have speculated that Freud abandoned his original theory because he was unwilling to face the implications of that theory: that the predatory acts of his own peers, and colleagues in Vienna society (and even perhaps his own father) lay behind his patients' difficulties (Rush, 1977). He might challenge sexual Victorianism, but to challenge male sexual conceit was too much for even this iconoclast. Whatever his motives, his revised theory sponsored or at least helped rationalize two very negative developments in the study and treatment of sexually abused children. It equipped the budding army of mind healers with an ideology that discounted patients' reports of childhood sexual victimization. Several

generations of women who have brought up such experiences in psychotherapy have found them discounted and contradicted by their therapists (Herman and Hirschman, 1977).

Adding to whatever trauma such a denial might produce, Freud's revised theory also turned his original theory upside down by placing blame for whatever overt events might have irrefutably occurred on the child, not on the adult. Such experiences were the result of the child's Oedipal impulses rather than the adult's predatory ones. It was an ironic development: Freud's revised theory took the moral opprobrium directed at the offender in such situations, and boosted an ideology which placed it on the victim. In some people's view, this ideology of denial and blaming the victim, has been the biggest obstacle to the serious study of child sex victimization.

#### Kinsey's Contribution

Kinsey was another central figure in the unfolding of the history of research on child sexuality, and Kinsey too had a rather ambivalent impact on the study of sexual victimization. On the one hand, Kinsey's studies were ground breaking, establishing that childhood sexual experiences were virtually universal and in giving assurance to many people that their previously imagined "deviance" was in fact shared by many others. But in spite of evidence from his survey that child molesting, sexual abuse and incest were far more widespread than anyone had previously been able to



show, he gave these findings very little attention. He made pronouncements that he thought incest was more in the imaginations of psychotherapists than it was in the experiences of their patients (1948) and he wondered why any child should be so distraught by having its genitals fondled by a stranger (1953, p. 121). He chose to give great emphasis to the "normality" of homosexual experiences, masturbation and extramarital affairs, but downplayed the findings of the commonness of sexual abuse.

Certainly Victorianism and sexism have played their parts in blocking recognition of the seriousness of the problem of childhood sexual victimization. But a full understanding of the story requires us to remove ourselves from the vantage point of contemporary sexual discussion to the reality of "sexual politics" of the last several generations.

#### Child Molesting and the Moralists

Sexual abuse is indeed not a discovery of the 1970's. Concern about child molesting and the sexual corruption of children have been persistent themes of moralists for decades. If one can judge from the spokesmen who have appeared on the subject, the people who are "discovering" sexual abuse today are the liberal professionals and academics, people insulated by their youth or their social class from the alarmist appeals of moralists. This ironic theft by the liberals of a onetime conservative issue can

happen today only because of a generally unnoticed realignment of political forces on public policy issues concerned with sexuality.

In previous generations, liberals steered clear of any association with the issue of child molesting. They were busy lobbying for sexual reform: greater availability of contraceptives, more and better sex education, more enlightened treatment of sex offenders, fewer restrictions on erotic literature, decriminalization of consensual sex acts, permissiveness toward childhood sex exploration and so forth.

To any and all of these causes, the conservatives mounted a ferocious opposition. They painted a grim picture of the widespread immorality, promiscuity, degeneracy and sex criminality which would take place if any of these reforms were implemented. For many years, their paranoid alarms had a wide audience.

Child molestation was a favorite theme of the moralists during this whole struggle. A no less prominent guardian of the conservative cause than J. Edgar Hoover described the situation in an article, "How Safe Is Your Daughter" in the popular American magazine in 1947: "Depraved human beings more savage than beasts, are permitted to roam America almost at will." If liberal reforms were to be achieved, the children would be the ones to suffer.

In the face of this paranoia, liberals needed science on their side. They were hard pressed enough to marshal and publicize research findings that supported their reform programs. They could hardly be expected to promote lines of inquiry that supported the opposition viewpoint. So it is likely that the problem of sexual victimization of children fell victim itself to this partisanship.

This may be part of the reason for the paradoxical positions taken by Kinsey in flat contradiction to the results of some of his surveys. Although Kinsey has often been portrayed as a detached "orgasm counter", in fact there was for him as well as other sex researchers, a strong reformist zeal behind his science (Pomeroy, 1972). This need to cover their political flanks on a potentially vulnerable issue was probably an important reason why Kinsey and others avoided the sexual abuse question for so long.

#### Realignment of Sexual Politics

Now, of course, much of this has changed. In the last 15 years it appears that there has been a dramatic realignment of forces in sexual politics. The liberal-moralist battle remains, but on many issues the moralists have been routed, and initiative has passed to the liberals. No one familiar with battles over abortion, sex education, homosexual rights, etc. would dare proclaim a victory for sexual reformers, but the successes of recent times and the sexual liberalization of large segments of the

population have created a very different climate.

The result is that the liberal position is no longer monolithic and consolidated by adversity, but has broken into component parts -- advocates for women, advocates for homosexuals, sex educators, libertarians, and so forth. Sexual abuse is emerging as an issue at this historical moment because that earlier coalition is fragmenting. The women's movement which was once in almost total alliance with the sexual reform movement, has gained in strength and autonomy and has formulated its own priority issues, some of which were not priority issues of the earlier coalition. Sexual abuse is one of these new issues which has emerged from a recasting of the sexual reform agenda from the point of view of women.

Interestingly, there appears to be very little concern (at least publicly expressed) that the current publicity about "child molesting" will foster a conservative backlash against sexual liberalism -- the backlash, which was feared by sexual reformers in an earlier period. This may be in part because those concerned about protecting children do not identify so strongly with other reform causes any more. But more likely, it is because they believe that the climate of sexual liberalism is well enough established that it cannot be reversed. The very success of sexual liberalism may have created conditions under which this potentially more troublesome issue (from the liberal point of view) could have its day.

### Sexual Abuse and Sexual Reform

Yet the sexual abuse of children still promises to be a very controversial social problem. It is possible that some serious public policy clashes will result from the development of this new concern. The clashes are likely to emerge not between those who want to keep and those who want to roll back the "sexual revolution." Rather, they will occur between those who want to give priority to alternative programs of sexual reform. Those who are most concerned about protecting children from abuse may find themselves at odds with those in favor of creating a freer sexual environment particularly in the family.

The following discussion is speculative and inferential. Very little has appeared in print arguing the ideological positions that will be outlined here. Yet it seems highly likely that a public policy debate about family sexuality is in the offing, fueled to some extent by the recent concern about sexually abused children. In the next few pages we will try to anticipate some of the positions in this discussion, based on the available literature. This speculation is important and worthwhile because it points out what may become some of the important theoretical and empirical questions that need to be answered about family sexuality. These questions form a backdrop for the research that will be reported here.

We have described so far some of the social, historical and ideological developments that have permitted a new awareness of the sexual exploitation of children. This awareness carries with it an outlook on the nature of sexuality in family life. There are two important facts that condition this outlook: 1) The sexual exploitation of children is common. 2) It often takes place in the family. These facts convey an image of the family as a place in American society where children are sexually vulnerable.

It is important to recognize that there have been ideological developments from other quarters, also within the sexual reform tradition, that have been urging a different kind of outlook on family sexuality. This point of view has been arguing in effect for more rather than less sexuality in family life. The points of view are not necessarily in conflict, but could be.

Those arguing for more sex are not in favor of sexual abuse. Rather, they are interested in combatting a climate of sexual repressiveness in which they believe the culture is trapped. They believe people in our society are sexually inhibited and guilt-ridden as a result primarily of childhood sex repression and that this results among other things in sexual perversion, sexual maladjustment, marital problems and the inability to express affection (Martinson, 1973; Pomeroy, 1974). If there is any opportunity to unlock this vicious cycle, they believe it is in the family. In this view, in order to counteract sexual repressiveness,

families need to become more sexually open environments. To do so, children must be encouraged to take much more positive attitudes toward sex and sexual curiosity. Parents and children need to talk candidly about sexual matters. The secretiveness, anxiety and taboo which dominate the topic of sex in most families need to be abolished (Pomeroy, 1978).

As a key to this process, those who would create more sexual openness think it crucial to eliminate some of the myths that create sexual anxiety within the family (Currier, 1977). For example, there is the myth that children are not sexual, should not be permitted to masturbate, show sexual curiosity or engage in sex play with other children. This myth has been well enough demolished that it is now ritually disproven in most child rearing manuals.

But there are new frontiers to be pushed back. For example, many of those in favor of sexual reform of the family have begun to promote the idea of family nudity (Pomeroy, 1978). They have mounted an assault in recent years against the psychoanalytic convention that adult nudity is harmful to a child because it is overstimulating or "arouses oedipal anxieties". On the contrary, say the reformers, nudity fosters sexual comfort, and positive gender identification (Oremland and Oremland, 1977).

A certain wing of this movement has developed even more radical proposals. Some have argued that intercourse in a child's presence (the classic Freudian nightmare) or mild

forms of sexual play between parents and children need not be traumatic, and can have educative functions, if they are handled the right way (Oremland and Oremland, 1977).

A few have been willing to suggest that the whole cornerstone of family sexual anxiety -- the incest taboo -- needs to be re-examined (Constantine and Constantine, 1973; Pomeroy, 1978). Currently, there are research efforts underway to uncover "positive" incest experiences, experiences that indicate that sexual contact among family members need not be the extraordinarily anti-social, highly traumatic event it has been stereotyped as (Nobile, 1978).

This train of thought is disturbing to those concerned about sexual abuse (Goldsen, 1978; Steinem, 1977). It poses the obvious question of whether the logic of family sexual liberation ends up making children more vulnerable to sexual victimization. Will it promote the fantasy of sex with children, and in men with weak control of their sexual impulses lead to overt exploitative activity?

The criticism by those concerned with sexual abuse has been primarily directed at those more extreme proponents of the sexualized family. But it might easily encompass some of the more moderate proponents, too. Given the large number of children sexually abused by family members, they may ask, should the family become any more sexualized than it already is? Do children need to be protected from rather than subjected to the sexuality of their elders?



On the other side, those who are advocating a change in family sexual values and behavior may come to see the child protectors as obstacles to their cause. Won't focussing so intently on the threat of sexual exploitation within the family, they may ask, only increase family sexual anxiety and lead to increased sexual repressiveness? Won't it promote a climate where fathers continue to be self-conscious about hugging their daughters? Despite its laudable intentions, won't the preoccupation with sexual abuse in the family have a chilling effect on openness about sex?

#### THE DEBATE ON FAMILY SEXUALITY

So there is clearly the potential for conflict between those who are pressing for more open sexuality within the family and those trying to protect children from sexual exploitation at the hands of their elders. Drawing out the elements of each position, in anticipation of a public confrontation and perhaps even in exaggerated form, is useful because it allows us to analyze the assumptions of each point of view. There are four important theoretical issues on which the two camps appear to disagree. All of them are issues which can be addressed with empirical findings.

1) Is sexual abuse a result of too much sexual repression or not enough? On this issue, those most concerned about sexual abuse (Rosenfeld, 1977) tend to be

arguing from a Freudian perspective, even though they are often critical of Freud and his treatment of sexual abuse victims. Freudian doctrine has maintained that the family was an environment rife with incestuous impulses which always threatened to get out of control. Evidence in recent years that there is a great deal of sexual abuse and incest has supported the Freudian intuition that such sexual impulses are the norm not the exception.

These unruly sexual impulses are kept in check primarily by taboo and repression (Freud, 1962). Such constraints do not perhaps need to be as rigid as in Victorian times, nor do they need to apply to so many aspects of sexuality. But some basic ones need to exist, such as the taboo on incest and sex with children. When these constraints are too weak, behavior that is uncontrolled, antisocial, and exploitative can easily occur. Sexual abuse, this point of view would predict, should occur in families with weak normative controls.

However, those concerned about freeing the family from sexual repression would probably say this is exactly backwards. Their view implies that sexual repression is the cause, not the solution, to sexual exploitation. Sexual repression breeds people who have twisted and hostile forms of sexual expression, who feel intensely sexually deprived, and thus exploit other defenseless people. They would probably predict that sexual abuse would be more common in highly repressive environments.

2) Is childhood sexual expression really related to any social benefits? Those favoring more open sexuality in the family may be particularly willing to run risks involved in the increasing sexualization of children, because they believe the benefits will be so positive. They believe we can eradicate many social ills by allowing children and families freer expression of sexual impulses. In such a society, would there really be fewer sexual problems, less social exploitation, and even less violence? There is evidence from child development research that sexually anxious parents breed passivity (Sears, 1965, p. 152), and from anthropology that sexually open societies have less killing (Prescott, 1975). But more evidence is needed.

3) What are the long-term consequences for the child of sex with an adult? Those arguing for more open sexuality in family life might take a position of cultural relativism. They might argue that sexual experiences between adults and children are only harmful because our society makes such a fuss about them. The main damage occurs not from the experience itself, but when a child encounters social reaction to the experience. Even in this society, there may be many instances of children who had positive or at least innocuous reactions to such experiences (Pomeroy, 1978). If family sex is not really that harmful and what harm there is comes from societal reaction, then it may be more important to change societal reaction rather than to focus so exclusively on the dangers of family sex.

Those concerned about sexual abuse are likely to be skeptical about this reasoning. Through personal exposure, they are acutely aware of the enormously traumatic experiences many children have had and the disruption it caused in their later life. In their support, the weight of Freudian opinion is that the great disparity between the physical size and social sophistication of adults and children makes child-adult sexual encounters inherently traumatic (Oremland and Oremland, 1977). Anthropological evidence suggests, too, that although adult-child sexual contact does occur in some cultures, it is not common, and that the taboo on incest, one important form of adult-child sex, is universal (Murdock, 1949).

4) Do changes in the sexual culture of families benefit males and females equally? Feminists in particular among those concerned about sexual abuse may charge that much of the pressure for sexual liberation comes from a male point of view. It has tended to emphasize more sex, and better sex with more people. These have not necessarily been the sexual priorities of the women's movement. Feminists may wonder whether the sexual liberation of the family would have benefits for women that are more clearcut? Or would it tend primarily to benefit men, while the women carried most of the burden of risk due to their greater vulnerability to sexual exploitation?

From this discussion, we can see that sexual abuse is not just a problem for social workers. It is also a problem for social theorists since it poses some key questions about the nature of the family and human sexuality. Unfortunately these are not questions we can address fully in this study. Rather they are part of a research agenda for a whole generation.

What this study can do is to set the stage for the serious scientific investigation of the problem. We will be asking some questions preliminary to any deeper probing. How widespread is the phenomenon of sexual encounter between adults and children, and between family members? What are the main descriptive features of these experiences?

But beyond these general questions, findings from the study do cast light on some of the controversial issues raised earlier. For example, is sexual abuse the result of too much or too little repression? In Chapter IX, there are some clues to an answer when we examine some of the family factors that are statistically correlated with experiences of sexual victimization. In Chapter X, we try to assess whether the general historical trend toward sexual liberalization has been associated with an increase or decrease in the incidence of sexual abuse. Both of these matters reflect on the connection between sexual repression and sexual abuse.

Other elements of the controversy are addressed throughout the dissertation. In almost every chapter, for example, comparison is made between the experiences of boys and girls. This is crucial to an assessment of whether changes in family sexuality will have a differential impact on the sexes. Another continuing concern is what are the important sources of trauma. Are they intrinsic to the experience of adult-child sex or do they stem from social reaction? The implication of our findings for some of these controversial issues will be summarized in the conclusion of this work.

#### THE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

##### The Experience of Interest

To address some of the issues raised here, this study could have investigated a variety of subjects: sexual development, childhood sexual experiences, sexual exploitation, family sexuality, to give some examples. There are a wide range of possibilities. Even the topic we have been so confidently referring to as "sexual abuse" is not just one topic. It has been used to mean incest, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and more. We must make clear our own intentions. What this study is interested in are sexual experiences that occur between children and older persons. The experiences we wish to study all have the following characteristics: 1) They occur to children. 2) They are considered inappropriate by society. 3) They

involve persons who by virtue of being older have a substantial advantage in authority and sexual sophistication over their child partners.

We excluded sexual experiences that occur among peers, no matter what the age of the child. This eliminates what is often called "sex play" among preadolescent children, and adult style sex as it occurs among preadolescents and young adolescents who are peers. Who is a peer and who is an older person is not always easy to define. Our method of using a strict age difference allows for some ambiguity, unfortunately, but we feel it is the best of the alternatives that were practical for this study. We think it has been successful, but that is something the readers will have to judge for themselves. Further discussion of how we operationalized this matter is provided in Chapter III.

We considered defining our subject matter in other ways, for example, sexual overtures toward children where force was used, or sexual experiences of children which the child reported as negative. Rather than try to define it in terms of the experience of the child, we decided to try to define it in terms of the social inappropriateness of the age status of the partners involved. This accounts for our use of age difference as the main criterion for the kind of experience we are studying.

### Naming the Problem

What to call this kind of experience poses another problem. Various terms have been proposed in the last few years to describe it: sexual abuse, child molestation, sexual victimization, sexual harrassment, sexual assault, child rape, and sexual misuse. Each appears to emphasize a slightly different aspect of the phenomenon. The differences are not great, but a choice must be made.

Sexual assault is not a good term because many of the experiences we will be discussing do not involve physical violence. Similarly, child rape is not accurate because of many of the differences from rape which we described earlier. Child molestation is a classic term, but is too closely associated with the stereotype of the stranger in the schoolyard, and does not appear to encompass the many family members who are involved. Sexual harrassment is too weak, and sexual misuse makes the child sound like a thing, not a person.

So far in this chapter, we have used the term "sexual abuse". This is the term that is probably the most widespread, and we have used it because it is the word that has been adopted most consistently by the movements we have been describing. We have not chosen it for our title, however, and we will de-emphasize its use in the remainder of this work for a reason mentioned earlier: Sexual abuse is a concept based on a parallel with physical abuse. It emphasizes the aggressive and hostile motivation that is



present in physical abuse. But sexual abuse is not very often aggressive and hostile.

We favor the term "sexual victimization". As opposed to sexual abuse, this term emphasizes that the child is victimized by her age, naivete, and relationship to the older person, rather than by the aggressive intent of the "abusive" behavior.

However, we do not wish to be doctrinaire about this. The term sexual abuse, because of its currency, will appear from time to time in the rest of the text.

Some researchers might reject any of these terms. All of them are highly charged and have pejorative connotations that some researchers would find distracting to an unbiased examination of the problem. This is not our position, however. We recognize that these terms are political and moral terms, but we do not feel that this disqualifies them from use in scientific investigation.

For one thing, it is the intention of this research to support the renewed social and political concern over the problem of sexual victimization. As this research will show, children are sexually victimized by adults far more often than is generally realized. This is a serious social problem, and in the effort to raise public consciousness, a term that arouses, like sexual victimization or even sexual abuse, is a good term.

Secondly, merely choosing another "sanitary" term like "childhood sexual experiences with older persons" -- a term which we will use extensively, incidentally -- does not solve any problems. It is still obvious to anyone but the most gullible that what the researcher is interested in is the phenomenon that is being called "sexual abuse" by people in the social and political arena.

The better course of action, and the one adopted here, is to use the value laden term, but to carefully caution readers about perceptual biases that it may introduce.

In addition to the major theme of sexual victimization of children, this research has a secondary interest: incest. For purposes of the study, incest means sexual contact between family members and relatives including those of the immediate and extended family. Much sexual victimization is incestuous and much incest is sexual victimization as we have defined it. But they are not identical. In particular, sexual contact between same age family members is a kind of incest that is not victimization. And sexual contact between an unrelated adult and child is victimization that is not incest. Because the two are so closely related, we felt we could not address one issue without the other. So findings on incest are discussed in Chapter VI and continued to some extent in Chapters VII, VIII and IX.

### THE PLAN OF THE DISSERTATION

The following chapter is devoted to theories about why sexual abuse occurs. It reviews theories concerned with the motives of the offender, the vulnerability of the child, the dynamics of the families and the function sexual abuse plays in the larger society.

Chapter III explains the justification for and strategy adopted by this study. It outlines some of its limitations, as well, and assesses, to the extent possible, its validity.

Chapters IV through IX present the actual findings of the study, embedded in a discussion of the issues raised by the findings. Chapter IV gives an inventory of the sexual victimization experiences. Chapter V looks at the older partners: who are they, how old, what sex. Chapter VI introduces the subtopic of incest, distinguishes it from the larger subject of sexual victimization, and reports some of the study findings about incest. Chapter VII tries to answer the perennial question, "Were the experiences traumatic?" and, if so, why. Chapters VIII and IX try to find out whether there were any features that distinguished the child sexual victims in their backgrounds from the other people in the sample. Chapter VIII looks specifically at social and demographic features, and Chapter IX at family structure and composition.

Chapter X compares selected findings from this study with findings from other studies in an attempt to answer two questions: 1) Has the incidence of sexual victimization

been increasing or decreasing? 2) Are there differences between the kinds of cases that are reported to agencies and those that are not.

Finally, Chapter XI gives a short overview of the findings, some suggestions for future research and some commentary on how the findings of this study reflect on the social policy questions posed earlier in this chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### WHY ARE CHILDREN SEXUALLY VICTIMIZED?

This chapter presents 13 theories about why children are sexually victimized. These are theories about why offenders do it, why it happens to some particular children and in some particular families, and why it is apparently so common in our society.

Altogether, however, they do not add up to an inspiring panorama of insight. Knowledge on this neglected subject is still in a primitive state, but that does not make this topic unique. On almost any topic related to sex, knowledge is sparse.

Actually, a deeper flaw is the fact that we know more about sexual deviance than we do about sexual normalcy or sexual ordinariness -- to choose a less value laden word -- and this topic is a good case in point. Here we are inquiring how children come to have sexual experiences with adults when we hardly know how children come to have sexual experiences at all. So all theories about childhood sexual victimization must be viewed against their true backdrop: a vast ignorance of the forces governing the development and expression of sexual behavior in general.

## THEORIES ABOUT THE "OFFENDER"

Early theorizing on the subject was heavily moralistic and medical as the following theory illustrates:

( 1) Abuser as Degenerate. In this view sexual abusers of children were seen as psychopathic, feeble-minded creatures, physical and moral degenerates (Krafft-Ebing, 1935). But such preconceptions did not long withstand the light of evidence.

The early efforts to study sex offenders had a kind of heroic quality to them; long suffering interviewers made meticulous studies of the dregs of humanity in dismal prisons as they tried to get beyond the myths of the sex fiend. Their research on this subject revealed that most of the stereotypes were false. Only a small portion of such sex offenders were psychotic, senile or mentally retarded (Cohen and Boucher, 1972; Glueck, 1954; Gebhard et al., 1965). They painted a rather more human sometimes even sympathetic, portrait of the "child molester", one which in many cases made him sound more attractive than the run-of-the-mill criminal.

They were not primarily strange men who lured away their victims in parks, playgrounds and alleyways. More often they were friends, neighbors or relatives of the children they victimized. They were not brutal and sadistic, for the most part, but used their authority or their charm to gain children's confidence, cooperation or at least passive assent. And unlike rapists, they did not

attempt to have intercourse with their victims. Rather their penchant was for genital fondling, exhibition and masturbation.

Since many of these researchers were psychoanalytically oriented, their theorizing focussed on the developmental experiences of these offenders.

( 2) Seductive Mothers. An offender's sexual interest in children resulted from a disturbance in his relationship to his parents. Many child molesters were viewed as men who had overly seductive mothers, whose overtures aroused their incest anxiety. The incest anxiety in turn spawned a fear of adult women and adult sexuality, and a turning toward children who did not present such a threat (Glueck, 1954).

Other theories followed the early Freudian model and focussed on early childhood sexual trauma as the source of deviant behavior:

( 3) Sexual Fixation. Sexual preoccupation with children resulted from an unusually pleasurable childhood sexual experience, so that the offender, like Lolita's notorious Humbert Humbert, becomes fixated at an early developmental stage or conditioned to respond to that early childhood stimulus (McGuire et al., 1965; Nabokov, 1959). A negative sexual experience could have a similar effect by either deterring the individual from normal sexual maturation or driving him into a compulsive repetition of the original situation in an effort to change the outcome.

Imaginative as these psychoanalytic theories are, they have not received a great deal of empirical confirmation however. Subsequent studies on larger samples have failed to find these regular patterns. Only a minority of offenders show the childhood traumas and the warped parental relationships that the psychoanalytic approach would predict. Men who become sexually involved with children seem to be a much more heterogeneous group than was originally thought (Swanson, 1968). Researchers have more and more had to turn away from an overarching theory toward typologies that take account of the variety of personalities, situations and behaviors.

The following 5 propositions are not theories in the sense of those previously cited. Rather they are empirical generalizations about sexual offenders against children based on the most current research on such men. For the most part, they explain some of the difficulty in establishing a theory of sexual victimization.

( 4) Diversity of Sexual Offenders against Children

( 4a) Only a minority of incarcerated child molesters (25-33%) have a primary and relatively permanent sexual interest in children, something that would be described as a personality characteristic (pedophilia). The rest become involved for what seem more transient reasons: an unusual opportunity, stress, the frustration of other sexual outlets, etc. (Gebhard, et al, 1965; Groth, 1978).



( 4b) A sexual involvement with children has very different motivational roots in different men. In some it is an act of sexual gratification, but for others it expresses a need for closeness or for aggression.

( 4c) Sexual interest in children, particularly on an enduring basis, does seem to be connected to a fear of adults and adult sexuality. Children are often attractive to such men because children are naive, undemanding and do not have adult physical characteristics (Hammer and Glueck, 1957).

( 4d) The motivation for involvement with children depends a great deal on the age of the offender, the age of the child and the activity involved. Adolescents molest children for different reasons than adults. Men who are sexually interested in very young children differ from those with a sexual interest in older ones. And the motivational roots of exhibitionism, for example, contrast strongly with those of incest (Gebhard et al., 1965; Mohr et al., 1964).

( 4e) Alcohol shows a consistent connection with patterns of sexual abuse of children (Browning and Boatman, 1977; Gebhard et al., 1965; Virkkunen, 1974). Nonetheless, many social scientists doubt that the large number of sexual offenses that take place in conjunction with alcohol means that alcohol causes or releases a sexual interest in children (or other deviant interests). Drinking may be more of a way in which the activity is excused or rationalized by the offender than a causative factor

(Gebhard et al., 1965; McCaghy, 1968).

Of course, even these generalizations must be accepted with an appropriate dose of caution. What these men have in common may be more the fact that they have been caught than the fact that they had sex with children. The vast majority of sexual offenders against children, the undetected ones, may be of an entirely different breed.

Thus, although simple profiles of the typical "sexual abusers" have not been forthcoming from research on incarcerated offenders, the findings have at least influenced the direction of future research efforts. It is acknowledged that they are not generally impulsive, raving "sex maniacs" or psychopaths. This knowledge, combined with the frustration of efforts to account for their behavior psychologically, has led to a new focus for research on sexual abuse -- the family situation where sexual abuse arises.

#### THEORIES ABOUT THE "VICTIM"

Since it has been easier, on the whole, to talk to victims than to offenders, a great deal of theorizing has taken place about the children who are involved in child-adult sex. Many attempts have been made to relate the occurrence of the experience to something about the psychology of the victim.

From the time the question of sex with children was first taken up, the idea that children might be the instigators, not the passive victims of the offense has had a great deal of currency. For many years, the one myth researchers took the most relish in exploding was the myth that children were helpless prey to adult offenders. It has been pointed out repeatedly in the literature, that children do things that contribute to their victimization: They act suggestively; they go along with the offender's proposition; they allow the situation to continue; and they fail to report it to anyone who could take action to stop it. All these seem to indicate varying degrees of complicity in the offense.

Freud, as we pointed out earlier, laid a groundwork for this orientation, with his theory that every child in his or her fantasy life wishes for sex with his parents and by extension, other adults and that this fantasy sometimes spills over into reality. Laretta Bender, a famous American child psychiatrist, and one of the earliest to look at adult-child sexual encounters from a research point of view, found that all of the child victims she interviewed were unusually attractive children who made seductive overtures to the psychiatrists (Bender and Blau, 1937). The theory based on these kinds of observations usually is articulated as follows.

( 5a) The Sexually Acting-out Child. Some children act in ways which actively encourage adults to approach them sexually. These are children who have poor relationships with their parents, who are needy in other ways and who have discovered that they can obtain attention and affection from an adult by arousing the adult's sexual impulses (Burton, 1968).

A related theory which holds the child less fully responsible for the sex offense emphasizes the following:

( 5b) The Sexually Defenseless Child. When approached by offenders, many children seem to collaborate in their victimization by failing to take self-protective actions. They accept the adult overtures, they agree to accompany the adult somewhere, they allow the situation to continue, they do not take action to stop the molestation. Such children are believed to be disturbed, have sexual conflicts, few friends, or a passive outlook, all of which factors make them especially vulnerable to being molested (De Francis, 1969; Weiss et al., 1955).

In the field of "victimology", there is a tradition of theories like these that try to understand the ways in which victims contribute to their own victimization. The process is usually called "victim precipitation", and it highlights the fact that victims frequently contribute to their own murders -- by striking a first blow or hurling an insult -- or to their own robberies by leaving doors unlocked and valuable possessions in plain sight.

What is unusual in the case of sexual abuse of children is the degree of importance that the victim precipitation analysis has assumed. The idea that murder victims bring on their own demise developed fairly late in the field and had a moderate impact on our understanding of the homicide situation. In contrast, the idea that children are responsible for their own seduction has been at the center of almost all writing on the subject of sexual abuse since the topic was first broached.

Victim precipitation when it is discussed with reference to sexual abuse is also unique because it is so poorly defined. In homicide cases, victim precipitation has been given the very precise meaning that the victim was the one to strike the first blow (Curtis, 1976). In discussions of rape, victim precipitation was defined as an actual offer of sexual intercourse that was later withdrawn. But in the case of sexual abuse, anything a child might do that does not conform to the standards of a "model" victim is liable to earn the child the reward of being considered an accomplice.

Some critics have said this kind of preoccupation really reflects the fantasies that the researchers have about the children and also the resistance that a male dominated society puts up to the recognition of a particularly seamy side of male sexuality (Rush, 1974). In addition, it also reflects the fact that researchers who have studied only the victim are likely to try to use things

they know about the victim's psychology to account for the victim's experience. (In homicide cases, by contrast, victims are not usually available for study). Both these may account for an over-emphasis on victim precipitation.

The victim precipitation analysis has some important logical defects that should also be noted (Silverman, 1974). To an extent that has not been adequately recognized, the idea that victims contribute to their own victimization is a tautology. By the mere fact of acting and making choices, people have control over things that bring them to fateful junctures. This existential truth is illustrated in Thornton Wilder's Bridge of San Luis Rey. But is this what we want to emphasize about crime?

In addition, the notion of victim precipitation depends very much on whose point of view is taken. What may have seemed like a precipitating gesture from the point of view of the offender (or more likely the researcher) -- such as rubbing up against someone -- may not have been for the victim. For some offenders, the mere fact of a child's being physically beautiful may be enough to precipitate an adult into sexual overtures. Is the victim responsible for this? Children most certainly do not share adult meanings of sexual gestures. But, since researchers are also usually adults, they are more likely to identify with the offender's view in the matter and see the child as provoking. Fortunately, in the last few years, largely as a result of consciousness raising by the women's movement on the subject

of rape, investigators have become somewhat more circumspect about "blaming the victim".

#### THEORIES ABOUT FAMILY CONTEXT

Some of the earliest research on the subject made the discovery that much sexual abuse of children took place among family members. But it has only been recently that families, rather than family members have been implicated in the problem of sex between adults and children. This change required a willingness to talk to all the family members, instead of just the ones most handy. The discovery of family therapy as a method of clinical treatment, and also an increasing interest by sociologists in the problem, have also helped advance a family approach to sexual abuse, in contrast to the earlier psychodynamic approaches.

Family dynamics have been easiest to identify in the case of incest. Father-daughter incest has been the kind most theorized about, since it is the kind most frequently observed. Here the sexual abuse takes place in the heart of the nuclear family, and the group process is most readily analyzed. So we will review some theories about incestuous families and show how in some cases these theories generalize to sexual abuse outside the family.

( 6) Social Isolation. Incest occurs in families characterized by a high degree of social isolation (Bagley, 1969; Riemer, 1940; Weinberg, 1955). The prototype of such families is the backwoods, Appalachian clan, poor and

interbred, but similarly isolated families occur in cities and suburbs too. The isolation appears to reflect and reinforce several things that promote incest. These families shy away from social interaction, and become drawn in upon themselves. As a natural part of this process, sexual attachments which would ordinarily develop with people outside the family occur within the family. The external outlets are not available nor are they sought. Riemer (1940) gives examples of how incest may develop in such families by a turning inward in response to family crises and life changes, where other families might cope with similar events by turning to help from the outside.

Social isolation in these families creates a climate where deviance is freer to emerge. Such families are insulated from the scrutiny of public view which must act to enforce the incest taboo in less isolated families. And without available models, incestuous behavior may come to be accepted as normal there. It has been suggested that some of these isolated families are part of subcultures where incest is not regarded with the same kind of disapproval as in the culture at large. In fairly self-contained communities, these incest tolerant values can be transmitted from generation to generation, relatively unchanged.

( 7) Incest as Role Confusion. Incest and other kinds of adult-child sex are forms of role confusion (Summit and Kryso, 1978; Zaphiris, 1978). As such they are eminently problems of "socio"-pathology rather than psycho-pathology.



In adult-child sex, adults place children in adult sexual roles. A father acts toward his daughter as he would toward his wife. Brothers and sisters treat each other as lovers rather than relatives. One of the most successful theories of incest considers it a problem of role confusion in a family. Ironically, this very sociological point of view on family pathology has been elaborated most by psychiatrists, not by sociologists (Minuchin, 1974).

In this theory, father-daughter incest is a kind of functional adaptation by a family to severe role strain (Henderson, 1972; Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1966). Parents in these families usually have unhappy marriages. Sex between spouses is unpleasant or non-existent (Molnar and Cameron, 1975). Fathers are often authoritarian and physically abusive within family (Weiner, 1962) yet incompetent men in their provider role (Cormier et al., 1962). Mothers, for their part, are either unwilling or unable to fulfill parental functions (Browning and Boatman, 1977). They are ill, still heavily under the sway of their own families, or uncomfortable with the responsibilities of being a mother. In addition to tension with their husbands, they have strained and alienated relationships with their daughters.

In this situation, incest is a possible outcome, and sometimes even a solution to the family dilemma. Depressed, incapacitated and subservient, many of these mothers are just unable to provide any protection for their daughters.

They are peripheral family members. In a situation where the father-daughter bond is the strongest emotional axis in the family, it eventually leads to sex. In cases where the mother is incapacitated, alcoholic or absent, a daughter often assumes many of the mother's housekeeping and child-caring responsibilities and she displaces the mother sexually as a natural extension. Some mothers are even said to feel content at being relieved of these family and sexual obligations. What this all amounts to is a mother-daughter role reversal brought about by a strain and breakdown of the normal family role relationships.

( 8) The Milieu of Abandonment. According to still another theory, incest may occur in response to a pervasive kind of family emotional climate, one dominated by the fear of abandonment. In such families where each member fears he/she may be abandoned by the others, sexuality may be the final resource used by family members to stave off this trauma (Henderson, 1972; Kaufman et al., 1954).

There are two themes that seem to characterize families where this kind of crisis leads to incest. Such families have a record of abandonment that dominates family history. Secondly, the cast of characters in such families seems to be constantly changing. Stepparents and foster children shuffle in and out of the family circle, and the family boundary seems to be diffuse and poorly maintained. Very frequently the fathers in such families have nomadic lifestyles, and are away from the family for extended

periods as a result of military service, job requirements or marital incompatibilities. Incest has often been noted to occur when the fathers return from such an extended absence. It is a desperate attempt to give some substance to tenuous family ties that can't seem to be sustained in any other way.

In trying to explain why daughters tolerate and in some cases encourage incestuous relationships that extend over periods of months and years, one frequently cited factor is that daughters may be receiving a kind of attention and affection which was otherwise unavailable to them. It may not only be the affection and attention, but daughters may also harbor the perhaps accurate notion that without the incestuous relationship there would be no family at all (Lustig et al., 1966). Of course, once the incest begins this fantasy becomes all the more realistic, since revelation and termination of the relationship are virtually certain to bring about the crisis of family dissolution that was feared all along, as authorities often move in to put the offender in jail or the victim in a foster home.

#### Sexual Victimization: The More General Case

The foregoing three theories have been formulated to explain father-daughter incest and not childhood sexual victimization in general. One of the hypothesized mechanisms, mother-daughter role reversal, primarily applies to the specific nuclear family situation. But the other

theories, abandonment anxiety and social isolation, can apply to explanations of sexual abuse beyond the case of father-daughter incest.

Quite a bit of the reported sexual abuse takes place between members of the extended family, grandfathers, uncles, cousins and other peripheral relatives. It is quite readily seen how both social isolation and its subculture more tolerant of intra-family sex could explain these cases of sexual abuse outside the nuclear family. Abandonment anxiety too, can draw into a forbidden sexual relationship, members of an extended as well as a nuclear family.

These foregoing theories are ones derived from generalization about the experience of incest. But other theories using family factors have emerged from the study of the more general case of sexual victimization both inside and outside the family.

( 9) Marital Conflict. Marital conflict can make children vulnerable to sexual victimization by anybody, in two ways. First, it often subjects them to contradictory messages about sex, and the resulting sexual confusion hampers their ability to handle potential sex abuse situations. Second, the conflict is hard on the child, and leaves the child insecure about where to turn for protection. When a child feels unprotected, he/she is more apt to become entangled in a sexual situation with an adult in which he/she feels helpless (Weiss et al., 1955).

( 10) Oversexualization. It has been suggested that some families are oversexualized, and children from such families are more vulnerable to sexual abuse, even outside the family (Litin et al., 1956). Two things appear to be going on. Children have inappropriate sexual models and an unusual kind of sexual socialization. Moreover, they are sexually stimulated by their own parents, perhaps not directly, but as a result of talk or exposure to unusual sexual behavior. These two factors make them vulnerable to sexual involvements with adults.

( 7) Poor Supervision. Children are vulnerable to sexual abuse when they are poorly supervised (De Francis, 1969). This theory echoes ideas expressed in the two preceding theories, except that it is more general. Not just family conflict or oversexualization, but any situation which results in a child being haphazardly cared for can lead to a child being vulnerable to a sexual abuse situation.

#### SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SOURCES

Sexual victimization of children is not universal. There are societies where it is not known to occur, (Mead, 1968) and there are undoubtedly parts of our own society where it is less common. Unfortunately, we know little about the demography of sexual abuse. While anthropology has taken a lively interest in why incest is almost universally tabooed, it has devoted little attention to the

related question: why is the violation of the incest taboo more common in some societies than elsewhere?

But it is understandable that anthropology would have a difficult time addressing our question: what are the causes of sexual victimization? The concept of sexual victimization we have offered so far is a very culturally relative one. In some societies sexual contact takes place on a regularly sanctioned basis between adults and children (Ford and Beach, 1951). Here it is not a deviant act and no victimization would be said to take place. For example, in some societies homosexual acts between men and boys play a part in tribal ritual. Among the Keraki of New Guinea, each pre-pubescent boy passes through an initiation in which he is introduced to anal intercourse by one of the tribe's older men (Ford and Beach, 1951). The same source cites several other such instances in other societies.

However, all societies prohibit most adult-child sexual contact, and the incest taboo, one form of this restriction, is virtually universal (Weinberg, 1955). Where adult-child sex is permitted it is either in highly ritualized and structured circumstances or not considered sexual. What is important about sexual victimization in our own society is that this rather important taboo is violated fairly often.

There are two major theories that account from a social and cultural point of view for the frequency with which our prohibitions on adult-child sex are violated.

( 12) Male Supremacy. Sexual victimization is one way in which men (the dominant status group) control women. To maintain control, men need a vehicle by which women can be punished, brought into line, and socialized to a subordinate status. Sexual victimization and the threat of sexual victimization are useful in keeping women intimidated (Brownmiller, 1975). Inevitably the process starts in childhood with the victimization of girl children.

Whether or not it functions to maintain male dominance as Brownmiller argues, in a male dominated society the sexual exploitation of women and children by men is certainly easier. Sex in any society is a valuable commodity, and a dominant group -- such as men -- will try to rig things to maximize their access to it. The cultural beliefs which underpin the male dominated system contribute to making women and children sexually vulnerable. For example, to the extent that family members are regarded as possessions, men can take unusual and usually undetected liberties with them. The fact that the male sexual urge is viewed as overpowering and in need of satisfaction allows men to rationalize escapades of anti-social behavior, such as sexual abuse. In a system of severe sexual and generational inequality, women and children lack the resources to defend themselves against such sexual victimization. These are ways in which male supremacy promotes sexual abuse.

The theory is fairly effective in explaining the sexual abuse of women by men, and the preponderance of male offenders and girl victims which we observe. Children, however, are a subordinate group in almost every society, and probably have more power in our society than most. What the theory does less well at explaining is why, given their universal powerlessness, in some societies children are often sexually exploited, and others not.

( 13) Social Fragmentation. Sexual abuse is common in this society according to another theory because of the increasing isolation of individuals and families. Although no one yet has formally articulated this theory to account for sexual abuse (but see Frederick Cuber of Odessey Institute quoted in Helen Dudar, 1977) it is a theory which is used to explain many kinds of family and sexual pathology and is readily adaptable to sexual abuse as well.

We discussed earlier the theory that incest tends to occur among isolated families and in isolated subcultures. Some theorists have alleged that isolation is, in fact, the dominant feature of our society. The isolation encompasses not just families but also individuals and results from increased mobility and the breaking down of neighborhoods, communities and other integrating structures (Lasch, 1977; Parsons, 1959; Slater, 1968).

As mentioned earlier, isolation facilitates sexual abuse in two ways. It reduces the intensity of general social supervision, so that all kinds of deviance can



increase. It deprives people of socially sanctioned forms of support and intimacy, so that they may turn to forms which are taboo. Sexual abuse is, in this theory, a symptom of pervasive loneliness.

Although both these theories leave certain aspects of the problem undiscussed, they both highlight a need to analyze sexual victimization from the point of view of the organization of society as a whole, and not just as the outcome of the idiosyncrasies of certain individuals, families and subgroups.

#### THE CONSEQUENCES TO THE VICTIMS

Although we have just about exhausted theories about the causes of sexual victimization of children, there are still two more theories we need to review. These are theories not about causes but about consequences, and they have generated more furor than most of the previous theories combined.

Among those who study the problem, an intense dispute has raged over more than forty years about how serious a problem sexual abuse really is. On the one hand, there have been those who have argued that although generally unpleasant, the vast majority of sexual offenses against children are rather innocuous affairs best treated as one of the minor and transient hazards of childhood. Meanwhile, however, others point out the many case histories of children who have been permanently scarred by the

experience, alleging that we have not yet begun to recognize the true toll of this widespread problem.

The anti-alarmists tend to argue things this way. The innocence of childhood, they say, is a form of natural protection against the long term effects of sexual abuse. A great many ordinary things are frightening to children -- a trip to the doctor, a ride on an airplane -- but by the same token the pain passes quickly. The same is true of sexual abuse.

Moreover, children have only a dim sense of adult sexuality. What may seem like a horrible violation of social taboos from an adult perspective, need not be so to a child. A sexual experience with an adult may be something unusual, vaguely unpleasant, even traumatic at the moment, but this does not make it a horror story. Most childhood sexual experiences involve encounters with fondlers and exhibitionists, Kinsey pointed out, and, "it is difficult to understand why a child, except for its cultural conditioning, should be disturbed at having its genitals touched, or disturbed at seeing the genitalia of other persons." (Kinsey, 1953, p.121). Most of the women who reported such contacts in Kinsey's sample did not appear to suffer any long term consequences (Gagnon, 1965). One other survey (Landis, 1956) and several other case studies (Bender and Grugett, 1952; Burton, 1968; Yorukoclu and Kempf, 1969) have also found children to be relatively unscathed.

On the other hand, there is no lack of reports of traumatic outcomes to such sexual experiences. Hospital emergency rooms, for example, are regularly visited by child victims of sex offenses, and such children appear to suffer many of the same severe consequences of adult women who have been raped (Burgess and Holmstrom, 1974). There is confusion, crying, depression and subsequently a sense of shame, guilt feelings and awareness of stigma. These go on for some time.

It has been noted that child victims fare better to some extent than adult rape victims, but this is because children are less likely to have suffered massive physical coercion or threat (Peters, 1976), not because they are so quick to forget. The fact that so many childhood victims fail to report their experiences to anyone, even parents, is powerful evidence that the experience is surrounded by conflict.

The picture from clinical records on adults who were former childhood victims also tends to support this view. Psychotherapists report an unusually large number of childhood sex victims among their clients, (Herman and Hirschman, 1977; Swift, 1977), and note that women with such experiences are often suffering from depression (Henderson, 1972; Molnar and Cameron, 1975; Sloane and Karpinsky, 1942) and difficulty in relating to men (Herman and Hirschman, 1977).

Studies of specific deviant groups also reveal frequent sexual abuse experiences in the histories of these people. A large proportion of women drug addicts (Benward and Densen-Gerber, 1975) and prostitutes (James and Meyerding, 1977) were found to have incest experiences in their backgrounds. Adolescent runaways also appear to commonly be childhood sexual victims (Weber, 1977). The trauma of these experiences does not easily fade away say these observers. Sexual abuse victims are often doubly and triply victimized over an extended period of time, once by the offender and then again by parents, relatives and the social agencies appointed to handle the problem. Parents often blame the child for getting into trouble. And the police, social workers and courts often subject such child victims to brutal and insensitive interrogation, publicity and exposure which also compounds the trauma (Burgess et al., 1978; Schultz, 1975).

Many comments have been and will be made about this controversy before it is settled. Only three very elementary observations will be made here.

1) Obviously some people have been traumatized by early childhood sexual experiences, (even this is conceded by the anti-alarmists) but the argument appears to be over whether such trauma is typical or occurs only in isolated cases. Actually, the real dispute is more of a political one: is this a social problem worthy, because of its serious harmful consequences, of a massive mobilization. It seems to me

that even if only a small number of children are harmed by the experience, it is still worthy of mobilization. So the real question to be answered is not, are children harmed, but how are they harmed, in what instances, and how can that be avoided.

2) In favor of the anti-alarmists, it must be mentioned that the reports of trauma are subject to the "clinical fallacy". Therapists, clinics and drug treatment facilities are by definition dealing with traumatized individuals. It is not clear whether for each person who seems to be badly affected by the childhood sexual experience, there are many others who were not affected.

Moreover, there is the additional difficulty of identifying the exact trauma-inducing factor. Many of the people reporting childhood sexual experiences also come from environments containing plenty of other trauma-inducing experiences (Geiser and Norberta, 1976). Are their current problems due to the highly visible sexual experience or to some of the other environmental factors, the family disorganization or the way in which the experience was reacted to? These are strands of the puzzle that need to be disentangled.

3) In criticism of the anti-alarmist, however, it must be said that they have often demanded proof of unreasonably serious difficulties before accepting that any trauma occurred. If a person avoids mental hospitalization, manages to marry and becomes a parent, anti-alarmist

researchers have often concluded that no serious damage took place. This seems overly optimistic. Even if the result were something so "comparatively" minor and subjective as an inability to feel comfortable in the presence of older men, this needs to be taken seriously as evidence of deleterious long term effects.

Fortunately, this question of trauma and the consequences of sexual victimization is one of the questions most amenable to empirical examination. We will do so briefly here in Chapter VII, and it is certain to become one of the focal points of future research on the subject.

## CHAPTER III

### A SURVEY ON CHILDHOOD SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION

The study of the sexual victimization of children has taken place almost entirely through the agency of police, courts, jails, child protective agencies or psychiatrists' offices. Researchers examine convicted offenders or police records of complaints filed or families who report an incident to an agency or a victim who many years later tells her story to a therapist. There are serious questions about how much can be learned in these ways about a problem, which, like the proverbial iceberg, is 90% hidden from public attention of any sort.

For one thing, there are many reasons to think that cases that come to the attention of these agencies are special in some way. Convicted offenders, as the cliché goes, are the failures of the world of deviant behavior. They are the ones who carried on their activity so blatantly or brutally or so stupidly that they got caught (wanted to get caught, the Freudian might add). Families who report incidents are likely to be either the ones so wracked by family conflict they could not contain the humiliating secret or the ones who had no other recourse. And the people who end up in the psychiatrist's office are often the ones having the hardest time coping with life.

A second limitation on these studies is that they are usually based on a very small number of cases. Theoretical papers based on 4 incidents or less are not at all uncommon in the literature. And a final problem is that the histories are usually collected under circumstances that are not really conducive to accuracy and objectivity (Lester, 1972).

Of course, it is easy to be critical of all that has gone before, to discount years of work and hundreds of pages with a few sharp words. So while there is truth to the idea that our knowledge about the sexual victimization of children has been drastically limited because we have studied it through the vehicle of psychotherapy and the criminal justice system, it must be born in mind that this is not an easy area to study by any method.

#### RATIONALE FOR A SURVEY

Is a survey the solution? Survey advocates -- who are also usually sociologists, rather than psychologists or psychiatrists -- often see this tool as the way to bring real science in to supplant unruly subjectivity in the study of a new social problem. They see swarms of "clinical fallacies", preconceptions, and the researchers own projections dispersing, as survey data surges in.

True, surveys in a social problem area of this sort do have some important contributions. 1) They provide a large number of cases for purposes of categorization, and seeing



the range of possibilities. 2) They provide the possibility of a control on the thing being studied, so that a contrast can be made between situations where the event being studied occurs and those where it does not occur. 3) They give the opportunity to generalize to a larger population. 4) They create an incentive to translate vague concepts and intuitions into concrete definitions and hypotheses.

Surveys also have their drawbacks. They can introduce their own kind of selection factors, so that their respondents may be hardly more representative than a group of psychotherapy patients or jailed convicts. They can cramp complex experiences, feelings and human phenomena into categories and fixed responses that completely distort the meaning and import of an experience. And in the hands of the unscrupulous or careless, they can be every bit as much of a vehicle for preconception and prejudice as the case history. But the time appears ripe for surveys on childhood sexual victimization.

Aside from the fact that it has hardly been done before, (the "because it's there" motivation of the world of social scientists) there are a number of reasons for doing such a survey that have only come into being in the recent past. For one thing, it is only recently that people realized that this is an experience that is widespread enough to be amenable to survey analysis. When an event occurs too infrequently, a survey is a very inefficient way of gathering information about it. Case studies in such

instances are a better road to knowledge. Secondly, sex research and public discussions of sexual matters have a new legitimacy. This development has made such a survey on sexual victimization of children both more acceptable to potential respondents and to other authorities whose cooperation would be essential in any such undertaking.

Third, our sophistication in doing research on such sensitive topics has increased dramatically in recent times. Other sensitive topics -- sexual intercourse, family violence, contraceptive practices -- have now been extensively studied, and many techniques developed for improving validity, participation and confidentiality in such research. The most recent addition to this technology which gives both encouragement and technical assistance to a study of this sort is the "victimization survey" which has now been conducted for several years at a great deal of government expense.

Fourth, there is now a burgeoning policy concern about this subject and related matters -- family violence, crime victimization and child-abuse -- which creates the need for new and different kinds of information. At the time of earlier clinical and court studies, the main pressure for new knowledge came from the needs of psychotherapists and judges. Now government officials have become more involved in the problem, trying to formulate strategies requiring the creation of new services, reorganization of existing services, and the spending of larger sums of money. They

need data on social and demographic factors -- information useful in the prevention of victimization or identification of vulnerable children. This also puts a premium on the kind of information available by survey rather than by case study.

#### An Exploratory Study

Despite new incentives to do survey research in this area and opportunities created by new knowledge and techniques, there are still some serious obstacles in the way of doing surveys that can be of recognized scientific value. Childhood sex and incest are still highly tabooed topics among many segments of the population, and there is no assurance that a high degree of candor can be obtained. Moreover, ignorance of the subject so heavily outweighs knowledge, that it is likely that surveys will shoot in the dark for a while before learning how to approach the subject accurately and impartially.

For example, there is a great deal of question about whether there is even a commonly accepted vocabulary that can be used to gather information so that it means the same thing to the different people. A lot of time was spent in the current study trying to decide what to call the sexual activity involved when two people engage in copulatory motions, but no penetration takes place. In slang, some people call this "dry humping." Some researchers have called it "genital apposition." We doubted that either of these

would have meaning to most people.

And once sexual experiences have been recorded, to what other events in a person's life should they be linked? Sexual development, family organization, peer relationships. The field of possibilities is vast, and few hypotheses have emerged from case studies.

For these reasons, the current study was conceptualized as an "exploratory study." In essence, that meant that one of the (ironical) purposes of the research was to find out whether research was possible -- given this kind of approach. But exploratory meant some other things too. It meant that instead of testing hypotheses, the purpose of the study would be to develop them. It meant that the research would cast a wide net over the subject matter to find out which avenues of approach were most fruitful. It meant less emphasis on scientific proof and more on scientific inquiry.

To counterbalance the shallowness of survey data, it was decided to try to combine it with a small scale interview study. First a survey would be conducted to answer questions about incidence, about social and demographic factors and about the range of experiences. Subsequent to that, interviews would be conducted to find out more about the details of the experience, its meaning and impact, and how it fit together with family background and other developmental experiences.

Combining these two approaches solved an important problem of the interview approach alone: how to recruit people who had had childhood sexual experiences for personal interviews. Word of mouth, bulletin boards and newspaper ads are very biasing and ineffective recruitment procedures on such a sensitive topic. However, if interviewees were recruited from the survey, there was a chance of getting a large group by distributing enough surveys, and a representative group by providing enough motivation to attract otherwise reluctant volunteers.

Although the interviews are a crucial part of the study design, this report is based primarily on an analysis of the results of the questionnaire survey. Administrative problems and the need for elaborate human subjects protection procedures have created some delay in the completion of the interview portion of the research. Moreover, once collected, the interview data itself requires lengthy preparation before it is amenable to analysis. For these reasons, a systematic study of the results of the interviews has been deferred for another publication.

#### DESIGNING THE SURVEY

In designing the study, there were four main goals that needed to be achieved: 1) Representativeness -- the survey had to touch on some population more heterogeneous than social welfare agency case loads or incarcerated criminals. 2) Validity -- the responses needed to be as truthful as

possible. 3) Protection of subjects -- we needed to find ways not to embarrass or endanger the people who participated in our survey. 4) Feasibility -- the study had to fit within some fairly narrow time and budget constraints.

Unfortunately, we could not maximize all four of these objectives at once. The ideal, for example, in representation would have been some kind of scientifically selected nationwide probability sample allowing generalization to the population of the whole country: the dream of every survey researcher. Obviously such a study was not currently feasible. Even if expense and time were not considerations, such a national probability sample still might not be the best for our purposes. For example, knocking on a sample of scientifically selected -- but totally unfamiliar doors -- might lead to an unacceptably high refusal rate. If interviewing people in their households posed a serious potential of compromising their confidentiality and exposing them to the questioning of friends and relatives, then this would clash with the objective of protecting our subjects. So there were many priorities to be juggled.

Ultimately, we decided on a sample of college students in social science classes in a variety of New England colleges and universities. This is a rather conventional choice for research of this sort. But in this case, such a sample provided some distinct advantages for the subject

matter, over and above the conventional reasons -- that college students are handy and available.

College students, for example, are particularly attractive in dealing with the validity problem of this kind of research. For maximum validity, a study needs subjects who are well motivated, not threatened by the subject matter, not inconvenienced by the research, and able to provide the needed information.

As a group, college students are probably more suited to these needs than any other. For one thing, they are among those most comfortable with sexual topics. For another, because the survey could be presented in classes where it related to the subjects under study and had the endorsement of a familiar professor, respondents were much more likely to be motivated to participate than if they had been approached by a stranger in their household or in public.

Thirdly, taken as part of class time, the survey would not inconvenience students much, and thus we were assured of a higher participation rate. And perhaps most importantly, college students are still fairly close in time to their childhood experiences and would suffer from less memory distortion than an older person questioned about a comparable event. In fact, given that children and adolescents are virtually inaccessible to research on such topics because of rules for human subjects protection, college students are the youngest subjects available and

thus the best from the point of view of memory detail.

College students have some other distinct advantages on the matter of human subject's protection. A key kind of danger in research of this sort is that participants' privacy and confidentiality will be violated. Although researchers routinely use anonymous questionnaires to deal with this danger, they are not always conscious of other ways in which they make their subjects vulnerable. One of the most common unforeseen compromises in confidentiality comes when attention is drawn to the fact of a person's participation in such a study. Even when a respondent's answers are confidential, the person is still liable to be interrogated by others about his or her responses, making things difficult for a participant who does not like to lie.

It is particularly difficult, for example, to survey subjects who are living in family units without it drawing the attention of other family members. However, because many students live autonomously, and because filling out the survey would be part of ordinary class time -- not distorting their routine in any way -- there is a minimum likelihood that a student's participation in the study would be drawn to the attention of any of his family or intimates. This seems a distinct advantage.



### Limitations of Sample

However, student samples also present other distinct disadvantages which have been catalogued many times before. The main one is their homogeneity and lack of representativeness. Their most homogeneous dimension, of course, is age. The vast majority of college students fall between the ages of 17 to 22. Even surveys that attempt to recruit older college students, as this one did, rarely can manage more than a few students over age 24. In this study, we were able to recruit 18% of the sample from the over age 24.

However, the age homogeneity is the less serious problem. After all, by age 18, all those respondents who will have childhood sexual experiences have already had them. Living longer will not give them any more or any different kinds of experiences. The age homogeneity only means that we can find out little about the experience of any age cohort besides this one, and thus will not know whether the incidence of such sexual experiences is increasing or decreasing and whether their nature is changing. However, this is not an enormous limitation.

The more serious problem of representativeness comes from the fact that colleges are selective. Only about 40% of an age cohort currently attends college in this country, and this 40% contains the brightest, the most motivated, the most upwardly mobile, the mentally healthiest and of course, the most well-to-do. This group is distinctly different in

their life experiences from those who do not attend college.

Most attention is usually paid to the social class bias of college student samples. In our sample, for example, the median family income was around \$14,000 -- well above the \$10,236 national figure for 1970, the time period for which most of the respondents were estimating their family income, but about the norm for families of college students (Astin et al., n. d.).

Although our sample's income distribution deviates significantly from that of the population at large, it does include however a fairly good number of individuals from obviously poor backgrounds. Twenty per cent of the sample reported family income of under \$7000. So there will still be enough income range in this college student sample to look at the experiences of students from both poor and rich backgrounds.

For our purposes, the more serious bias of a college student sample is that it excludes many people who may be troubled, disorganized, of below average intelligence or from deviant subcultures. Such people are the least likely to make it through the various educational filters that tend to reward intelligence, self-discipline and conformity. However, these may be the very people who have had or who are the most vulnerable to having experiences of sexual victimization and incest.

We can try to adjust incidence figures to take account of the exclusion of these people by assuming the rates are too low. But what is much harder is to assess what kinds of knowledge about the experiences we are missing by failing to have such people in the sample. Unfortunately, we cannot assume that their experiences are similar to the ones of people who did get into the sample. They were probably more damaging and destructive, and hence may have emerged from very different personal, family and social circumstances.

Another limitation of the survey is the fact that it was conducted almost entirely in social science classes, raising the question of whether some additional biases were introduced. For example, there is a popular belief among college teachers that students take social science courses to work out personal problems. Is it possible that students with upsetting childhood sexual experiences might be more likely to take social science courses in an attempt to get help for problems related to the experience? This factor, if true, might result in an inflated number of reports of childhood sexual victimization experiences in the survey.

However, we are skeptical that this bias is operating on any large scale in the survey. Most of the courses surveyed were large introductory courses, taken by students from a wide variety of disciplines. Because of distribution requirements, almost all college students take one or two social science courses. We suspect only a minority of these students, if that many, take these courses specifically

because of personal problems. Moreover, we doubt whether popular belief has any validity. We do not know of any empirical evidence to support it. Even if social science students feel more troubled, it is still questionable that they actually have more negative life experiences.

In summary, this student sample probably excludes some crucial segments of the relevant population for the phenomenon we are studying. However, it is a good sample from the point of view of motivation, recall and protection of confidentiality. It is easily a much more "normal" and "representative" group than any of the groups that have been previously studied -- court cases, therapy clients and volunteers.

#### SURVEY PROCEDURE

The survey was done at six New England colleges and universities, chosen to give a diverse sample. One school was a small private, expensive elite school. Two others were large residential state universities, one from a primarily rural state, the other from a more urban industrialized state. A fourth was an urban state university branch campus, about 50% of whose enrollment is commuters. A fifth was a community college (no residential students) in a New England industrial town. The last was a recently formed community college, an institution without any physical plant, which delivers evening courses in high school facilities to a primarily adult population.

Surveys were conducted in classes whose subject matter ranged from sociology to psychology to social work to human sexuality, and included both introductory and upper level courses. The classes were chosen on the assumption that the most highly motivated respondents would be ones who could see the connection between the research and the subject they were studying and whose professors could give the research and the researcher a positive endorsement. Thus classes were not sampled systematically, but rather according to the subject matter and the receptivity of the professor to the research.

The questionnaires were completed by students during class time. The research was first presented to the class, including discussion of its importance, its sensitivity and the precautions that were being taken. Questionnaires were distributed, and students told that participation was completely voluntary. Respondents took 45 minutes on the average to complete the questionnaire, and were free to leave when finished or before, if they did not wish to complete the questionnaire.

A key dilemma was how to recruit volunteers for personal interviews without compromising their anonymity, the anonymity of their questionnaire or drawing the attention of other class members to them. The problem was dealt with by including a separate flyer in each questionnaire on which students could volunteer for a personal interview. Instructions indicated that we wanted

to interview only those who had had some kind of sexual experience with family members. The flyer asked volunteers only for a first name, a nickname, or an alias and phone number for contacting them. All students, whether volunteering or not, were asked to fold up the flyers and hand them in separately. Thus we obtained information for contacting interviewees, without making them conspicuous to the class, without our having to learn their names or use their anonymous questionnaire.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

The questionnaire used in the survey took between 45 minutes and an hour to complete. It contained questions about childhood sexual experiences with adults and children, incestuous sexual experiences and coercive sexual experiences at any age. It also asked about sources of the respondent's sex information, attitudes and practices about sex and discipline in his or her family of origin and current sexual behavior. Questions also probed family background, the nature of family relationships, family composition, and various social and demographic features. In all, over 600 items of information were gathered.

Because of the large amount of data and the large sample size, it was necessary to place limitations on the data that would be analyzed and reported in this initial report. Only two kinds of sexual experiences will be analyzed here: 1) childhood sexual experiences with older

persons and 2) sexual experiences with relatives. Other childhood experiences and adult coercive sexual experiences will be reported on at a later time. A selection has also been made from among information available in the survey on family, sexual development and current behavior. This report will limit itself to matters of family composition, social and demographic background, and parental role adequacy. Questions relating to sex education, family sexual norms, family violence and current sexual behavior will be taken up elsewhere.

The data analysis was also streamlined to permit a reduction in the number of questionnaires that needed to be coded for the purposes of this dissertation. All 796 questionnaires received were first analyzed with regard to the sexual experiences reported, and those which contained either a childhood sexual experience with an older person or an experience with a family member were selected. The analysis of the 350 experiences of these 264 individuals provides the data for chapters IV through VIII of this study.

It was also important to compare how those with relevant experiences differed from those without in terms of family background, social and cultural origin. The group without relevant experiences is made up of 532 individuals whose questionnaires were not selected in the first analysis. Instead of comparing the "experience" group with the whole "non-experience" group, however, a 50% systematic

sample (every other case) was taken from the latter and only these were coded. Then in any analysis involving both groups, each response in the non-experience group is given a weight of 2 in order to give correct estimates of incidence for the sample as a whole. Thus, if there were 30 low-income families in the non-experience group, this was doubled and added to the number of low-income families in the experience group to get the total number of low-income families represented in the whole sample. This sampling and weighting procedure is a convenient technique to simplify data analysis and does not introduce any biases into the study.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

The survey sample used for the data analysis consisted of 796 students, 530 females and 266 males. The classes that were surveyed contained a disproportionate number of women, and this was treated as an advantage not defect in the sample, since it was expected that women would report more experiences of sexual victimization. The extra proportion of women boosted the number of experiences from the number that would have been reported on a sample with an equal number of men and women. In an exploratory study like this, more experiences gave us more information.

The sample had the expected college-age distribution, 75% being 21 years of age or under. Our efforts at diversification, however, did result in a limited group of



older students. About 18% of the sample was over 24, ranging all the way up to 74 years old for the oldest participant. As for the marital status, about fifteen per cent were currently or had been married, but the vast majority was single, never married.

The composition of the sample reflects the fact that just one of the campuses surveyed was in a large city, and the rest were in large and small towns. Thus only 12% of the respondents had grown up in cities of over 100,000 in population. The largest proportion (43%) came from towns of between 5,000 and 25,000. This makes it a primarily small town sample.

The ethnic and religious breakdown mirrors this regional and small-town composition. First, there were almost no blacks in the sample, since blacks live almost entirely in the metropolitan areas in New England, and in addition, are grossly underrepresented among residential college populations. The largest ethnic representations were Irish, English and French-Canadian, around 200 students reporting each of those groups in their ancestry. There was also a scattering of Scots, Italians, Germans and Eastern Europeans.

Fifty-three percent said they had grown up as Catholics, 34% as Protestants and 6% as Jews. Five percent claimed no religious background.

The sample came largely from intact, middle-class family backgrounds. Only 11% reported that their parents had been divorced or separated. The median income, mentioned earlier, was very close to \$14,000.

#### VOLUNTEER BIAS

The modern world has come to accept the sex survey as it has the airplane. But acceptance has come more because sex research has generally confirmed what sex researchers wanted to find out. There are few definitive proofs that sex surveys give a true representation of sexual practices in the whole population.

The kinds of distortions that are alleged to invalidate sex surveys can be conveniently divided into two types. One kind of distortion is caused by the inability or refusal of certain kinds of people to participate. Thus there may be a certain segment of the population whose behavior we never learn about. A second kind of distortion is caused by the inability or refusal of people who do participate to report accurately. The first is called volunteer bias, and the second response invalidity.

We mentioned earlier ways in which our sampling procedure might underrepresent certain kinds of cases of sexual victimization because of the exclusionary bias of college attendance. There are other biasing possibilities in our process of data collection. Not everyone enrolled in the classes we approached actually completed a

questionnaire. From the hypothetical population of all the students in all the classes surveyed, subjects were excluded in one of two ways: 1) they may have been absent from the classes on the days when the questionnaire was administered, or 2) they may have declined to fill out the questionnaire once it was presented to them. In addition they may have skipped relevant questions in the surveys they did fill out.

We obtained from the professors in the classes surveyed the theoretical enrollments of the classes and compared them to actual attendance on the days the survey was given. Approximately one-third of the eligible population was excluded as a result of non-attendance. Although non-attenders may be less serious students, may be ones more vulnerable to illness or may have some other distinguishing features, we suspect on the whole non-attendance does not introduce large systematic biases in such samples. Factors relating to non-attendance may be fairly random or only tangentially associated with an experience of childhood sexual victimization.

However, a second bias may be introduced because participation in the survey was necessarily voluntary. Of the students to whom the questionnaire was presented approximately 8% chose not to participate. The reasons for not participating may be related to the experience under investigation. Some may have opted out because they found the subject matter offensive. Some may have had experiences they did not want to have to discuss. Others, no doubt,

merely left because they were not being required to stay and they had other more pressing things to do. And an unknown percentage of the non-participants left because they had already filled out the survey in another class that was included in the survey. Note then this 92% is a good participation rate, compared to the 75% which is now typical of door-to-door surveys. It is also somewhat higher than what has been found in other sex research on college student groups (Kanin and Parnell, 1977; DeLameter and MacCorquodale, 1975; Reiss, 1967). So the volunteer bias in this study is less than is standard for research of this sort.

There is no consensus in the research community on just how this volunteer bias may distort the findings of sex surveys. In some instances it may inflate the reports of a certain kind of sexual behavior, in other cases it may depress them. Kinsey found in his 100% group samples (groups where there was no volunteer bias) fewer reports of homosexuality and other sexual activities than among samples which were only portions of whole groups, suggesting that those with more and more varied experiences were more eager to be interviewed (Kinsey, 1948, p. 99). However, it is just as easy to imagine that people with certain kinds of deviant experiences may prefer to keep them private and thus decline participation in research like this.

Barker and Perlman (1975) sent sex and non-sex surveys on a random basis to subjects who had previously been given personality tests. Curiously, response rates were identical for both surveys. Moreover, they found no differences on 108 personality measures between those who did and did not respond to either survey. This suggests that volunteer bias does not affect findings at all, and also that contrary to stereotype, sex surveys are not more vulnerable to this kind of effect than any other kind of survey.

A third source of volunteer bias occurs in our survey because some of the actual respondents chose, as they were instructed, to skip certain questions they found too personal or did not wish to answer. Thus 78 or 10% of the sample refused to answer questions about childhood sexual experiences, perhaps because they had something to hide, or perhaps because they simply found such questions disturbing or too intimate.

Fortunately, we have some other information on who these particular non-respondents were because they did fill out other sections of the questionnaire. There is nothing noticeable about this group of non-respondents to distinguish them from the rest of those who took the survey. There is a slight preponderance of Catholics among the non-respondent group, but not enough to be statistically significant.

The only other trend among non-respondents is that they seemed particularly numerous at one of the schools. This is a reflection of either the student culture at that school or the conditions under which the survey was administered there. Because it is not associated with any demographic or family differences, the non-response disproportion at this school can probably be discounted as having any effect on issues we are concerned about. Thus from evidence which we can marshal from our own study, we are fairly confident that no large bias has been introduced by the procedure by which respondents chose to participate or not participate in the survey.

#### VALIDITY OF RESPONSE

The second perennial question about sex research is whether the responses we do receive can be trusted. Aren't people likely to misrepresent experiences which they imagine are deviant, and beyond that, aren't many experiences, even if not consciously misrepresented, subject to the great distorting influence of time, memory, and unconscious processes?

Once again, the history of research on sex gives both alarming and reassuring counsel to those concerned about response validity. Kinsey and his colleagues were confident that very few of their respondents lied. Their checks on validity showed their data to be remarkably accurate. Husbands reports tallied with wives reports. Retrospective

accounts of events like the age of onset of puberty corresponded well with medical findings based on direct observation.

Other survey researchers have not been so sanguine. It has been a generally accepted principle in the field that validity declines with increases in the threatening nature of the subject matter, and sexual topics have been shown to be among the most threatening. Clark and Tiffit (1966) tried to validate survey data with lie detector tests performed on respondents after they had filled out questionnaires. They found that all items in their survey were subject to some over- or under-reporting and on the whole, the more sensitive items, like homosexuality and masturbation, were subject to the most.

Similarly, Bradburn et al. (1978) showed that people who say they are most ill at ease about discussing a certain behavior tend to give lower reports of engaging in such behavior, and refuse to answer such questions more often. This suggests to these researchers that there is a fair amount of underreporting and misrepresentation in most surveys and the largest amount in surveys whose subject matter makes people the most uncomfortable. They speculate that real incidence rates are between 8% higher than reported for topics like intercourse to 27% higher for topics like smoking marijuana.

Presumably a topic such as ours, involving reports of childhood sexual experiences and incest, would be among the most threatening imaginable, and thus liable to great distortion -- probably under-reporting, if we followed the conclusion of the Bradburn research. Unfortunately, there is no way to obtain direct validity checks on the experiences reported by our subjects. We too suspect that they are underreported, but cannot prove this suspicion. It is possible to provide some indirect validation of certain other experiences of a moderately threatening sort that are reported in the survey. The validation comes from comparing our findings with the findings of other surveys of comparable populations on the same topics.

For example, in our study 66% of the women reported a childhood sexual experience. This compares to 48% who said they had such an experience reported in the Kinsey study. We also asked respondents whether they had engaged in sexual intercourse. For unmarried college women, the percent of non-virgins ranged from 55% for fresh(wo)men to 85% for seniors. These rates are double the rates reported by Simon and Gagnon in a 1967 national college student survey (Gagnon, 1977, p. 182). They are almost exactly the same as the figures seen in one of the most recent of such surveys done on college students, this one in Colorado (Jessor and Jessor, 1977). It would appear doubtful from these comparisons that there was substantial underreporting of the experience of either pre-marital intercourse or



childhood sex experiences. Both of these findings convey the impression that the group of respondents with which we are dealing was being quite candid about reporting sexual behavior.

#### DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

Probably the most difficult problem of the whole study was how to define sexual victimization. Although many clear cut cases come to mind at the mention of the term -- the child who is forced to masturbate an adult -- there are also vast hazy areas: sex play among children, parents teaching their children to masturbate, etc. As we pointed out in our introduction, because child sexuality is currently an ideological battleground, what one defines as sexual victimization depends in part on philosophical and moral issues as well as empirical ones.

There were two somewhat separable issues that the research needed to confront. What was sexual and what was victimization? We will take them up in that order.

#### DEFINING A CHILDHOOD "SEXUAL" EXPERIENCE

A sexual experience is an unfortunately vague term that can be used, depending on the person, to refer to both a very wide or a very narrow range of things. For some, nothing less than genital arousal culminating in orgasm is a sexual experience; others might consider sexual something like sucking a thumb or awakening in the morning with an

erection as a result of having a full bladder.

### Can Children Recognize Sexual Gestures?

Defining what is sexual in this research is additionally complicated by the fact that we are referring to childhood experiences, and most children have even a more amorphous idea, if they have any at all, of what is sexual than have most adults. Some observers feel that amidst this confusion a child is likely to label things as sexual that would not be considered so by most adults, for example, a fond caress from a relative. This would imply that there would be many false reports of childhood sexual experiences (Trankell, 1958).

It is our belief, however, that the distortion occurs in the other direction. If anything, the child, as a newcomer to the vocabulary of sexual gestures, is likely to fail to recognize sexual actions and intentions on the part of others, or interpret them as something else. Children, viewed in this light, may be the victims of many sexual acts which they don't even notice.

However, our interviews with adults about their childhood sexual experiences have persuaded us that this is mostly a hypothetical concern. It is true that if an experience was not labeled as a "sexual" experience by a child, there is no reason to think that as an adult that person would spontaneously remember the event when asked about his or her childhood sexual experiences. But since

our interviews covered a wide range of child and family experiences, we anticipated that instances of such unlabeled sex might emerge in the course of our talks. None did.

Instead, what was much more common was for an interviewee to suddenly recall in the course of the discussion a childhood sexual experience that he or she had forgotten about, forgotten not because he or she had failed to realize that it was sexual but because he or she had indeed seen it so and that awareness was either painful, shameful or frightening.

#### How Children Recognize Sex

We were impressed at how accurately children perceived sexual experiences as sexual. In most cases, children, even very young children, recognized spontaneously when an activity was sexual. Obviously, they did not understand "sexual" in the full sense that adults understand the term. But they knew that the activity was different, they knew it was taboo, they knew that it involved visceral sensations, and they knew that it should be done covertly and not mentioned. One thing that makes these experiences stand out is the feeling the children had about the peculiar way in which the adults were acting:

R: I can't remember the exact age I was when things started to happen, but it was somewhere around four or five. The first big incident was

one night when my mother went to my grandmother's for the night. My father put his penis between my thighs and began pushing it back and forth and told me that "Mommy likes it when I do this."

I just lay there. I didn't have any idea what it was he was doing. I knew that what he had done was not right, I guess, because of the sneaky way he was acting.

The way I interpreted the above occurrences was just that I had a vague idea it was something bad. I didn't know what sex was. I only knew that the way he acted was something I didn't want to be part of (Armstrong, 1978, pp. 56-57).

Another thing that made the activities so clearly definable to these children is that they involved the genitals. Obviously children learn very early the "special" nature of their own and others genitals, and after that, all social activity pertaining to them is clearly "unusual". Parents and caretakers have genital contact with the child up until toilet training, but once toilet trained this contact ends abruptly. We encountered no instances of a recollection of an adult having contact with a child's genitals, where the child was unclear about whether the activity was sexual or part of normal caretaking.

In a few rare instances, an adult did begin to have sexual contact with a child before the child had any inkling that something unusual was going on. Here is the experience of one interviewee whose father began to fondle her at age three:

R: I can remember as young as 3 years old sitting in front of the TV watching TV on a little TV stool. My father was always comforting and warming to me...So I would scoot my chair back and he would put his arm around me and then he would put his hand in my underwear. And fondle me -- at 3 years old. I can hardly believe it. I thought nothing of it except he did it...So that went on from like 3 until, gee, I would say 5,6, or 7.

My father would always take me places with him too. And we would be riding in the car and he would do the same thing or he would put his hand on my chest. There was nothing there, but he did it anyway. I was always getting poison oak. He used to always come and doctor the poison oak and then he'd always check the places where I didn't have it to make sure I didn't have it. Which were the places which were covered. "Oh, we'll check here." Of course, there was never anything there, but he'd always check.

### "Remembering" Early Experiences

In this instance, as in other similar ones, the child upon reaching age 7,8 or 9 suddenly realized that this behavior was inappropriate. Either they learned more about sex, or they found out that such things did not happen in their friends' families, or most often, they sensed an inappropriate quality in the parent's attentions. At that point the sexual meaning of all the previous activity became clear to them.

So it is our impression that even when a young child at first fails to recognize the inappropriate sexual content of some family behavior, the meaning of that behavior does become clear to the child at some subsequent point in most cases. It is true, however, that in the histories we have taken, the inappropriate sexual activity continued up through the time when the realization took place. If the fondling had ended when our respondent was four, would she still have "discovered" at age eight that she had had a sexual experience with her father? Our guess is yes, but we have no specific cases to illustrate it.

It is fairly common, however, for children to suddenly "remember", when they learn about sexual intercourse as pre-adolescents, that at an earlier age they interrupted their parents in an activity which seemed peculiar at the time, but which did not have a clear meaning until later. It is in a similar way that children recognize a sexual event that has happened to themselves even if they had no sexual

label to apply to it at the time. When children do come to understand the meaning of sexual gestures, that understanding seems to branch out to include the past as well as the present and in a fairly accurate fashion. The sex is not forgotten.

#### How the Questionnaire Defined Sex

Nonetheless, this discussion does illustrate one of the important limitations of our method (and perhaps any method) of investigating childhood sex. We are dealing with subjectively defined sexual experiences. That the experience was "sexual" is something decided by the respondent in the survey, not by the researcher.

The instructions to the respondents read as follows: "We would like you to try to remember the sexual experiences you had while growing up. By 'sexual' we mean a broad range of things, anything from playing 'doctor' to sexual intercourse -- in fact, anything that might have seemed 'sexual' to you." The "might have seemed" was included as a deliberate attempt to see if respondents would volunteer some amorphously defined experiences. A list of conventional kinds of sexual activities was then given for the respondent to choose from, plus an open category marked "other" where respondents could put something that didn't fall into any of the given categories. However, only a handful of respondents used the "other" category, and most of these were for oral-genital contacts -- clearly sexual in

nature.

Ultimately, we have no sure way of knowing if in many of the cases, respondents were doubtful about whether the experience they recorded (or one they didn't) was really sexual. But on the basis of interviews with respondents who had earlier filled out surveys, we believe that this situation was extremely rare.

It is possible some people's childhood sexual experiences are not even in conscious awareness, due to repression or because they were not labeled as sexual by the child. We think such instances are relatively few. This would be a fascinating study in its own right, but one that will have to wait for another time.

#### DEFINING VICTIMIZATION

Victimization is also a slippery concept, subject to various definitions according to one's values. Has a child been victimized who eagerly accepts an invitation for sex with an adult? If parents fail to provide a child with proper sex information, has the child also been victimized? (For the broadest conceptualization of sexual abuse including things like circumcision, see Van Stolk, 1977). The question of "whose point of view" comes into play here, as it did trying to define what is sexual. Is victimization something judged from the point of view of the victim or the point of view of an outside observer?



There seemed to us three possible ways of going about defining sexual victimization. We will say a bit about each possibility and explain how we arrived at our final choice.

### The Consent Standard

Among adults, a person is usually thought of as sexually victimized when something is done to that person that he or she did not consent to. In the past, laws have also proscribed sexual activity such as homosexuality and prostitution which was consensual, but which violated standards about what was appropriate sexual behavior. The "victim" here was not so much the person or persons engaged in sex as the "community" whose morals were being flaunted. But this notion of the society as victim has lost much of its popularity, and there is more and more controversy today about whether anybody is really victimized by such behavior at all. There is much greater agreement around the idea that when consent is not present, victimization takes place.

In the case of children, however, consent is much more problematic. When a child agrees to take off her clothes for her uncle, is this a form of consent that means that victimization is not taking place?

There seem to be two major difficulties with the consent standard when applied to children. 1) Children are to some degree less aware of the meaning and consequences of various, particularly sexual, behavior. Can a child consent to an activity of whose implications she is only dimly

aware? 2) Children, because they are under the physical and legal control of adults, are rarely in the position to be able to freely consent or freely not consent. Thus when a powerful and authoritative person in a child's life, like an uncle, asks her to do something she has never done before, can a child be said to have consented in any adult sense of the word, when she goes along with the idea? Here is an example of just such a situation:

R: It was with my uncle and I'd say I had to be about 5. It started off as a silly game. In French [Canadian], a bug is called a "bebette", and he would say, "the bebette is going to get you" and he'd go up my leg, which was all right. But then he went all the way up my leg and under my underpants and he would touch me. I just didn't like it. He made me very uncomfortable. I didn't know what he was doing. I just knew I didn't like it.

I: Did you ever say to him, "I don't want to play bebette"?

R: I wasn't a very outspoken child when I was young. Very timid. He was my uncle, he was my elder and you don't tell your uncle what to do. That's how I was brought up. If I had it to live again now (laughs) it would be different.

Thus from a research point of view, it seemed inadequate to use the consent standard of victimization. If we only counted experiences where force was used, for example, we felt we would be excluding many kinds of sexual victimization where the child was exploited by the juxtaposition of an adult's authority with a child's naivete. If we asked the respondent, "did you consent", we doubted that there would be any uniformity in the definition of consent they would use.

#### Did Subject Feel Victimized?

An alternative method would have been to count as victimization any experience in which the respondent felt victimized. This would solve two problems. 1) We would not be telling someone who did not feel victimized, that, yes indeed, he or she was a victim. 2) It would be an improvement over the consent standard, in that respondents could view the experience in light of subsequent events and decide whether they had eventually suffered from it even though at the time they had willingly participated.

The main drawback here is that we felt that self-perception as a victim was just too subjective a standard. Many people, we have found in our interviewing, react strongly against the idea of seeing themselves as a victim under any circumstances. Others readily embrace the label. Whether they do or not seems related to how they like to view themselves in general, and not to the objective

circumstances of their childhood sexual experience. We preferred to make our own judgements about respondent's experiences based on the description they gave us.

#### The Community Standard

The third method for defining victimization, and the one we decided to use, takes as its reference community standards about what is an exploitative sexual relationship involving a child. The standard is based on the age of the child, and the age of the child's partner. This method has several advantages:

1) It is objective and easy to use. 2) It is the method used by the law in some states too assess the legality or illegality of sex acts involving children. 3) It is a method that has also been used in other research on the subject, and will allow us to more easily compare results with those of other studies.

A 5-year Age Difference. What would be an appropriate age standard? The main problem is to try to exclude sexual activity of a consensual nature among age mates, but to include activity where the age superiority of the older person gave him substantially greater knowledge about sex and the authority to gain compliance from the child. For a child 12 or under, a five year age difference is enough to put an older child into a whole other category in terms of knowledge and authority. It is also the age difference used by previous research.

For a child age 13 or over, the picture is less clear. Here we begin to have to separate sexual victimization experiences from what are consensual adolescent and adult experiences. In our estimation, the five year difference is no longer adequate for this adolescent group. Young adolescents sometimes have sexual experiences with older adolescents, and these fall outside the realm of what we wish to consider sexual victimization. However, when young adolescents have sex with persons who are clearly adults, this is once again regarded as a kind of sexual victimization. So in addition to the 5 year difference for a child under 13, the standard we adopted considered any sexual experience to be also victimizing if it occurred to an adolescent age 13-16 with a partner 10 or more years older.

Validating the Cut-off. The main problem with such age differentials is that they are arbitrary. Although the general notion is easily acceptable, there is not a clear basis, for example, for using a 10 year cut off rather than a 9 year cut off. In an attempt to test the validity of our cut-offs, we examined the consequences for our data of utilizing other possible figures.

For example, we looked at what the group of sexual abuse victims would be like if it included young adolescents with 5 year older, rather than 10 year older, partners. This more liberal cut off only added 7 cases to the sample. Examining the questionnaires of these respondents, some of

their experiences corresponded to our image of sexual victimization, but most did not. In only two cases was force involved and in only one was the experience evaluated negatively. Thus it was decided to keep the more conservative cut off, preferring to err on the side of underreporting rather than overreporting the incidence of sexual victimization.

Subsequent analyses of the data (See Chapter VII) have given us additional confidence in the procedures chosen to define sexual victimization.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EXPERIENCES DESCRIBED

How many children actually are sexually victimized? This question is on the minds of many people. When a problem like sexual victimization is a relatively new arrival in the status of "social problem", it is quite common for there to be a great deal of concern about "how much". An incidence rate gives a scientific and political credibility to a problem.

#### INCIDENCE

Tables 4-1 and 4-2 gives some estimate from our survey of how many children have sexual experiences with "inappropriately older partners". The figures are impressively large: 19.2 percent of the women and 8.6 percent of the men reported such an experience.

The exact figures one gets depend to some extent on how one defines the sexual victimization experience. To avoid being misled by the numbers, it is important to realize what all is included.

### Kinds of sexual activity

These kinds of sexual activities were included: kissing and hugging and fondling in a sexual way, touching the genitals, exhibiting the genitals, attempted or simulated intercourse, and intercourse. In addition, we included four cases where adults made overt and frightening sexual overtures to young children, but where no further sexual activity took place.

[Tables 4-1 and 4-2 go about here.]

### Child-Partner Combination

The incidence for three particular subclasses of relationships are included in Tables 4-1 and 4-2.

1) Children: 12 or less; partners: 18 or over. A majority of the tabulated experiences fell into this category, probably the one most obviously stereotyped as sexual victimization. Here is an example from one of our interviews:

When the respondent was 8 through 10, he used to go visit his uncle by the seashore for the summer. The uncle's next door neighbor, also considered an "uncle" by the family, drove a truck for a candy and potato chip distributor. He would invite the respondent into his truck for candy and potato chips and in return would play with the boy's penis and ask the boy to rub the "uncle's" penis.



Table 4-1. Girls' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Much Older Persons

Age Relationship	Number of Experiences	Number of Persons	% of Sample (N=530)
Child: Under 13 Partner: Over 18	66	60	11.3
Child: Under 13 Partner: Under 19 But 5 Yrs Older	31	30	5.7
Child: 13 to 16 Partner: 10+ Yrs Older	22	20	3.8
Total	119	102*	19.2*

\*Column does not add because some persons had experiences in 2 or more categories.

Table 4-2. Boys' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Much Older Persons

Age Relationship	Number of Experiences	Number of Persons	% of Sample (N=266)
Child: Under 13 Partner: Over 18	11	11	4.1
Child: Under 12 Partner: Under 19 But 5 Yrs Older	6	6	2.3
Child: 13 to 16 Partner: 10+ Yrs Older	6	6	2.3
Total	23	23	8.6

This continued weekly throughout three summers, until the respondent, uncomfortable about the activity, unable to escape from the man and afraid to tell anyone about it, simply refused one summer to return to his uncle's for vacation.

2) Children: 12 or less; partners: under 18, but 5 or more years older. Much sexual victimization, we know, takes place at the hands of older children. Cases are commonly reported, for example, of adolescent babysitters who take sexual advantage of the children for whom they have been given responsibility. Some sexual victimization of children also takes place at the hands of older siblings. One of our respondents remembered that at age 4 she had been twice cornered in her bedroom by her 16 year old brother who made her stroke and lick his penis. Another respondent talked about an experience at age 8 during the depression, where her 13 year old brother and his friend bribed her and her younger sister to let the boys try to have sexual intercourse with them.

3) Children: 13 to 16; partners: 10 or more years older. Some of the most classic sexual victimization experiences occur in early adolescence. Three of the father-daughter incest cases reported in our sample occurred after age 12, two of them not until the daughter was 16. It first happened to one of our interviewees when she was fourteen, and asleep one afternoon on the couch next to her father who was watching TV. Her mother was out working.

She awoke to find her father had unbuttoned her blouse and was fondling her breasts. This went on for 6 months, until the father finally pressured her to have intercourse, but she refused and avoided him successfully after that.

In order to exclude experiences that might be considered normal adolescent sexual experimentation, only experiences with partners 10 years or more older were included. As explained in Chapter III, there were 7 experiences reported by young adolescents with partners between 5 and 10 years older, but after examining these, we decided not to include them.

These adolescent sexual experiences with partners 10 or more years older were clearly not consensual, romantic liaisons. Close to 70% of both the girls' and boys' experiences involved force. About three-quarters of the experiences were rated as negative in the case of both sexes. In every case but four, these relationships either involved force, were experienced negatively or involved a family member. They can be confidently labeled as victimization.

#### Incidence Summarized

All told, sexual experiences with substantially older partners are surprisingly common: They happen to at least 1 out of every 5 girls. Note, too, the large number of boys who report such experiences. Boys have such experiences less than half as often as girls, but still close to one boy

in every 11 has such an experience. It is this group of both boys' and girls' experiences that will be the subject of this and the next chapter.

#### RELATIONSHIP TO PARTNER

Almost half of the girls' experiences are with family members (Table 4-3). This includes fathers, stepfathers, brothers, uncles, cousins and grandparents. An experience with at least one of each of these relatives is represented in the sample. (Only brothers and cousins who conformed to our age difference criterion are discussed here.)

Boys' experiences are also primarily with older people they know, but to a much lesser extent with actual relatives. Only 17% of the boys' experiences were with family members, but still 70% were with relatives and acquaintances combined.

This is additional confirmation of the now well-established fact that sexual victimization occurs to a large extent within a child's intimate social network (See studies cited in Table 10-3).

[Table 4-3 goes about here.]

The experiences with relatives are particularly striking because they often took place in relationships where a great deal of trust and affection existed. One woman related that she had been particularly close to her

Table 4-3. Experiences of Girls and Boys with Older Persons

Characteristic of experience	Girls (N=119)	Boys (N=23)
Mean age of child	10.2	11.2
Mean age of partner	31.7	26.9
Homosexual (%)	6	84
Family member (%)	44	17
<u>Activity:</u>		
Invitation (%)	3	5
Hugging in Sexual Way	6	-
Showing Genitals (%)	20	14
Fondling Sexually (%)	17	-
Touching Genitals (%)	38	55
Simulated Intercourse	10	5
Intercourse (%)	4	9
Other (%)	3	14
Partner initiated (%)	98	91
Partner used force (%)	55	54
More than once (%)	40	41
Longer than one week (%)	39	41
Told Someone (%)	37	27
<u>Reaction of child:</u>		
Fear (%)	58	41
Shock (%)	26	14
Surprise (%)	18	23
Interest (%)	14	41
Pleasure (%)	8	23
Negative Reaction (%)	66	38

maternal grandfather while growing up. She often went to spend weekends at his house, where he would take her fishing, tell her stories, and give her a great deal of special attention.

The grandfather had a room separate from his wife and would usually ask his granddaughter to come and cuddle with him at bedtime. At first she enjoyed the cuddling, but the grandfather's caresses became progressively more sexual until he began to fondle her vagina, and press up against her. When this began to happen she realized that something was wrong and started to feel very uncomfortable about the bedtime cuddling. She declined his invitations after that, and although the experience did not destroy the relationship with the grandfather, she was left with a disturbing childhood memory and a secret she never dared to share with anyone.

Childhood sexual experiences with relatives are particularly upsetting because in so many cases the child's confidence in a particularly important person is destroyed. Moreover, the experience usually introduces a secret or a tension not just between the child and the older partner, but between the child and other close relatives, too. In this case, our respondent did not dare to confide in her mother about the experience. Not only was she afraid of her mother's reaction -- would her mother even believe her -- but she felt an obligation to protect her mother from this terrible revelation about the mother's father. The

destructive power of these kinds of terrible secrets is very great and is a common theme in many of the stories of sexual victimization at the hands of family members.

(More detail on the subject of the family ties between children and their adult sexual partners appears in Chapter VI under the heading of Incest.)

#### DURATION OF THE EXPERIENCES

One respondent gave an account of sexual contact with her father that started when she was four and lasted until she was fifteen. That was an unusually long experience. Others reported experiences that lasted a few weeks, a few months or a few years. Some encounters were episodic, spanning many years but only occurring two or three times. For example, one woman was molested by her brother-in-law when she spent a week at his house while her mother was delivering a baby. Nothing more happened for over a year until he came to visit at their house, at which time the genital fondling re-occurred. There is a great variety in the patterns.

The majority of experiences reported, however, are single occurrences. A child has an encounter with an adult, it is unpleasant and the child avoids the adult after that. Or the child tells a parent what has happened and the parent takes some action to make sure it does not re-occur. Some experiences happen only once because they are with strangers whom the child has never seen before and never sees again.



About 40% of the experiences occur more than once and about 40% last more than one week (Table 4-3). In other words, if the experience happens more than once, it usually goes on for longer than a week. The long relationships usually go on for a long time. This is illustrated by the fact that average duration of relationships for girls is 31 weeks. With so many single time experiences, there are a few very long time experiences that pull the average up.

#### AGE AT TIME OF EXPERIENCE

At what age are children most liable to encounter sexual experiences with older persons? Perhaps this will cast some light on just what it is that makes children vulnerable.

Most studies, including this one (Table 4-4) have shown that children are vulnerable at all ages (See studies cited in Table 10-2 below). Experiences at age 3 or 4 are not at all rare. Reports have appeared even of children as young as 3 months being treated in emergency rooms as the result of sexual assault (Sgroi, 1976). At the other end of the spectrum, children encounter such experiences until they stop being children, and then sexual abuse may continue although we call it something else.

[Table 4-4 goes about here.]

Table 4-4. Age of Children at Time of Sexual Experience with Older Partner

Age Group	Girls (N=119)	Boys (N=23)
Mean	10.2	11.2
<u>Percent</u>		
4-6	14	18
7-9	23	9
10-12	47	41
13-16	16	32

In spite of the wide age range at which experiences occur, it has often been assumed that among girls it is particularly the onset of puberty that enhances their attractiveness to adults. In the analyses of incest, for example, much has been made of how hard it is for some fathers and other male relatives to cope with the sexual fantasies provoked when their daughters, sisters, and nieces begin to develop. In other words, it is assumed that a girl's vulnerability to sexual overtures increases as she acquires adult sexual characteristics (Schechter and Roberge, 1976).

This appears to be wrong. Data on the age distribution of the sexual experiences of subjects in this study are presented in Table 4-4. Overall, experiences for both girls and boys cluster around the preadolescent period. The mean age for girls is a fairly young 10.2. When broken down into single year intervals (not presented in table) there is one peak at 8 years old and a set of peaks in the 10 to 12 age bracket. These findings are confirmed in many other studies of both reported and unreported cases, which show mean ages of this young or younger (See Chapter X, Table 10-2).

This evidence undermines the idea that pubescence is the crucial factor in making a girl most vulnerable to sexual abuse. Certainly at age 10 or 12, some girls are beginning to develop secondary sexual characteristics. But at age eleven, for example, only about 40% of American girls have started breast development and in no more than 15%

would it be noticed if the child were clothed (Marshall, 1975). So a majority of the experiences with adults take place before signs of puberty appear.

Also damaging to the idea that pubescence creates vulnerability is the finding in Table 4-4 that the number of experiences, actually drop somewhat after puberty. Other studies have indicated a similar drop (Queens Bench, 1976). This does not mean that adolescents have fewer total sexual experiences -- on the contrary. But it does mean that young adolescents have fewer experiences with adults and substantially older partners. If puberty really made girls more vulnerable we would expect a substantial increase in the age 13-15 category.

How then to explain this special vulnerability in the preadolescent years. Lolita's Humbert Humbert believed that a certain type of man was fatally attracted to little girls in that twilight age between childhood and adolescence. But the allure faded with the onset of puberty. Such a pattern was intrinsic to the urge (Nabokov, 1955).

However some more mundane features of child development might explain the vulnerability too. Preadolescence is a period when children begin to operate more independently from adults. They begin to go places on their own; they are not so closely supervised. In this independence they may become more vulnerable.

Children begin to become aware of adult sexual meanings in this period, but, they are still naive. The full implication of sexual gestures is not yet apparent to them. Thus while they may provoke sexual actions by their appearance and behavior, they are not yet skilled in avoiding and discouraging sexual maneuvers on the part of adults. One reason for the drop in abuse experiences in the early adolescent period is that, once girls reach puberty, they quickly acquire those skills.

This explanation provides support to a symbolic interaction rather than physiological view of sexual interaction (Gagnon and Simon, 1973). The physiological approach has always tended to emphasize the sexual triggering mechanisms inherent in physical aspects of sexuality -- hormones, secondary sex characteristics, nudity and so forth. Symbolic interaction analysis has pointed instead to gestures and role playing as the key components of sexual behavior. In terms of such a contrast, vulnerability to sexual abuse in children is more related to their vocabulary of sexual knowledge and skills than to physiological factors such as breast development.

#### KINDS OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Sexual activity between adults and children cannot always be evaluated by the standards we ordinarily use to evaluate sexual activity between adults. Too many things are different. In ordinary consensual adult sex, we know

that certain agreed upon scripts govern behavior, and certain gestures mean certain things to both participants. But in the case of sex between children and adults, the scripts and meanings are much less apparent to those of us looking in from the outside. Thus great caution must be exerted in jumping to conclusions on the basis of conventional sexual stereotypes.

For example, a great deal of misunderstanding exists about the role of intercourse in adult-child sexual encounters. Since intercourse is the goal of much adult sexual activity, many people are surprised to find out that intercourse is not that frequent in sexual contacts between adults and children. In Table 4-3, for example, we see that only 4% of the experiences reported by girls involved intercourse.

The physiology of sexual relations is one factor that needs to be taken into account. It is very difficult, and sometimes impossible, for grown men to have intercourse with most young girls. Their vaginas are too small. When intercourse is attempted, it is usually accompanied by intense pain and injury to the girl's genital area.

But more important, many of the adult men who seek sexual contact with children, are not seeking sexual intercourse. This is obviously true in the case of exhibitionists, who seem to derive their satisfaction from the shock and surprise their behavior produces in their victims. Contact with exhibitionists makes up about 20% of

the sexual experiences girls have with adults. It is also true with other kinds of adult-child sexual activity.

The most common form of adult-child sexual contact involves the touching and fondling of genitals. Adults will ask children to masturbate them, or adults will want to finger and sometimes have oral contact with the child's genitals. Fleeting one-time occurrences of "child molesting" often involve a man who tries to rub a child's genitals. But even in those sexual relations that last a long time, very often the activity will consist primarily of masturbation and genital fondling.

Such men may have the opportunity to try intercourse, but they do not take it. This was the case in the experience of one of our interviewees who was sexually involved with her father for 11 years, starting at age 4:

R: (experience at age 8) I remember this the most --- that he went to my room, picked me up, brought me to his bed and I remember that he masturbated on my chest. I thought he urinated all over me. To me that was the vilest and most horrible thing that could be done. But he never tried to insert himself. That was the nearest that he ever would have come to that point...

Later he didn't do anymore of the masturbating on my chest, nothing else. Mostly it was just him putting his hands in my pants and

stimulating me... I can remember there was a time when I used to put like 4 or 5 pair of underwear on under my pajamas hoping that he would get discouraged. And then he set down ground rules that we couldn't wear underwear to bed...

It wouldn't be every night. Two, three times a week, but it was so bad that every night you'd lie awake wondering if this was going to be the night. Lots of times he'd be out very late in the morning and I would fall asleep and wouldn't hear him come in and I would wake up and he'd be there and I'd be horrified...

So things went on like that for just a long, long time. It was even worse when I started developing, you know around 12, 13, 14.

Is it that such men are using masturbation and genital fondling as a substitute for intercourse, which they really desire? Are they afraid to try intercourse either because the child is too small, or because actual intercourse with a child is a more severe taboo they do not want to violate? These may be two valid reasons for the low frequency of intercourse in childhood sexual victimization.

But work with adults who sexually molest children suggests that for many of them sexual intercourse is not their goal. The sexual contact they are seeking with children is of a more childish sort (Gebhard et al., 1965;



Mohr et al., 1964). Their interest in children may represent a flight or escape from more adult forms of sexuality. In psychoanalytic terms, many of the offenders are seen as "regressed" or "pregenital" in their sexual interests (Hammer and Glueck, 1957).

From the point of view of the adult then, it is probably wrong to interpret masturbation or genital fondling as a "lesser" form of sexual contact than intercourse. This mistake is made, for example, when incest is limited to "sexual intercourse" between family members and other forms of sexual contact are excluded. Many long term, emotionally charged intra-family sexual relations do not involve intercourse. But they may be quite similar in intensity and duration to ones involving intercourse.

#### INITIATION AND FORCE

As pointed out in Chapter II, there has been a long-standing concern in the literature on the sexual victimization of children with evaluating how much the child participated in the sexual experience. We have tried to point out, and agree with others who have pointed out (Armstrong, 1978; Rosenfeld, 1978; Rush, 1974), that this is not a fruitful, and is in fact a destructive, preoccupation in the field.

To the extent that they comment on this subject, our data show the children to be the recipients of sexual actions, not the initiators, and also the victims of force

and coercion. Only in a tiny minority of cases did the respondents say they had initiated the sexual activity. Ninety-eight per cent of the girls and ninety-one per cent of the boys said it was the older partner who started the sexual activity (Table 4-3).

Force was present more often than not in these experiences. Fifty-five per cent of the girls and almost an equal percentage of boys reported that the partners used some kind of force to gain their participation. The force ranged from actual physical constraint such as holding them down to the threat that they would be punished if they did not cooperate.

But even where respondents did not report overt force, it is hard not to see elements of coercion in the age difference or authority difference of the parties involved. In an incident mentioned previously, an eight year old girl was bribed by her brother and friend to allow them to try intercourse with her. This took place in the midst of the depression, in an impoverished family. Our respondent described herself as an extremely shy and compliant child to whom the sum of 25 cents seemed like a fortune. Her brother had always been a kind of hero to her, and had been given substantial authority over his younger siblings by the parents.

It is true that children often did not take actions that might have, from an adult point of view, protected them or prevented a re-occurrence of the experience. But in many

cases, children were confused about the situation, did not perceive their options or were deliberately misled by their partners. The respondent, described earlier, who was victimized by the potato chip salesman neighbor, was not forced into sexual activity. But when he became uncomfortable with it, he did not know how to terminate it. He doubted that faced with a choice between his story and the neighbor's denial that his uncle would believe him and protect him. There was a kind of coercion present in the very structure of the situation.

R: He was accepted by everyone else around me and no one else knew. Everybody within the cluster, around the house, accepted him as being a friend and he could come into the house... So if they were accepting him, then I really had to be careful... Especially when you're a small kid they have such a physical intimidation over you. Now I can see that he's a very short, fat old man and I'd like to kick him down the stairs. Now I've got no problem, but at the time, just the fact that he told me not to tell... You know, he said please, don't tell anybody. But the way he said it, it was like if you do I'm gonna... He never directly threatened me, but I just figured that he probably would...

I: Did you think that your uncle or that the family was capable of protecting you if you had asked them to protect you?

R: See that's weird because they accepted him and they had known him for a long time. And I often wondered, if it's me against him, who are they gonna choose.

I: Because you were not really part of their family either?

R: No I was just a guest. He's the next door neighbor. He's there all the time.

I: So you really doubted whether they would be willing to defend you?

R: Yeah.

(The uncle did finally find out about his neighbor, when the uncle's own son became a victim. The uncle forced the neighbor to move away.)

#### REACTION TO EXPERIENCE

For the most part, girls seem to react to the experience consistently with what one might expect. A much older person has involved her in an activity which at its very least was unusual, and perhaps painful and probably coercive. The adult in all likelihood conveyed a fear and furtiveness in his own manner of approaching, and interacting with the child. In the case of most children,

even the very young, there is a strong awareness that whatever was being done was not right (De Francis, 1969). Children learn at a fairly early age that genitals have special connotations, involving anxiety, privacy and specialness.

Thus it is not surprising that the predominant reaction reported by girls was fear, followed in frequency by shock. Not very many reported being interested in the activity or experiencing any pleasure from it.

But the fact that any of the children experienced pleasure may surprise some. Unfortunately the nature of the enjoyment experienced by some sexually abused children has been seriously misunderstood and has led to an almost prosecutorial attitude in the past on the part of some therapists, an attitude that has upset many victims.

Contrary to the stereotype, most victims in our study readily acknowledged the positive as well as the negative elements of their experience. They did not block out these aspects or deny them. They talked about the times the physical sensations felt good. Or they remembered how their sexual experience with an adult or family member satisfied a longing for affection and closeness that was rarely met at any other times.

These were not expressions of adult kinds of sexual passions and longings. On the whole, they were part of a confusing flood of feelings and sensations, usually dwarfed by an overwhelming sense of helplessness, guilt, anger or

fear. In fact, the pleasure often only intensified the guilt or the helplessness, as the child remembers feeling even more confused and out of control of even her own emotions.

Here are how some of the victims described it:

R: He would usually corner me somewhere and he would ply me with compliments. Between the compliments and because he was so nice and like a father figure, I was confused about what to do or how to handle it.

I was the last one to wear a bra in my sixth grade class. So I was very pleased at this situation, also. I think it really pleased me that he'd feel me up and say, "See, this is how it makes them grow." I would even check to see if they were growing. They never did.

I can remember getting pleasure out of our experience. However, for the most part, after a while I began to hate him, but I think for maybe just a few days or hours even there was a time when it thrilled me to think about it. When it actually happened, I didn't like it at all.

\* \* \*

R: I would pretend that I was asleep. Why I did it I'm not sure. I think partly because there was still that need for that affection or whatever. Partly because it felt good. Usually I would just lie there and accept his advances and feel bad about it. I can remember lying in bed at night awake, just waiting for him to come, afraid to go to sleep, petrified.

\* \* \*

R: Sometimes I hated it. You would sort of put your head down and march, hands in pockets to the basement knowing that he would be waiting down the basement steps and around the corner with his zipper down and his penis hanging out for a blow job. And it was like "Oh my God. I don't want to do this. I wish I could jump out the window."

But sometimes -- there was a different side of my dad that I normally didn't see. There was a seductive quality to it. A total relaxation. He was not as gruff. He was not as stern. There would be some caressing from him which, I guess, I can look at it now and say -- there were times and there are times -- I know myself well enough to know that there are definitely times when I want to be caressed... (Armstrong, 1978, p.185).

These ambivalent feelings were part and parcel of some of the most nightmarish experiences. They did not stop respondents from rating them as highly traumatic. Thus in spite of the pleasureable moments, most of the female respondents (66%) remembered the experiences as having been negative. None of our interviewees were glad that the experiences had happened. In the sample as a whole, only a small percentage of women (7%) rated the experience as positive. The mean rating for victims as a group based on a scale from 1 (positive) to 5 (negative) was 4.0.

#### TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL

Given that these experiences seemed to inspire primarily negative reactions, why were so few (only 37%) reported to anyone. We know that only a tiny fraction of adult-child sexual experiences are reported to the police (Landis, 1955; Gagnon, 1965). Considering how much crime of all sorts is not reported to police, and the kind of complications and aggravations that are created by police involvement, this seems understandable. But these children also did not report the experiences to their own parents, or even to brothers, sisters or friends. For a great number, our survey was the first mention of the experience they had made since the time that it had occurred.

This finding is a sad commentary on the state of sexual anxiety in most families. Undoubtedly in a large number of cases children made an accurate assessment that it would be



a mistake to mention the experience to anyone. In all likelihood the reaction to their revelation would have been anger or hysteria. Since even adults commonly feel somehow responsible when they have been sexually abused, it is the extraordinary child who could tell a parent without being fearful -- usually legitimately so -- of being blamed. Moreover, most families give children very little practice in discussion of matters involving sex. So in many cases the channels or even the vocabulary for mentioning such a matter to parents were probably missing. One child who finally did tell her mother recalls:

R: I expected to be scolded. I really did. That's why I remember the expression on her face. I expected to really get it for saying this, expected them to stick up for him and not for me because I was a child. And I was saying something bad about the adult, you know. That's what amazes me. Nothing was ever said. I wasn't accused of lying. Nothing. The whole thing stopped. He never touched me again.

Another child never said anything:

I: Why don't you think you ever told your parents?

R: Well, it was a mixture of thinking that they wouldn't believe me and being afraid that they would turn it around and blame it all on me.

I wasn't going to say something and get blamed for everything, so forget it. Up until the time I put my mouth on his penis, it didn't seem like anything that serious anyway -- just looking. And after I put my mouth on his penis, that seemed really incriminating, so I wasn't going to tell.

That these childish fears are often well-grounded is illustrated in an interview with a woman whose daughter came to tell her one day that her stepfather had been making sexual advances to her:

R: I'm a nurse and I used to work nights. When she was 14, she told me that my husband had come into her room one night when I was working and tried to have sex with her. Well, I wouldn't believe it. As you can imagine, at the time I'd only been married a couple of years. I wasn't going to believe any such thing about my husband. I think it was sort of a self-protective mechanism. But I've learned a lot since then.

Many people who have had child sexual experiences, just like many adults who have been raped, say subsequently that the pain of silence and internally felt stigma were often worse than the pain of the experience itself. On the other hand, there are also a large number of victims who remember that the reaction of parents and other authorities caused a

havoc in their lives that also dwarfed the pain of the experience itself. Caught in the dilemma of such a no-win situation, who is really to say that the child who chooses silence -- apparently the most common response -- is not making the most rational choice.

#### EXPERIENCE OF BOYS

Women are the main targets of sexual assault. But an important discovery of our survey is that a substantial number of boys have childhood sexual experience with adults. (Table 4-2) Not as many boys (9%), have such experiences as girls (19%), to be sure. But the number is higher than would be expected, boys reporting almost half as many experiences as girls.

Sexual abuse of boys is a phenomenon well known to child protective workers and has often received lurid coverage in news reports about pedophiles and other sex offenders. Stories have appeared in recent years describing rings of child prostitution, mostly involving young boys, and often implicating community stalwarts (Lloyd, 1976).

But among reported cases of sexual abuse, girls have always predominated by a wide margin. The American Human Association study in New York (De Francis, 1969) found girl victims outnumbered boys ten to one. Many other clinical studies of sexual abuse report on girls alone, instances of male victims being so uncommon.

On the other hand the Landis (1955) survey of unreported childhood sexual experiences conducted over twenty years ago did reveal a startlingly large number of male experiences, nearly as high as the rate for women. But almost all the experiences fell into the vague category of what he listed as "homosexual approaches", which made it ambiguous whether they were the kinds of sexual experiences equivalent to what the women were reporting.

A kind of double standard exists which may have hindered the recognition of sexual abuse against boys. As a result of our cultural stereotype which casts men as sexually active and women as sexually passive parties, it has been possible to read more consent and less exploitation into the adult-child liaisons of young boys than in the comparable experiences of young girls.

Is there any truth to this picture?

Our study (Table 4-3) reveals some interesting similarities and differences in the sexual experiences of boys and girls with older persons. (In examining Table 4-3, it is important to remember that although the absolute number of boys' experiences is less than a fifth of the girls, many fewer men were surveyed.)

### Differences

Boys appear to be older than girls on the average when they have their sexual experiences with adults. This difference of about a year, although small, is consistent

with the findings of other studies (Chapter X, Table 10-2). Other researchers usually associate it to the fact that puberty occurs later in boys. However, since we have seen earlier that the onset of physiological puberty is not what triggers sexual victimization for girls, we need a better explanation for boys, too.

That boys are older when they have such sexual experiences may indicate that the experiences are more consensual. It may be a feature of male adolescence that they feel less constrained from seeking out homosexual and heterosexual experiences with older persons.

A more striking difference is the extent to which boys' and girls' experiences occur within the family or outside the family. Girls' experiences are with older family members 44% of the time compared to 17% of the time for boys.

This finding prompts a number of speculations. For one thing, the disparity may reflect the fact that most of the girls' experiences are heterosexual and most of the boys' homosexual. The adult family members to whom both male and female children are exposed, especially fathers, grandfathers and in-laws, are men with heterosexual histories. This is not to say that they might not have a homosexual orientation as well. But the exposure to men with homosexual orientations would be more likely to occur outside the family.

For another thing, pre-adolescent boys operate somewhat more independently than pre-adolescent girls. Partly as a result of parental concern over exactly this kind of sexual victimization, girls are often held in tighter reign by their families. They may also be given more explicit and detailed caution about sexual encounters with adults. This may mean that boys are in more situations where they might be vulnerable to sexual approach outside the family.

This is evidence that girls' experiences are more serious than boys'. To the extent that family sexual abuse is more disturbing and involves the violation of more taboos and trust one would have to say that girls are more seriously victimized by adults than are boys. In this sense, the idea of girls being more vulnerable, not just in terms of numbers but in terms of the nature of the experience, is quite true.

Boys also differ from girls in that they engage in a somewhat different pattern of sex acts with adults. Boys are more heavily involved in actual genital contact than girls. They engaged in more genital touching and also in more "other" acts, "other" including oral-genital contact. This mostly reflects the fact that sexual gestures may be directed at girls' breasts as well as their genitals, and also that exhibitionists primarily target girls. The different pattern for boys does not tell us much about whether boys' contact with adults is more consensual. Other statistics say more about this issue.

Although men are stereotyped as more active parties in sexual encounters, this does not appear to be the case in matters of adult-child sex. Ninety-one per cent of the boys reported that it was the older person who initiated things. This is only slightly less than the comparable figure for girls. Although there are many stories about aggressive young teenage boys actively seducing older men, in our sample, this was a relatively rare source of adult-child sexual involvement.

In addition, boys are very likely to be coerced in their sexual encounters with older persons, just as likely to be coerced as girls, in fact. They reported that over half of their partners used force in initiating the sex. This suggests that boys are not consenting partners in most cases.

Another crucial difference between the experiences of boys and girls is in their reactions to what happened. In their overall evaluation, girls rate their experiences more negatively than boys. Boys report feeling more interest and pleasure at the time, and girls remember more fear and shock. This certainly confirms the impression that the experiences were more traumatic for the girls.

This does not mean that boys' experiences were never traumatic. Indeed, some were extremely so:

I: Could you compare this to some other experience in you life?

R: Much more traumatic at the time. Very anxiety producing. Probably there wasn't anything in my life as anxiety producing.

I: So this was the biggest trauma of your life?

R: Oh, without a doubt. Mostly because I went through like two months of avoidance. I was always very conscious of where I was, who I was with, and was the group large enough so he couldn't single me out, and, you know, it was pretty terrifying. "Can I go outside? Is it safe to go outside?" Nothing really as traumatic as that.

The effects a childhood sexual experience had on this man are very similar to the kinds of traumatic effects described by many women:

I: Was the sexual experience just another one of those incredible things that happened to you? Or was there something special to it?

R: There was something more attached to it or I wouldn't have had what I consider an impeded development. I always wondered why I was so shy and inhibited. And not interested in dating or getting to know women. Only within the last two



years, and I'm almost 31, have I ever really enjoyed having sex with someone. I always figured it was something I had to do. When I was married and my former wife wanted to make love, I was always finding excuses not to. I didn't like it. It didn't turn me on. It wasn't exciting. It didn't feel good.

But on the whole, such experiences were more numerous for girls.

A number of factors may account for this finding. As mentioned earlier, girls' experiences occur more often with family members and with men who are of an older age than the men who approach boys. Both these features of the girls' experiences (and especially the greater age of the adults, as we will see in Chapter VII) could account for part of the greater negativity in the responses of the girls.

Girls may just be more vulnerable to experiencing childhood sex as traumatic. Boys, for example, generally learn about sex at an earlier age, and incorporate it more into childhood camaraderie and have a less fearful outlook on it (Elias and Gebhard, 1969). This no doubt stems in part from the fact that parents and other adults are very anxious about girls' sexuality.

Part of the anxiety is indeed justified, since as we have seen, girls do tend to be frequently victimized. Another part of the anxiety however, relates to the cultural

conception of girls as sexual merchandise that can be ruined or devalued. There is undoubtedly a self-fulfilling prophecy in the anxiety, which intensifies the reaction a parent makes or that a child anticipates a parent making, and thus increases the traumatic potential of any incident.

In summary, boys' experiences occur at an older age with generally younger partners. They less frequently involve family members and more frequently involve genital contact. They are felt to be less frightening and shocking. Still, there is no strong evidence that they are willing victims. Their experiences are typically initiated by the older person and occur under circumstances of some duress and coercion.

Because of the differences between them, in the rest of the data analysis, we have treated boys' experiences and girls' experiences separately. This procedure always produced much more meaningful results, particularly insofar as the girls were concerned. The findings about the boys' experiences appeared much less coherent. There were many fewer significant correlations relating to the boys' experiences. More attention needs to be given to boys' experiences using a sample of such experiences even larger than the one we have here.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined some of the major descriptive features of the childhood sexual experiences with adults reported by the boys and girls in our sample. In brief they are:

1) Such experiences occur to about one in every five girls and one in every eleven boys.

2) Especially for the girls, the experiences very often occur with family members.

3) Peak vulnerability for the child falls prior to puberty, ages 10-12.

4) Intercourse is not the major sexual activity. Rather most child-adult sex is touching and fondling of the genitals.

5) Coercion is present in over half of the experiences, and only a very tiny fraction are initiated by the children themselves.

6) Only a minority of the experiences are ever reported, even to parents and friends, let alone police.

7) The girls had particularly strong and consistently negative reactions to the experiences; the boys somewhat less so.

## CHAPTER V

### OLDER PARTNERS

#### THE MYTHS OF THE CHILD MOLESTER

"Child molesters" were once pictured as sexually frustrated old men who loitered in public parks or outside of school yards in hopes of luring naive youngsters into their clutches with offers of candy or money (McDonald, 1952). We now know this is not accurate. Study after study has punctured this stereotype so that if any vestige of it remains -- as it certainly does -- it is because the truth is more unpalatable than the myth.

The first unpalatable truth is, as we have already indicated, that most sexual abusers are well known to their victims. They are for the most part family, friends and neighbors. The strangers of the old "child molester" myth make up only a small minority. This is most clearly true in the case of girls. In our survey, 75% of the older persons who had sexual experiences with the girls were known to the girls. Forty-four per cent were actually family members. A roughly similar number of partners were known to the boys (70%), but there were many fewer family members among them (only 17%).

The myth of the child molester as a stranger is just part of a larger mythologizing process that surrounds all kinds of anti-social behavior. People worried about assault think their greatest danger comes from the faceless mugger in a darkened alleyway. Many women stereotype the rapist as an unfamiliar black man who grabs them on the street or breaks into their house. In fact, most assault occurs among family and friends in people's own houses. Most rapes occur between people of the same race, many of whom are known to one another. In a familiar psychological process, people project the dangers they fear as far away as possible, onto pariahs, outcast groups, those they cannot identify with, convenient sociological receptacles. In fact, the greatest danger is often closest to home, even, as in the case of sexual victimization, right in the home.

The stereotype of the child molester stigmatizes not just strangers but old men. But here again it is mistaken. Every bit of evidence indicates that sexual abusers come from all age groups, but if they predominate anywhere, it is among the young. Of course, figures for the ages of adult partners in this study, as well as in others, come from estimates made by victims, and are subject to the distortion of memory and the young age of some of the participants. But as ballpark figures the accounts can be believed. In this study they show older partners of the children ranging from adolescents to age 70. The average age for partners of girls is 31.7 and for boys 26.9.

The actual age distribution of partners is the exact opposite of what the stereotype might suggest (Table 5-1). The largest group is the teenagers, then the young adults, tapering down with age into an almost perfect inverted pyramid. The over 50's group, the alleged "dirty old men", contribute only a tiny fraction to the sample.

[Table 5-1 goes about here.]

No one factor explains this particular age distribution. The way that male sexuality develops over the life cycle, different kinds of sexual motives must come into play at different times. Adolescents are experimenting with sex, often confused about sexual values and often impulsive. Young adults tend to be the most sexually active in all varieties of sex including rape and homosexuality. Men in their thirties may be experiencing the anxiety of aging and the disappointment and conflict of the middle married years and this may fuel a sexual involvement with children.

Another factor to take into account is accessibility, the simple question of who has the most opportunity for sexual contact with children. Adolescents have younger brothers, sisters, cousins and family friends within easy reach, and adults in their thirties are likely to have their own children, the children of relatives and friends. They are also most likely to be engaged in activities that mix adults and children. As far as we know, senior citizens may

Table 5-1. Age of Older partners

Age of Partner	Girls (N=119)	Boys (N=23)
10-19	33.6	39.1
20-29	23.5	21.8
30-39	17.7	21.7
40-49	16.8	17.4
50-59	5.1	-
60+	2.5	-

have the motives to approach children, but they may just not have the exposure. It could be a simple question of accessibility, but in any case, "the dirty old man" stereotype is wrong.

A final part of the stereotype of the child molester needs debunking: parks, schoolyards and automobiles are not the main sites where sexual abuse takes place. The most frequent locations are the home of the victim or the home of the offender. This would follow naturally from the fact that most of the abusers are known to the victim. Strangers would be more likely to need public places to perform their deeds, but familiar persons can operate in homes where their natural contact with children takes place. Although we do not have data in our own study on this question, this finding has been confirmed in other studies (De Francis, 1969; Landis, 1956).

#### THE MALE MONOPOLY

The most obvious characteristic of sexual abusers has been one of the least analyzed probably because it is so taken for granted: they are almost all men. It is older males who initiate sexual contact with younger children in the vast majority of cases. This is just as true for boys as girls, meaning that almost all such sexual experiences for boys are homosexual (94%), and for girls heterosexual (84%) (See Table 4-3). Women just do not make many sexual advances toward children.



The fact that men are sexual offenders is not often analyzed because it is so taken for granted. It is men who rape. It is men who are responsible for most sexual "deviations". It is so firmly entrenched in our image of male sexuality that it is certainly no surprise that men predominate in making sexual advances toward children.

Theories about the Male Monopoly.

Various kinds of speculations have been offered to understand this phenomenon. Some see it rooted in the nature of male sexuality. For example, recent endocrinological research has revealed what Money (Money and Tucker, 1975) calls the Eve principle -- that human sexual development, at least on a biological level, is biased toward the female, that only by "adding something" does male development take place. As a result, incomplete and faulty development with a biological basis occurs much more often with males.

This meshes neatly with the cannons of some psychoanalytic thought that also sees male sexual development as more vulnerable to aberration (Stoller, 1975). According to Stoller, males like females start life in total symbiotic identification with their mothers. But in order to develop appropriate masculinity they, unlike females, must thrust aside this symbiosis, break off the identification with their mothers, and develop a new positive identification with their fathers. But the

transition is treacherous, and in many males this process is not completed. They are left anxious about masculinity, fearful of becoming fused in the primal symbiosis with mother again, and hostile toward women and the male-female sexual complementarity. Out of these conflicts emerge the homosexual, fetishistic, and pedophilic deviations that seem to afflict primarily men.

Feminists in their analysis connect this highly incriminating feature of male sexuality to the nature of a male dominated society. They have argued that incest rules and other sexual taboos are male instituted regulations concerning the ownership and control of women (Herman and Hirshman, 1977). Because men make the rules and enforce them, men also assume the right to violate them. Having the power, both in the society and in the family, they can maintain a double-standard: harsh sanction and taboos on female sexual delinquency, and more leniency and covert toleration for themselves.

#### On Woman's Incapacity to Rape

Still another popular opinion is that women do not rape, and by extension sexually abuse, because of the physiology of the sexual situation. They do not rape 1) because of their inferiority in strength, weight and body size, and more importantly, 2) because men must play a physiologically active role in the sex act. "Man's structural capacity to rape and woman's corresponding

structural vulnerability are as basic to the physiology of both sexes as the primal act of sex itself. Had it not been for this accident of biology, an accomodation requiring the locking together of two separate parts, penis and vagina, there would be neither copulation nor rape as we know it....This single factor may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of a male ideology of rape" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 4).

In other words, a woman cannot have intercourse with a man unless his penis is erect, and that is not a faculty under a woman's control (Walters, 1975, p. 127). Threat and coercion are certainly not incentives to sexual arousal, in fact they are deterrents, so it would seem hard if not impossible for a woman to take what she wants by force.

In contrast to rape, however, neither of these things explain why so few women sexually abuse children. First of all, women do have physical and social authority over children, so size and power differentials cannot be deterrents to female sexual aggression in this case, as they might be between adults. Women could as easily take advantage of children as men.

Secondly, in the case of sexual abuse of children, the problem of the "limp penis" is revealed to be not really important. For one thing, many adult males lure children into sexual activity with the implicit trust of the child and without the coercion and threat that inhibit sexual arousal. Women could do the same.

But much more importantly, a great deal of adult-child sexual contact is masturbatory. The man fingers the girls genitals to arouse himself, or asks his partner to stimulate him. Or he wants to photograph the naked child, or expose himself to the child, for the child's horrified reaction. All of these activities in principle could be equally gratifying to a woman. There is no physiological impediment, such as a limp penis, blocking her access to sexual gratification from children in these ways. A woman could just as easily use a child's genitals or hand to masturbate with or gain gratification from viewing a child or exposing herself. But women don't. Although it is feasible for women to get sexual gratification from children in many of the same ways that men do, it rarely happens.

This then suggests that these two physical factors fail to explain best why women do not rape. It is not their physiological inferiority or the need for a sexually aroused partner. If these were the only factors, women might still sexually abuse children. The fact that they do not rape or sexually abuse children suggests that the important difference lies somewhere else, not in the physiology of the act, but in the psychology of the actor and the sociology of the situation.

### Relevant Male-Female Differences

Women have such different relationships with children from men in our society, that it is hard not to look for an explanation here. Several facets of this different relationship are possible explanations for the female reticence about sex with children. 1) Women have more physical contact with children, and this physical contact is freer and more total because it is more sanctioned. Physical contact with children is harder for men. They do not get much practice in it prior to parenthood and, even when they do, it is more inhibited and nervous because of the suspicions surrounding it. Women have more involvement with genital and excretory functions of children. Their greater comfort with these may defuse some of the sexual tension between women and children. Men, being more excluded from such activities, may develop a stronger fascination and a fantasy about them that can motivate a sexual approach.

2) Women also have more direct responsibility for children. They supervise their activities, watch out for their safety, and may come to identify more with their sense of well-being. Thus women may better understand the trauma of a sexual intrusion on a child, and thus be deterred.

However, one could easily exaggerate these differences between men and women in their relationship to children and their implications for sexual abuse. After all, in spite of all of the above, their greater responsibility for children

and their greater closeness, women end up physically abusing children more often than men (Maden and Wrench, 1977). So it is wrong to overromanticize the bond between women and children. Women's closeness and the responsibility could easily be cause for more rather than less abuse, if sexual abuse operated like physical abuse.

Moreover, not all women are mothers. There are sisters, cousins, friends and strangers who may not have had all this supposedly "prophylactic" involvement with children. Comparable male relatives, friends and strangers make sexual advances toward children. Why not female?

3) The socially conditioned channels of sexual responsiveness draw women away from children, but men toward them.\* In our society, women choose their sexual partners from men older than themselves. Men choose partners from younger women. Thus, for a man's sexual interest to attach itself to a child conforms to his general tendency to seek out youth in a sexual partner. This is not so natural an extension for a woman, and may mean that it is more of a psychological contortion to see a child as a sexual object.

In a similar fashion, other themes in the process of sexual socialization make children more likely partners for men. For women, there is a greater emphasis on mutuality as a foundation for sexual involvement. Men tend to emphasize

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\*I am indebted to Kersti Yllo for this insight.

gratification as an end in itself and adopt an orientation that allows them to see the Other as an object (De Beauvoir, 1953). It is easier for them to brand children as possible objects for gratification.

#### THE FEMALE MINORITY

The foregoing may have given the mistaken impression that women never sexually abuse children. Actually, there are instances where women do take sexual advantage of children although it is uncommon. Probably the most notorious of these are cases of mother-son incest that have been reported -- although very infrequently -- and some of which have actually been prosecuted (Weinberg, 1955). Insofar as this occurs, it makes sexual abuse distinct from rape because in rape women are never offenders, except in conjunction with a man. Although they do occur, instances of sexual abuse perpetrated by women are taken less seriously, and are not investigated or prosecuted with the same zeal as cases involving men. When brought to court, charges are often reduced to misdemeanor offenses like impairing the morals of a child.

Women's sexual offenses against children may in fact be less serious, but it is certainly true that lenient treatment of women offenders is also abetted by myths about such experiences. For one thing many men are titillated by the idea of an older woman initiating a boy into the ways of the world and so that when a woman has sex with a boy they

find it hard to consider this victimization. Moreover, the idea that boys are the sexual aggressors, is so strong that even in cases where the male is a child and the female an adult, there is an assumption that the boy must have taken a more active part in the liaison, than would be supposed if the victim had been a girl. Thus instances of adult females interacting sexually with boys as least, are seen as less exploitative and less abusive than in the case of male offenders.

Fifteen instances of child sexual experiences with substantially older women were reported in our survey. Although this is a small group for a statistical analysis, the gross tabulations, (Table 5-2) regarded with healthy caution, can give us a better idea of the kinds of sexual involvement women have with children. However, we are lumping together experiences of both boys and girls.

The older women partners in the sample are not greatly different from the older men partners. They range in age from 12 to 45. They include a mother, an aunt, several sisters and some strangers. And their activities range from exhibition to intercourse.

The two main differences from men partners are that the women partners are somewhat younger (averaging 22.1 years old as opposed to 29.4) and they are substantially more homosexual, that is their approaches are more often directed toward girls rather than boys.



Aside from this, the women partners are remarkable in their similarity to the men partners. They approach children whose average age is about the same. They both are members of the children's family in about the same proportions. There is little difference in the kinds of sex activities they engage in. They both are the initiators of the activity in an overwhelming number of the experiences. They use force, when they do so, equally often, and activities with male and female older partners last about the same length of time.

These similarities are surprising. After all we have said about the fact that men are much more likely to sexually approach children, we might naturally expect that the instances where women did so would be quite distinctive. This does not appear to be the case.

[Table 5-2 goes here.]

However, in spite of the similarity in the form of the experience, they do not at all elicit the same kind of reactions from the children, and this is a key difference. Women provoked much less fear in the children they approached, than the men did. The children were more likely to be interested by the experience, and they also reported fewer negative feelings about the experience in retrospect.

Table 5-2. Experiences with Male and Female Older Partners

Characteristic of experience	Female Partners (N=15)	Male Partners (N=125)
Child's Age (Mean)	9.2	10.3
Partner's Age (Mean)	22.1	29.4
Homosexual (%)	67	14
Family member (%)	47	38
<u>Activity:</u>		
Invitation (%)	-	3
Hugging in Sexual Way	-	6
Showing Genitals (%)	27	19
Fondling Sexually (%)	7	17
Touching Genitals (%)	40	40
Simulated Intercourse	13	7
Intercourse (%)	7	4
Other (%)	7	5
Partner Initiated (%)	86	99
Force (%)	50	57
More than once (%)	43	40
Longer than year (%)	21	17
<u>Reaction of child:</u>		
Fear (%)	20	62
Shock (%)	26	26
Surprise (%)	13	18
Interest (%)	40	13
Pleasure (%)	20	10
Evaluation (Mean)	3.5	4.0

The fewer negative reactions among this group is partly explained by the fact that the partners were women, and it is certainly believable that sexual advances by women are less intimidating. But one confounding factor is present here as well. A third of the children who reported on experiences with women were boys (compared to only 14% with men), and we know that boys report fewer negative experiences than girls. The tenor of these sexual experiences is better illustrated with some examples.

Ten of the woman partner experiences were with little girls, and several of these seemed to be fairly offensive. A 17 year old, for example, started manipulating her 9 year old sister's genitals, and this went on many times over a three year period. The elder sister used some threat or coercion in her approaches and the respondent recalled it as a negative experience. Another respondent reported when she was 10 a strange woman in her twenties exhibited her sex organs to her. A number of these offenses involved force and more often than not they were regarded negatively.

The boys reported a more mixed set of encounters with older women. One reported that when he was 12 he had a one time intercourse experience with a 23 year old woman which he felt quite positive about. But a 16 year old boy had a near intercourse experience with a 28 year old woman stranger that he felt the opposite about. A 6 year old boy had his penis manipulated many times by an aunt in her thirties sometimes using threats or coercion. However, he

said he felt neither positively or negatively about the experience. Consistent with boys' experiences in general, they reacted less negatively than the girls to the experiences they had, even when the major outlines of the experience were similar.

So the scanty evidence we have indicates that a few women are sexually involved with children, both boys and girls. Some of the boys experiences with adult women at least are so-called "initiation" rites, which turn out fairly positively for the boys. But not the bulk of them. For most children, the experiences with older women look like the experiences with older men, are often perceived negatively, especially by the girls, and involve some force. They would appear to qualify for the term sexual victimization.

#### HOMOSEXUAL PARTNERS

There is a widespread popular conviction, illustrated by the appeal of opinions like those of singer Anita Bryant, that homosexuality and sexual victimization of children are connected. The foes of homosexual rights often raise the specter of how dangerous it is to allow homosexuals to hold positions of responsibility involving children, such as in teaching or day care. Courts, acting on this stereotype, are often reluctant to give homosexuals custody of their children. Is there any truth to this idea?

First, it should be patently obvious by now that the majority of sexual abuse of children is heterosexual. Incidents between older males and younger females are the largest category of victimization. So the repression or elimination of homosexuality -- even if one wanted to entertain these as social policy goals -- would not solve the sexual abuse problem.

However, a much thornier question is whether the average homosexual person is more likely to victimize a child than the average heterosexual person. Because this is not a survey of older partners but rather a survey of child victims, it is not the correct kind of study for answering this question.

The data from the study do permit a comment on this issue, however. The 266 men in the study reported 17 childhood homosexual encounters with men. The 530 women reported 108 childhood heterosexual encounters with men. In a population with an equal number of boys and girls, that means that about 31 per cent of the incidents initiated by men are homosexual.

If we knew that about 31% of the male population were homosexual, then we might conclude that homosexuals do not contribute to the sexual victimization of children any more often than according to their frequency in the population. Knowledge about the number of homosexual men is admittedly primitive. A revised estimate from Kinsey's data shows that about 30% of college educated men (back in the 1940s) had

homosexual experiences (Gagnon, 1977, p. 253-4). But this counts anything at any age. Only an estimated 6% had extensive homosexual experiences after the age of twenty, only 15% had homosexual experiences after the age of 16. So it seems likely that the number of men one would wish to call actively homosexual is well below 30%. This could imply that homosexually oriented men contribute more than their share in the sexual victimization of children.

But this can happen one of two ways. We can assume that homosexual men on the average are more likely to victimize children, and this accounts for a rate of homosexual victimization higher than the estimated proportion of homosexual men. On the other hand, we can argue that the average homosexual is not more likely to victimize children, but that the ones who do are very promiscuous. They become involved with many more children than the average heterosexual who sexually victimizes children. This would also account for the higher rate.

There is indeed some evidence that homosexual partners of children are more promiscuous. For one thing, heterosexual approaches tend to be made toward family members, homosexual approaches toward non-family members. That many heterosexuals stay within the family means 1) they are often inhibited and thus less likely to be promiscuous and 2) they have a more limited number of potential partners. Also Gebhard et al. (1965) report that homosexual offenders against children in their prison sample

committed slightly more such offenses than the heterosexual offenders against children. So it is possible that the high percentage of homosexual victimization is due to a small group of homosexual partners.

This whole matter is a delicate and controversial issue. We wish to re-emphasize that our survey is not the appropriate kind for really answering the question of whether homosexuals are more likely to victimize children. Our conclusions are ambiguous. They can be explained either by assuming that homosexuals are more likely to victimize children, or by assuming that a small number of homosexuals are very promiscuous in their approaches to children.

#### ADOLESCENT AND ADULT PARTNERS

In Chapter III we posed some questions about who to treat as so-called sexual abuse "offenders". Many adolescents, we pointed out, take sexual advantage of children, so it seemed appropriate to try to include of adolescent-child encounters in our statistical tabulations and not limit ourselves to strictly child-adult experiences. We proposed the five year age differential to try to separate the experiences with adolescents that would be abusive from those that would tend to be consensual.

Although we have lumped adolescents and adults together in several of our analyses, many people would wonder how equivalent such partners really are. In sex of all matters, teen-agers are in their own way very naive and inexperienced

in spite of their mature appetites and capacities. Their curiosity about sex is overwhelming. Yet they are unclear about sexual meanings, and codes of sexual appropriateness. They are less in control of their impulses, less clear about their own sexual orientations, and vague about sexual responsibility. One might expect their sexual advances to children to reflect this naivete.

To the child partner of an adolescent, such naivete might be felt in different ways. Because the adolescent partner is in some respects still another child himself, the younger child might find herself somewhat less shocked, less scared, or less traumatized by the whole event. On the other hand, in the teenager's impulsiveness and irresponsibility, there might be elements of a brutality that could be very traumatic indeed. As anyone familiar with high schools knows, adolescents can display an inhumanity to one another and other children rarely matched in the adult world.

Thus it is not intuitively apparent how sexual victimization by adolescents might compare with sexual abuse by adults. It might be more traumatic or less traumatic, it might involve different kinds of sex activities, it might be more or less intense. To get a better grip on such comparisons, we have broken down the experiences of boys and girls according to whether their older partners were adolescents or adults. The comparison appears in Table 5-3.



The conclusion to be drawn is interesting. Experiences with adolescents and with adults are very similar for the girls. The anticipated "naivete" of adolescents does not make much difference in what happens and how the experiences are perceived. But for boys the differences are quite pronounced.

First we will take up the comparison in the case of girls. Adolescents and adults approach female children sexually in remarkably similar fashion. They both initiate the interaction all the time. They both use force about the same amount. They both shy away from actual intercourse with the children, and although the adults are more often exhibitionists and the adolescents do more touching, they both actually fondle and touch the children in about the same proportions.

These similarities in approach are particularly striking in light of two big differences. The adolescents are much more likely to be family members -- brothers and cousins primarily -- and of course, the partners of the adolescents are apt to be younger. Apparently neither the family connection nor the younger age of children who have experiences with adolescents changes matters with regard to force or sexual activity.

Not surprisingly, the reaction of victims to the two kinds of partners is also similar. Respondents reported that they found experiences with adolescents equally as traumatic as experiences with adults. They were somewhat

less frightened and shocked at the time, and less likely to tell anyone, but in retrospect they found the experience just as negative. This gives strong support to our decision to lump adolescents together with adult partners. The experiences with teenagers look as "victimizing" as the experiences that are described involving adults, at least in so far as the girls are concerned.

[Table 5-3 goes about here.]

When it comes to the boys, we are faced with a different matter. In ferreting out the experiences boys had with adolescent partners, it appears we have isolated a different type of experience from the one boys describe with adults. The differences are striking in many ways. They involve more family members, as did the girls experiences with adolescents. They go on much, much longer. They involve less touching and more exhibition or oral sex. They are not so often coercive. And most important they are evaluated fairly positively. Eighty-six percent say they were interested, and over half felt pleasure.

There are a scant 7 of these adolescent partner cases. So true generalization is difficult. Still the tendencies seem quite clear. There appears to be quite a bit more consent and positive result when adolescents approach younger boys than when they approach younger girls. This is true, in spite of the homosexuality taboo which is being

Table 5-3. Experiences with Adolescent and Adult Partners

Characteristic	Girls		Boys	
	Adolescent Partners (N=31)	Adult Partners (N=88)	Adolescent Partners (N=7)	Adult Partners (N=16)
Child's Age (Mean)	7.6	11.0	7.6	11.6
Partner's Age (Mean)	14.8	34.1	14.1	31.9
Homosexual (%)	13	7	71	81
Family member (%)	71	34	43	6
<u>Activity:</u>				
Invitation (%)	3	3	-	6
Hugging in sexual way	3	7	-	-
Showing genitals (%)	10	23	29	12
Fondling Sexually (%)	13	21	-	-
Touching genitals (%)	50	34	14	63
Sim intercourse (%)	10	8	14	-
Intercourse (%)	7	2	14	6
Other (%)	3	2	29	12
Partner initiated (%)	100	99	100	88
Force (%)	58	57	28	56
Drinking (%)	0	31	0	21
More than once (%)	52	34	67	37
Longer than year (%)	20	18	33	6
<u>Reaction:</u>				
Fear (%)	43	69	14	50
Shock (%)	20	31	0	18
Surprise (%)	23	15	0	25
Interest (%)	23	6	86	25
Pleasure (%)	3	9	57	13
Told Anyone (%)	22	42	43	25
Evaluation (Mean)	4.0	4.1	2.7	3.7

violated in most of these cases.

#### CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, studying the older partners in child sexual victimization experiences is a tough research problem. Convicted sex offenders are available. But they are an unusual minority. From our survey, it is clear that few unapprehended older partners step forward to report their experiences, even on an anonymous questionnaire, although we know from our victim reports that such experiences are widespread and there must be many such offenders in our population. For ideas on older partners we have to rely on the reports of their victims, an unreliable technique at best.

From these victim reports, we have been able to confirm much of what past research on sexual victimization has shown. The older partners are almost all men and of various ages: adolescents, young adults and middle-age. A few women do engage in such activities, and the experiences the victims have with some of them resemble the kind of experiences children have with men. But on the whole, sexual victimization is a problem in the relations between men and children. The vicissitudes of male psycho-sexual development, the nature of male authority in society, and the kinds of experiences males have with children can all explain parts of this problem.

## CHAPTER VI

### ALL IN THE FAMILY

Incest and sexual abuse are sometimes confused, but they are not the same. Sexual abuse normally refers to sexual relations between an adult and a child. Incest refers to sexual relations between two family members whose marriage would be proscribed by law or custom.

According to our survey, there are more incest experiences than there are sexual abuse experiences. Twenty-eight per cent of the women and twenty-three per cent of the men admitted a sexual experience with a family member. Only nineteen per cent of the women and nine per cent of the men said they had been sexually abused.

Much sexual abuse is also incestuous, however. As we saw in Chapter IV, forty-four per cent of the experiences of sexual abuse reported by girls were actually with family members. In other words, about 9% of the women in the sample had an experience that was both incestuous and victimizing. So there is a good deal of overlap.

An experience is both incestuous and victimizing, in the terms we are using here, when a child's partner is both much older and a member of that child's family. But confusion sometimes enters because cases can be one or the other without being both. When a child has an experience

with an adult stranger or neighbor, for example, this is an instance of sexual victimization that is not incestuous. The majority of the sexual experiences with older persons reported in this survey by boys is of this sort. When a child has an experience with a family member who is essentially the same age (for our purposes within 5 years if the child is 12 or under and within 10 years if the child is 13 to 16), this is an instance of incest that is not sexual victimization. There were many such relationships between siblings and between cousins.

#### DEFINING INCEST

Some discussion is needed before continuing however, about the way in which the notion of incest is being used.

In addition to having a lively existence in popular mythology, incest is also an important topic to two divergent disciplines: anthropology and psychoanalysis. Bandied about in these different contexts it is no wonder that the exact meaning of incest has been blurred rather than clarified.

One ambiguity concerns the kind of sexual activity implied by incest. Often incest means simply sexual intercourse between family members, but in some discussions it has come to mean other kinds of sexual contact, such as mutual masturbation or genital fondling. In the writings of some psychoanalysts "incestuous involvement" can even mean interaction with fairly little explicit sexual content, such

as when a mother is unduly preoccupied with a child's body, his physical well-being or cleanliness.

On the other hand, sometimes incest is used in a way that does not refer to sexual activity at all, but rather to marriage. Particularly when anthropologists discuss the relation between the incest taboo and exogamy, incest is used to mean the marriage of two family members of a proscribed proximity. Within jurisprudence too, incest can mean the marriage of two family members, and although sexual intercourse between the two is usually implied, the law forbids the marriage whether it includes intercourse or not.

For our purposes, we will use incest to mean sexual contact among family members. That sexual contact will include not just intercourse, but also mutual masturbation, hand-genital, oral-genital contact, sexual fondling, exhibition and even sexual propositioning of family members. It will not include unconscious sexual gestures, however, such as accidental exposure, or a mother's concern about a child's body, as in the psychoanalytic example above.

The rationale for this definition of incest is based on the following two considerations. The taboo on incest in our culture applies to all sexual contact between proscribed parties, not just intercourse. Those members of society who know that having intercourse with their sister or brother is wrong, also know that propositioning him or her is wrong. Any person who engages in conscious and overt activity which violates this taboo should be considered as committing

incest. There may be more or less serious incestuous acts, but they are incest nonetheless.

Secondly, much incest involves children. As we have seen, for physiological and psychological reasons much intense sexual activity with children does not include intercourse. Yet it clearly involves the kind of behavior and motivation that are generally considered incest. This is another reason why incest needs to include more than intercourse.

Another source of confusion, concerns the precise partners who come under the umbrella of the incest taboo. There is general agreement, codified in law, that mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, grandparents, aunts and uncles are off limits in our society (Weinberg, 1955). But what about cousins, what about steprelations and what about in-laws?

In earlier generations, first cousin marriages were relatively common, and there are several states today where this kind of liaison is still permitted. Even where it is not, many people believe that given the general loosening of extended family bonds in contemporary society, sex between cousins does not "feel" like incest. Nonetheless, because it is a taboo of which almost everyone is aware in modern society, we will include it within our definition of incest.

Steprelations too are sometimes included under the incest taboo as it is codified in some law and sometimes not. But irrespective of legalities, many stepparents and



stepsiblings live together in relationships that are virtually indistinguishable from relationships maintained by natural parents and siblings. At issue here, is whether the taboo applies primarily to a biological bond or to a social one. Those who tend to see the importance of the incest taboo in its prevention of inbreeding and the alleged genetic consequences thereof, have less of a problem with incest between steprelations. Those who see incest more as a protection of the social order and family role relations tend to see incest with steprelations as equivalent to other kinds of incest. Our bias is in this latter direction.

The great frequency of steprelation incest however, (see below) does suggest that the taboo, or the mechanism that enforces it, is weaker in regard to steprelations. However, stepparent and stepsibling incest violates a taboo that does exist, especially in those families where steprelatives have taken on the trappings of "normal" family relationships, and when violated, the consequences are similar to the violation involved in cases of natural family incest. For this reason, we will consider sex with steprelatives as falling within the incest category.

#### INCIDENCE OF INCEST

Incest is often called "the ultimate taboo" or the "universal taboo" or something similar to classify it as the gravest violation of the rules of human society. It is usually described as surrounded by "horror", "revulsion" or

some other strong adjectives (My husband, 1977). In fact, however, incest is regarded very ambivalently. On the one hand, it is treated as a serious threat to the social order which in this day and age means being associated with psychological abnormality and social degeneracy. On the other hand, unlike sexual abuse, which is almost never joked about, incest is often the subject of ribald humor, innuendo and the like. There are rhymes about incest such as this:

A young man with passions quite gingery  
Tore a whole in his sister's best lingerie  
He slapped her behind  
And made up his mind  
To add incest to insult and injury.

(Legman, 1964, p. 62).

Or jokes about incest. For example, Jack has just been seduced by sister Jill. "Golly, Jack", says Jill, "you're much better than Paw". "Yeah," he replies, "that's what Maw always says" (Randolph, 1976).

As in the case of wife-abuse, such an undercurrent of humor about a supposed taboo can be an indicator of a "counter culture", a covert belief among people -- often held simultaneous with the taboo -- that "it's really not so bad" or that "under some circumstances" at least, it would be OK. The humor reflects a kind of challenge to the taboo, a message that the taboo is not so serious that even joking

about it would be in poor taste. In contrast, truly serious taboos like parricide or fratricide are not the subject of any humor to speak of.

More evidence of this "counter culture" to the taboo on incest is available at any drugstore. In the last 5 years, the pornography trade has begun to cater heavily to incest fantasies. Titles like "Family Affair" and "Mother Love" are interspersed among more mundane themes in the shelves of erotic literature. Sexually oriented magazines often carry stories, ostensibly from readers, about incest experiences described in graphic detail (Readers discuss, 1977).

This indulgence in incest fantasy is not entirely restricted to males, as might be thought. The true romance magazines with their entirely female readership have also begun to capitalize on the incest theme. Recent story headings from a selection of such magazines include: "Whenever Dad's on the road, Mom begs me for Love," "I love my brother...the wrong way," and "Sis and I fight over Daddy's Bed; We take turns being his wife". Although the stories rarely turn out to be approving of incest, as the male-oriented literature is, the convention of the genre clearly is intended to allow readers to participate in incest fantasies without having to feel guilty about it. There appears to be a strong and growing fascination and covert approval of incest in the popular fantasy life.

Thus, although it does come as a surprise, perhaps it should be less so, to discover that people engage in a substantial amount of incest. More people report a sexual experience with a family member (26%) in our survey than report a childhood sexual experience with an older person, (16%). The comparison is possibly unfair. Childhood sex experiences can only occur in childhood while incest experiences can occur at any age. However, the above mentioned comparison is based almost wholly on experiences occurring before age 18. At any age period during childhood, there are more incestuous experiences than experiences with older persons. This suggests that the more serious taboo is on cross-generational sex no matter how related, not on sex between members of the same family.

An inventory of incestuous partners appears in Table 6-1. In addition to the large number of reported incestuous contacts, note the range of incestuous partners. In this sample of a little less than 800 individuals, a sexual experience was reported with every kind of blood relative recognized by our kinship system except for grandmothers. Mothers, aunts and grandfathers made only one isolated appearance in the inventory, but nonetheless it indicates that such incestuous relationships are not completely extraordinary. Even if we limit ourselves to nuclear family incest, the rates are high. Fourteen per cent of the girls and eight per cent of the boys had had sexual contact with a mother, father, brother or sister. For a crime of allegedly

universal revulsion, sex within the family seems to be remarkably widespread.

[Table 6-1 goes here.]

The largest amount of incest is confined to same generation partners -- brothers, sisters and cousins. Only 26 of the reported cases, a slim 10%, involved cross-generation liaisons -- the kind of liaisons that are conventionally regarded as the most serious. This gives additional support to our earlier claim that although incest itself is touted as the ultimate taboo, what is really most taboo is cross-generation sex, particularly within the family.\*

Almost all the cross-generation incest occurs to girls, not to boys. The boys reported one experience with an aunt and one with an uncle, and aside from this all of the rest of the 26 instances of cross-generation sex were reported by girls. This ratio, corrected for sample size, of about 4-to-1 is much more lopsided than for cases of sex with older persons outside the family, where boys report experiences at least half as often as girls. Members of the older generation are much more likely to sexually approach

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\*This presumes, of course, that incidence itself is some sort of barometer of the strength of the taboo. Such is probably true, but needs to be established by comparing incidence rates with attitudes, an analysis we will undertake elsewhere.

Table 6-1. Sexual Experiences with Relatives

Partner	Number of experiences reported by:		
	Boys	Girls	Total
Father	-	5	5
Step-father	-	2	2
Mother	-	1	1
Brother*	15	72	87
Sister*	16	18	34
Uncle	1	16	17
Aunt	1	-	1
Grandfather	-	1	1
Cousin-male	9	48	57
Cousin-female	33	16	49
Brother-in-law	-	5	5
Parents friend	2	10	12
Total family experiences**	75	184	259
Persons with family experiences	60	151	211
% of respondents	23%	28%	26%

\*includes stepsiblings

\*\*not including Parents friend

girls in the family than boys. For girls, then, the family would appear to be a more sexually dangerous arena.

#### FATHER-DAUGHTER INCEST

Of all kinds of incest, the one receiving the most attention at the current moment is father-daughter incest. Mental health workers once thought it to be extremely rare and confined to extremely degenerate family situations, but more recently they have revised their outlook on the subject. Based on experiences both with ordinary psychotherapy clientele and in special centers organized to treat sex abuse victims and incestuous families, many clinicians and social workers have come to the conclusion that father-daughter incest is "rampant" and of "epidemic" proportions.

Our own data give some backing to this concern. Five girls reported sexual experiences with fathers and 2 with stepfathers. In a sample of 530 women, this is over 1%, a figure in keeping with the only other survey information on the subject (Gagnon, 1965; Hunt 1974).

Although such small numbers are not a reliable basis on which to accurately calculate incidence, they, with the support of the previous surveys, do show that the problem is significant. One percent may appear like a small figure, but, if it is an accurate estimate, it means that approximately three quarters of a million women 18 and over in the general population have had such an experience, and

that another 16,000 cases are added each year from among the group of girls age 5 to 17. It puts father-daughter incest clearly in the same ballpark as other clinical phenomena of great interest to the mental health profession, such as schizophrenia which has an estimated incidence of one percent.

Two of the seven cases (29%), of father-daughter incest were with stepfathers. Once again the small numbers require caution, but this does confirm the widespread impression that incest with stepfathers is a particularly common form of father-daughter incest. When it is taken into account that only 5% of the sample reported having a stepfather, it can be seen to what extent the stepfathers contributed disproportionately to the incest rate.

Any one of several explanations are available to account for the vulnerability of stepdaughters to stepfathers. First, the taboo on incest between two such partners -- who do not have a true blood relationship -- may be less severe. Secondly, stepfathers, who have not experienced their stepdaughters as young children may, therefore have acquired less of the paternal, protective, tender or whatever impulse that acts as a shield or deterrent in natural fathers to incest. They may be more likely than natural fathers to have unalloyed sexual feelings. Thirdly, families with stepfathers may just plainly be more disorganized. The families have obviously been through the loss of one parent. If, as we suspect,



father-daughter incest is more likely in disorganized families and disorganized families are more likely to have stepfathers, this may account for why much father-daughter incest occurs with stepfathers. Of course several of these explanations may be at work simultaneously (for more discussion, see Chapter IX).

The above factors suggest that stepfather incest may have dynamics that distinguish it from ordinary father-daughter incest. It probably could be studied as a matter in its own right. Within this study, unfortunately, the number of cases of stepfather incest is too small to allow us to contemplate such a separate analysis. So for almost all our purposes we will lump cases of father and stepfather incest together, and call them father-daughter.

#### SIBLING INCEST

Of the various kinds of incest, father-daughter incest is the kind reported the most frequently to hospitals, clinics and police (De Francis, 1969; Burgess et al., 1978; Queen's Bench, 1976; Weinberg, 1955; Weiss et al., 1955). But many have doubted whether it was really the most common form of incest. It has often been speculated that in fact brother-sister incest was the most common, but that it rarely came to public attention, in part because it was less taboo, in part because it involved minors, but perhaps most importantly because it did not set up a similarly explosive family conflict situation. Although it violates norms

against sex within the family, brother-sister incest does not create an intense rivalry situation which threatens to upset all family roles, in the same way as father-daughter incest. This would explain both why father-daughter incest would occur less often -- family members, especially mothers, have a special stake in preventing it -- and why it would be reported more often -- an aggrieved family member would be more likely to take some public action. Brother-sister incest, in contrast, may be less offensive, both to the partners involved and to other family members. Thus it would be less often discovered and when discovered, more easily dealt with within the family.

All these explanations are speculative, but the facts on which they are based are well confirmed by our survey. Brother-sister incest is by far the most common kind of incest reported. Twenty-nine percent of the incest reported by girls was with brothers and 21% of incest reported by boys was with sisters. This preponderance of brother-sister incest is also supported by the results of Hunt's (1974) national survey, although his incidence rates are lower than ours.

More surprising, however, is the large amount of homosexual incest reported in our survey between siblings. Brothers were sexually involved with other brothers almost as often as they were with sisters, and sisters also reported a fair number of homosexual experiences, one fifth of all their sibling contacts. When homosexual experiences

are lumped together with heterosexual experiences, it is clear that sex among siblings is impressively common. Fifteen per cent of the girls and ten per cent of the boys had a sibling sexual experience. This accounted for about half of all the incest and 94% of all the nuclear family incest.

Much of the incestuous activity with brothers and sisters engaged in by our respondents took place at a fairly early age. Ninety percent of the girls and 80% of the boys were twelve or under at the time. A particularly large portion of it occurred around the ages of 9 or 10.

But it is mistaken to conclude from this that most of the sibling incest amounted to "playing doctor" and preadolescent sex experimentation. If we look at the partners to these sibling incest experiences we can see why. For the girls, almost half the sibling partners were not pre-adolescents, but were adolescents and adults. Twenty-three percent of the sibling partners were in fact more than 5 years older than our respondents at the time, putting them into the category of "older partners" which we analyzed in earlier chapters. Although sex between siblings takes place among members of the same generation, these same generation partners are not necessarily peers. Many are substantially older.

For example, we mentioned earlier the interviewee who reported that when she was eight, she had several sexual experiences with her brother and some of his friends who

were 13. The brother had bribed and manipulated her and her sister into letting them attempt intercourse on several afternoons when the parents were away. The woman remembers feeling ashamed and degraded by the experience for a long time afterward.

### Sibling Incest as Aggression

Many of the sibling experiences reported involved similar kinds of coercion. This was most particularly true for the girls who reported that about 30% of their sibling incest experiences took place under force or threat of force. When David Walters (1975) writes, "It is rare for an older brother to force a younger sister into sexual relations", (p. 128), we believe he is being misled by the scarcity of such instances coming to public attention. Such experiences are alarmingly common, and their scarcity among reported cases is merely another indication that such incidents are unlikely to be revealed either by victims or their families.

The use of force was not limited to partners who were adolescents, nor to partners who were much older. Some of the experiences that took place between siblings fairly close in age also involved force and coercion. For example, another of our interviewees told of being gang raped at 4 by his brother and his brother's friends who were only two years older.

R: [My brother] was an extremely angry person. He was extremely angry to me all the time. He's always claimed it was sibling rivalry, but the things he did to me I don't consider sibling rivalry at all. Like whipping. He was sort of into whips and tools of torture he had developed. He used to whip me and my friends. He strung one of my friends up by his toes upside down. He used to throw me down the stairs all the time. Tried to stuff a dead bird in my mouth once. These are just examples of the kinds of stuff he used to do.

My parents couldn't deal with him. They turned deaf ears. Whenever I said, "Carl's doing this, Carl's doing that," after a while they didn't listen. They didn't want to hear it. They would either say, "You're lying", or they'd say, "Go deal with it yourself." That started the whole process that they never really trusted me. I really felt like he had permission to do it.

At the time [age 4] we were living in a house that had a full basement. Across the hall from the playroom was my father's storeroom. He had a liquor closet and a gunroom. I was walking out of the playroom to go upstairs and I heard some noise in the storeroom so I went in. There was my brother and one of the kids from across the

street. And maybe a couple of others. There were four or five people in there. They had their pants down. I remember kind of looking eye to eye at these two people, I don't remember who, having anal intercourse right there. They'd gone into my father's liquor cabinet and the place was reeking. I tried to run, I tried to run away immediately. That's where my memory stops until later, I remember being in that room alone, covered with whiskey and this whiskey smell and then being discovered by my parents and getting punished for getting into the whiskey. And not being able to say what I had experienced.

I'm pretty sure they made me go along with whatever was happening. My guess is that people were kind of taking turns on one another. And that I was put up on that table and used by some of the other children there. I don't see how it could be any other way. It was something I was immediately terrified of. I think they manhandled me.

Thus sibling incest should not be overromanticized as it sometimes is in literature and in men's magazines (Pomeroy, 1978). The stereotype of innocent child sex games has only limited applicability. A substantial portion of sibling incest involves much older partners and some

coercion. The same is true for the incest experiences reported with other same generation partners: cousins and brother-in-laws. For example, two of the interviewees reported sexual assaults by older cousins. In one instance, the older boy tackled his 14 year old cousin and ripped her shirt in an attempt to have sex with her until she finally fended him off. She was shocked and upset and was never able to talk with him subsequently, nor reveal the incident to her mother or any other relative.

#### An Incest Avoidance Instinct?

The large amount of sibling incest reported here does pose some challenge to at least one common theory about the nature of incest avoidance. Westermarck's (1894) old idea that "familiarity breeds contempt" or at least "avoidance" has been resurrected in recent years by certain anthropologists (Fox, 1962) to help explain incest avoidance behavior. According to this view, when children are raised in close proximity to one another, a kind of bond develops that "innoculates" each of the children against sexual involvement with each other. They fail to find one another sexually and romantically attractive.

Some ingenious empirical support for this idea has been gathered by Shepher (1971). Among 2769 marriages of Israelis raised in the communal nurseries of the Kibbutz, he could not find a single case of marriage among two former nursery mates, even though no overt taboo exists against

such marriages. Shepher believes this aversion develops among siblings and nursery mates between birth and age 6 by a process similar to what ethologists call imprinting.

Such data would suggest that the sexual avoidance between siblings would be fairly routine, as long as they were brought up in fairly close proximity. Our finding, however, of a large number of incestuous involvements would suggest that such a mechanism was fairly weak, easily by-passed or non-existent.

Of course, two considerations could reconcile the antagonistic impression of these two sets of findings. For one thing, perhaps a large amount of the incest reported in our survey occurred among siblings who were not raised in close proximity. They may have not been "innoculated" in childhood because of large age differences or other circumstances in their upbringing. The fact that many of the sibling partners were substantially older reinforces this explanation.

A second consideration is also compelling. Shepher's data refer to marriages and (to a lesser extent) to adolescent sexual experiences. His theory argues that the imprinting takes place between ages 0-6, which is earlier than most of the sibling incest reported to us. It would be reasonable to assume that the avoidance takes effect as soon as the "imprinting" has occurred. But perhaps through some unknown mechanism the imprinting does not operate against childhood sexual involvement. Shepher himself did not



investigate whether any of the kibbutz children he studied had had childhood sexual experiences with their nursery mates. Children may be inoculated against pair-bonding as adults with early age mates and siblings, but not against childhood sexual activity with these same people. The question remains open. If the imprinting notion of incest avoidance is going to stand, however, it will have to take account of the fairly large quantity of reported childhood sibling incest experiences.

#### MOTHERS AND OTHER RELATIVES

Since recent experience has brought about a revision in people's thinking about the incidence of father-daughter incest, one wonders about whether conventional wisdom has been wrong about other kinds of incest. Traditionally, for example, mother-son incest has been looked upon as exceedingly rare, occurring only in the context of psychosis or extreme family disorganization. Few cases are ever reported or prosecuted (Weinberg, 1955). Nonetheless, devotees of men's magazines are often treated, more and more in recent years, to allegedly true accounts by readers of mother-son sexual encounters (Readers discuss, 1977). Conceivably, the low rates of reported cases could be attributable to reporting bias and to the reluctance of police and social agencies to recognize the existence of such incest, thus misrepresenting true incidence.\*

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\*Similar speculation has taken place on the subject of father-son incest. It too, seems to be rare and the dynamics very different from father-daughter incest (Langsley et. al., 1968).

(Zaphiris, 1978, who takes this point of view has studied 28 cases of mother-son incest, of which 11 occurred in military families.)

However, our data supports the conventional wisdom. No respondent reported a case of mother-son incest. One girl, however, did report being sexually approached by her mother, although the experience did not go beyond genital exhibition, and occurred only once. On the whole when it comes to overt sexual activity with children, mothers appear to be fairly benign. This goes along with the general finding of this survey and others that adult women rarely make sexual advances toward children (see Chapter IV). Mothers may nonetheless have enormous, perhaps even overpowering, influence on their children's -- both male and female -- sexual development, and sometimes, if one trusts psychoanalytic theory, this influence takes very insidious forms. One form it does not take, however, is direct sexual involvement with children, as is more often the case with fathers.

A variety of other adult relatives make sexual approaches to children and adolescents. Our survey documents instances of incestuous contact with uncles, and aunts, a grandfather and several brothers-in-law.

Aside from knowing that these are adult relatives, it is hard to formulate a picture of these kinds of incest relationships, without much more detailed information on the family constellation. Extended kin ties vary so much in our

current society, from ethnic group to ethnic group, from social class to social class and from family to family, that to know that someone is an uncle says very little about the exact content of the relationship. An uncle may be a man whom a child has known all her life, with whom she may have lived for various time intervals, and in whom she has a great deal of trust, or he may be a virtual stranger, who suddenly appears for a visit and then departs.

Some uncles, in other words, have hardly more relationship to a child than some of the "strangers" reported on in earlier sections. Other uncles may in fact be quasi-parents or parent surrogates.

By the same token, there are even some partners who are not relatives at all, but whose relationship to the family may be that of a virtual relative. The most striking instances of this sort are the not uncommon cases where the boyfriend of a mother becomes sexually involved with her children. Another such situation occurs when a close personal friend of a father makes a sexual advance toward his friend's daughter. Although we do not know them for a fact to be of these two sorts, we do note in Table 4 that 12 of sexual experiences reported by our respondents were with friends of their parents.

One woman in our interview sample reported just such a situation of boyfriend "incest". For five years she dated a man, who spent a great deal of time with her and her young son, but who never actually lived with them. The man was at

times physically abusive to her and also to her son, but he had a good sexual relationship with her, and seemed to show a lot of concern for her boy. He was always very hostile to homosexuals.

Several years after she had broken up with this man, and after her now teenage son had spent some time incarcerated for exhibitionism, the son came to her and told her that during those five years the boyfriend had made frequent sexual advances toward him. Those experiences, he said, had really "fucked him up." He had never told her about the incidents, she speculates, because he realized how badly the mother needed this boyfriend. Although the man was not formally a parent, the dynamics of the situation bear some similarity to a case of parent-child incest and illustrate well how kinship categories do not necessarily capture the true nature of the sexual victimization taking place.

Such relationships have many of the elements of incest. For one thing, there is the betrayal of trust on the part of someone who is a member or a quasi-member of the family unit. For another thing, such relationships set up a volatile triangle of conflict and rivalry that is or can be extremely damaging to family ties. However they develop, such encounters place in jeopardy the child's relationship to his or her most trusted adults, and in some cases may be functionally similar to nuclear family incest. In some instances parents themselves have complicity in the

situation, by their negligence in failing to protect the child and allowing the sex to happen (De Francis, 1969). In the case noted above, the boyfriend had once mentioned he found the son sexually attractive, but the mother had dismissed this revelation.

The lesson from this discussion of the nature of sex with so-called uncles and family friends is that labels may be deceiving.

#### SOME DISCREPANCIES

A reader with an agile mind for figures may have noticed some interesting possibilities in Table 5-1. Do brothers report as many sexual experiences with sisters as sisters do with brothers? Theoretically, in a representative sample of a population -- which this unfortunately is not -- reports by brothers and sisters, should be equal, because for every brother with an experience of sister incest in that population there should also be a sister with an experience of brother incest. If these figures were the same, it would provide a reassuring confirmation on the validity of the reports.

The rates are not identical, leaving us with some serious unanswered questions. They appear in Table 6-2. Twelve per cent of the girls report an experience with a brother, but only 6% of the boys report an experience with a sister. The difference is large enough so that there is a less than 5% probability that it occurred by chance.

[Table 6-2 goes here.]

Two things might account for this difference in rates. For one thing, some brothers may have several experiences with different sisters. If such were true, then more sisters than brothers within the same population would report incest experiences. Unfortunately within in our survey, the exact opposite seems to hold: it is the sisters who have multiple experiences not the brothers.

A second possibility is that girls are just more candid than boys about such experiences, give a more honest report of the experiences that occurred and thus have a higher rate than the boys. The boys, more often the older partners and aggressors in these situations, may feel more guilt about them and be less willing to admit to them.

This line of thinking is reinforced when we note differences in the kinds of experiences men and women tend to report. Women report a fairly large number of experiences with much older brothers, but men report fairly few experiences with much younger sisters. The average age difference for experiences reported by girls is 3 years, but by boys, less than one year. These older brother-younger sister cases are the ones the men in the sample are most likely to feel guilt about, and most likely not to report. This is a likely source of the lower than expected figure for males.

Table 6-2. Sibling and Cousin Incest Experiences

Type of Incest	Number of Experiences	Number of Persons	% of Sample
Males with Sisters (N=266)	16	16	6%
Females with Brothers (N=530)	72	65	12%
Males with Female Cousins (N=266)	33	29	11%
Females with Male Cousins (N=530)	48	45	8%

However, there is also some evidence against the idea that males are more guilt ridden about incest and thus less candid.

For example, incest experiences between cousins can be subjected to the same comparison as incest between brothers and sisters. Presumably, male cousins should report as many experiences as female cousins. This data also appears in Table 6-2.

In the case of cousins, the disparity reverses itself. Here more male cousins (11%) report an experience than female cousins (8%). It appears to undermine the claim that girls are more candid in their reports. It would require convoluted logic to explain why girls are more honest about experiences with brothers but more reticent about experiences with cousins. This is especially true since males are every bit as much the aggressors in cousin incest as in brother-sister incest.

Unfortunately, this poses a riddle for which we have no adequate explanation at the present moment. It strikes right at the heart of the very important, but inadequately researched subject of the validity and reliability of sex surveys. We can assume with some confidence that many people fail to report or underreport their sex experiences, but we know very little about what kinds of people underreport which kinds of experiences. We will have to set these questions aside for surveys better equipped methodologically to grapple with these questions.



## CONCLUSION

Sexual experiences among family members are more frequent than many would expect. Twenty-eight per cent of the women and twenty-three per cent of the men reported incestuous sex. Even limiting consideration to the nuclear family, one in seven women and one in twelve men had had such an experience. The majority of this sex is among children of the same generation, although not necessarily the same age. A remarkable number of the experiences involved some coercion or force.

## CHAPTER VII

### SOURCES OF TRAUMA

Respondents reacted to their childhood sexual experiences in different ways. Most reported them in various shades of negative, but some said that the experiences had been rather positive. Sixty-six per cent of the girls who had experiences with much older partners said they were negative. But boys' experiences and peer incest experiences for both sexes were not so highly negative. Why the differences?

On a subject so loaded with moral implications, it is hard not to allow strong moral prejudices to affect our thinking about it. When we hear that a child had her genitals fondled on a regular basis over a six year period starting at age 6 by her uncle, we immediately form a judgement about the seriousness of the experience. Most people are apt, for example, to see such an event as much more traumatic than one where a similar aged child was invited by her eight-year old brother to undress in front of him.

They will not have a hard time explaining why. The uncle is an adult, after all, and the brother only another child. That makes the uncle's involvement more traumatic to the child. And certainly the actual genital contact which

the uncle committed is more serious because of its intrusiveness than merely appearing naked before someone. Finally, the uncle experience continued over quite an extended period of time, while the other happened only once. Surely the duration of the experience must have contributed to its negative impact.

At least two authors have tried to formalize these assumptions, by providing a list of factors that increase the trauma of sexual victimization for a child. Groth (1978) sees trauma as a function of four factors. 1) The closer the relationship between the child and the older partner, the greater the potential trauma. 2) The longer the experience goes on, the greater the harm. 3) More trauma results from more elaborate kinds of sexual activity, actual penetration being the most and simple exhibition without physical contact being the least traumatic. 4) Experiences involving aggression are likely to be the most negative.

To this list, McFarland (1978) adds three other factors, ones on which other authors are not so generally agreed: 1) If the child participates in and enjoys the experience, he or she will be burdened with more guilt and negative feelings about the experience. 2) If the parents react severely and emotionally to the event, the child will be more harmed. 3) Finally, the older or more mature the child, the more traumatic the experience, because of their better comprehension of the meaning of the event.

These principles, with the possible exception of the very last one, correspond to common-sense about sex based on what we know about adult sexuality. But we need to be reminded that we are dealing with children's sexual experiences, not adults' and we may need a different framework for looking at them. Contemporary sex research has more and more pointed out that sex for humans is as much in the head as in the body (Gagnon and Simon, 1973). What is in a child's head about sex cannot be assumed to be the same as what is in an adult's. We need to look critically at assumptions we make about the trauma of children's sexual experiences.

#### MEASURING TRAUMA

We can do this with some of the data from the survey. Each respondent rated the experience on a scale from positive to negative. We can take this as a measure of how traumatic they thought the experience was. Then, using this level of trauma as a dependent variable, we can determine what kinds of experiences were associated with greater trauma. We can assess what aspects of the experience contributed most to the negative feeling about it.

A caution is in order about this procedure. For one thing, there is some ambiguity in the meaning of our measure. Our question asked, "In retrospect, would you say this experience was positive? mostly positive? neutral? mostly negative? or negative?" Although "in retrospect"

usually means "looking back on things past from the perspective of the present", not all respondents may have understood it that way. Some may have interpreted it to mean, "How did you feel about the experience at the time it happened?"

In either case, the scale is a highly subjective measure of trauma, and it may be affected by guilt or denial surrounding the experience. Some people who may have been tremendously affected by it may refuse to admit as much, while others who were barely affected may distort the experience out of proportion.

Nonetheless, the scale is a measure of some kind of evaluation of the experience, and thus worthy of consideration. As we will find later on, we can explain much of the kind of reaction a child had with reference to features of the experience itself. This lends credibility to the assumption we are operating on here: that what we are measuring is a reaction to something about the experience itself and not other extraneous developments in a person's history and outlook that occurred later.

#### AGE DIFFERENCES

Perhaps the first assumption we should hasten to test is the one on which much of the study so far has been based, that a large age difference between a child and his or her partner creates a victimizing experience. For much of the discussion about sexual abuse, we have analyzed a group of

experiences where the partners were at least 5 years older than the respondents (10 years in the case of adolescents). Is there some justification in assuming that such an age difference creates more potential for trauma?

Table 7-1 gives strong support to this assumption. Especially for girls, the larger the age difference, the greater the trauma. Partners more than 5 years older are associated with a much more negative experience than same age partners, and partners 10 years or more older even more trauma.

[Table 7-1 goes about here.]

This is as expected, but there is something else not expected. Since a larger age difference creates more trauma, it would be anticipated a younger child would be more vulnerable. Many have argued that very early childhood sexual experiences are veritable "time-bombs" set to explode as the child matures. Certainly in the moral perception of sexual relations, the younger the child, the more outrageous the act of sexual abuse appears.

But trauma does not seem to work that way. Experiences at earlier ages do not produce more trauma. If anything they produce less. Respondents whose experiences occurred at 4 to 9 years old remember them as about as negative or less so than those whose experiences occurred at later ages. For girls it is especially remarkable that the most negative

Table 7-1. Trauma by Age of Child, Age of Partner and Age Difference

	Mean Trauma (a) Score for:	
	Girls (N=245)	Boys (N=84)
<u>Age Difference:</u>		
Respondent older	2.9	3.0
0-4 yr difference	2.8	2.3
5-10 yr difference	3.8	3.0
10+ yr difference	4.2	3.5
	F=26.07**	F=3.64*
<u>Age of child:</u>		
4-6	3.1	3.1
7-9	3.3	2.5
10-12	3.7	3.0
13-15	3.2	2.8
16-18	3.9	3.1
	F=2.79*	F=.86
<u>Age of partner:</u>		
0-11	2.8	2.8
12-17	3.4	2.3
18+	4.0	3.5
	F=20.73**	F=4.90*

(a) Scale: 1=positive; 2=mostly positive; 3=neutral  
 4=mostly negative; 5=negative  
 ANOVA: \* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

experiences occurred in the age bracket 16-18.\*

Why would this be so? Several factors undoubtedly contribute to this finding. For one thing, the findings here present some evidence for the phenomenon mentioned earlier: a child's understanding of the situation deeply colors his/her reaction to it. The full meaning of sexual activities is acquired fairly late by most children, just prior to or in early stages of adolescence. Some children who entered into sexual relations starting at an early age report that at first they were unaware that they were violating a taboo. They did not realize that others regarded the activity as wrong until 8 or 9, when sexual and moral awareness more fully crystalized. Such naivete may exert a protection against trauma. It may be that activities undertaken under the cloak of innocence do not cause so much pain (McFarland, 1978; Sloane and Karpinsky, 1942).

In contrast, older children, especially adolescents, are much more aware of what is going on. They no doubt experience much more guilt in regard to their activities and this may increase the negativity they report (Summit and Kryso, 1978).

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\*The age range for children extends beyond 16 because some of the incest participants were that old at the time of the incest experience.



Older children, because of their greater awareness, may also be less apt to naively cooperate with sexual intentions of adults and other family members. This means that force is more often involved when older children interact sexually with adults. When force is involved, as we will see later, experiences are felt much more negatively.

Thus a younger child is not necessarily going to be more affected by a sexual experience than an older child. We are apt to be more protective of them because of their naivete and more likely to be outraged when adults take sexual advantage of it. But the popular "time bomb" metaphor or the idea that "the earlier the trauma the more pervasive the consequences" do not appear to hold.

#### CLOSENESS AND TRAUMA

Almost all researchers agree that experiences with close family members are potentially more traumatic than those with acquaintances or strangers. This seems to be based on a number of assumptions: 1) The closer the relationship the greater the violation of the child's trust and security. 2) The closer the relationship the more complicated the family dynamics triggered by the sexual relationship. 3) The closer the relationship the more serious the taboo violated, and hence the greater possibility for guilt. In addition, family members, police and agency personnel all seem to coalesce in support of a child who is victimized by a stranger, whereas when the

partner is closer to home, the child always faces divided loyalties and suspicions in the reactions of adults.

The starkest contrast is between the child who is victimized by a parent and one victimized by a stranger. Our findings give full support to the belief that father-daughter incest is indeed the most traumatic kind of sexual experience that can occur (Table 7-2).

However, the findings are much more equivocal about the closeness principle in general. For example, the closeness principle would lead us to expect that experiences with other adult relatives would be more traumatic than experiences with strangers. However, in our sample, respondents found experiences with strangers highly traumatic. They rated them just as negatively as they rated, for example, experiences with grandfathers and uncles. The fact that these latter were relatives did not seem to make a difference.

[Table 7-2 goes about here.]

A corollary to the closeness principle might be that sex within the nuclear family, at least, was more traumatic than outside. This is supported, at least, by the finding that father and stepfather incest is more traumatic than uncle or grandfather incest.

Table 7-2. Trauma by Sex of and Relationship to Partner

	Mean Trauma (a) Score for:	
	Girls (N=239)	Boys (N=84)
<u>Sex of partner(s):</u>		
Male	3.6	3.2
Female	3.0	2.7
Both	2.8	1.0
	F=4.25**	F=6.05**
<u>Relationship to partner:</u>		
Father	4.8	-
Step-father	4.5	-
Mother	3.0	-
Brother	3.2	2.4
Sister	2.9	3.1
Uncle	4.0	3.0
Grandfather	4.0	-
Cousin-male	3.1	3.0
Cousin-female	2.4	2.4
Brother-in-law	4.0	-
Friend/Acquaintance	4.0	3.2
Stranger	4.0	4.0
	F=3.94**	F=2.10*

(a) Scale: 1=positive; 2=mostly positive; 3=neutral

4=mostly negative; 5=negative

ANOVA: \* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

However, even here the verdict of the data is mixed, if instead of looking only at cross generation experiences, we also include peer generation experiences. In the peer generation experiences of girls, for example, experiences with brothers are more negative than experiences with male cousins, as would be expected. And experiences with sisters are more negative than experiences with female cousins. But contrary to the closeness rule, an experience with a male cousin is more negative than an experience with a sister. Similarly for boys, an experience with a male cousin is more negative than an experience with a brother. So the closeness principle does not produce consistent predictions. Closeness of kinship may not be related to the degree of trauma in an experience.

Of course, mixed in here also is the homosexual-heterosexual dimension. In general in society, homosexual relationships are viewed as more traumatic than heterosexual relationships because of the greater taboo, but applied to children and to incest the judgements are not so clear. Homosexual pedophilia is indeed seen as highly contemptible, perhaps more degenerate than heterosexual pedophilia. But is incest between brothers more taboo than incest between brother and sister? The gradations at this point are so subtle that once again other factors about the relationship are more important in assessing its stigma.

From our study, it would appear that homosexuality in a childhood sexual experience adds nothing to the trauma of an experience. For girls, for example, overall experiences with the same sex were less negative than experiences with boys and men. Experiences with sisters were not so bad as experiences with brothers and likewise for female cousins and male cousins.

For boys, the picture is a little more complex. Homosexual experiences were more negative for boys than heterosexual experiences. But most of the heterosexual experiences were with peers, whereas a great many of the homosexual experiences were with older persons. Since we know that experiences with older persons are more traumatic, this very likely explains why the homosexual experiences were more negative. If we control for the generation of the partner, however, the difference in trauma disappears. Within the peer experience, for example, incest with a brother was less negative than experience with a sister. This definitely suggests that homosexuality as part of a childhood sexual experience does not cause more trauma in itself than an equivalent heterosexual experience.

One of the main implications of Table 7-2, however, should not be missed in this complicated discussion about homosexuality. Experiences with men are more traumatic than experiences with women. This holds true for both girls and boys. This and other differences in men and women partners were discussed earlier in Chapter V.

## TRAUMA AND PARTICULAR SEX ACTS

People are often surprised, we explained earlier, that adult-child sexual contacts involve so little intercourse. This fact is explained partly by the physiological difficulty of intercourse with a child and partly by the psychology of the men who seek sexual contact with little girls (See Chapter IV).

But in spite of this fact, in looking at child sexual experiences people still use the standard of intercourse to judge the seriousness of the sexual activity. It is a habit well ingrained. After all, penetration is one standard used to judge virginity, and it is used in some law to determine rape. In addition, most of us spend our adolescence being drilled in the difference between intercourse and other sexual activity by adults as well as peers so the notion gets deeply rooted.

Short of intercourse a very clear hierarchy of sexual "seriousness" exists in our culture. Sexual intimacy has a series of stages leading from kissing through breast touching to genital touching to intercourse and these stages have a surprisingly rigorous order to them and are surprisingly universal in America (Reiss, 1967). Most people assume such a hierarchy applies to childhood sexual experiences as well.

However, our data show (Table 7-3) that this hierarchy does not apply. At least, the seriousness of sexual activity as it is usually understood does not seem related

to greater trauma in children. Children who have been involved in intercourse experiences do not seem more negative about them than those who only had their genitals touched. In fact the most negatively perceived experience was merely being approached sexually. Intercourse certainly did not stand out as a particularly negative factor in an experience, and for both girls and boys, simple fondling was about as negative as any kind of actual physical contact.

[Table 7-3 goes about here.]

This is a rather remarkable finding. It gives substantial support to our decision not to rule out any experiences from consideration because the sexual activity seemed too minor. It suggests that the actual sexual activity involved is less important than the context of the activity.

This kind of finding should also alert people who work with sexual abuse victims. It is possible that adults may discount certain kinds of sexual experiences because they seem too innocuous. For example, Kinsey fell victim to this assumption, saying, "It is difficult to understand why a child, except for its cultural conditioning, should be disturbed by having its genitalia touched or disturbed by seeing the genitalia of another person" (1953, p. 121). Taking this attitude, adults may not recognize really upsetting childhood sexual experiences that did not appear

Table 7-3. Trauma by Most Seriousness Kind of Sex Act Performed

	Mean Trauma (a) Score for:	
	Girls (N=244)	Boys (N=86)
<u>Activity:</u>		
Invitation	4.3	5.0
Hugging in Sexual Way	3.3	2.0
Showing Genitals	3.1	2.6
Fondling Sexually	3.8	3.0
Touching Genitals	3.5	3.3
Simulated Intercourse	3.8	2.3
Intercourse	3.7	2.0
Other	3.5	2.5
	F=1.40	F=2.37*

(a) Scale: 1=positive; 2=mostly positive; 3=neutral  
 4=mostly negative; 5=negative  
 ANOVA: \* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001



so by adult standards.

Two other characteristics of the experience are also remarkably unrelated to the trauma. Longer experiences and repeated experiences do not seem to cause more harm (Table 7-4). Just because the experience runs on for some time and occurs with frequency does not necessarily imply that it is going to have a more negative impact. This violates some other assumptions about sexual abuse. If anything the shorter, one-time experiences were reported as more negative.

Actually there is a logic to this finding that is not apparent at first. What it probably means is that when a child is approached sexually and finds the experience highly negative, the child often takes quicker action to end the relationship, than if the child is feeling ambivalent. Thus the highly negative experiences occur once, and then they end. Children are apparently more assertive in terminating negative experiences, and keeping them from reoccurring than many would have thought. If children defend themselves in this way, it would certainly explain why short term, one time experiences might be reported more negatively than long-term, repeated ones that many would have assumed were more traumatic.

[ Table 7-4 goes about here. ]

Table 7-4. Trauma by Force Used, Was Someone Told, Frequency and Duration

	Mean Trauma (a) Score for:	
	Girls (N=244)	Boys (N=86)
<u>Force Used:</u>		
Yes	4.6	3.7
Some	3.9	3.4
No	3.0	2.7
	F=42.53**	F=2.99
<u>Was Someone told:</u>		
Yes	3.5	2.9
No	3.4	2.8
	F=0.27	F=0.02
<u>Frequency:</u>		
One time	3.6	3.1
More than once	3.3	2.7
	F=2.67	F=2.78
<u>Duration:</u>		
Less than week	3.6	3.0
Less than year	3.2	2.8
Year or more	3.5	2.6
	F=1.99	F=0.69

(a) Scale: 1=positive; 2=mostly positive; 3=neutral  
 4=mostly negative; 5=negative  
 ANOVA: \* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

## TRAUMA AND FORCE

If the kind of sexual activity and the duration of the experience do not make the experience traumatic, then what does? We have shown that the age difference between partners makes a difference. But isn't there anything in the nature of what goes on between partners themselves that affects the child's feelings about the experience?

Indeed, the most important factor in determining the trauma of the experience is an obvious one: was there force involved? When force was involved, respondents reacted to the experiences very negatively (Table 7-4). But when no force was involved they were much more likely to see the experience as neutral or even positive. Of all the factors we measured, the use of force by the partner explained more of the negative reactions than anything else. For girls, it correlated with trauma .53.

It is not surprising that force should be so much more important in determining trauma than sex activity or duration. Unlike force, sex activity and duration both are ambiguous in their implication. A longer relationship and a relationship involving intercourse indicate greater intensity. Intensity may be more harmful, but it could also be an indicator in some cases of a positive or, at the least an ambivalent, bond. The same is not true with force. The presence of force would almost always signal something negative about the relationship. It is a concise symptom of a whole negative context -- the reluctance of the child, the

pressure exerted by the partner, the difference in power and control.

When force is involved, it does not matter whether there was only fondling or whether there was intercourse. Nor does it matter whether the relationship took place only once or over a long period of time. The primary recollection of the child is of the coercion. That there was sex involved is perhaps less important than the fact that there was aggression. The child's primary negative reaction is to the coercion and aggression being unleashed against him/her, not to the violation of the sexual taboo.

If coercion, not the elaborateness of the sexual activity, is the main traumatic factor, this would appear to contradict one popular theory about the source of trauma in childhood sexual experiences. This theory holds that damage comes primarily from guilt. The more a child imagines that he/she had complicity in the affair, the more guilty he/she will feel, and the harder it will be to get over (McFarland, 1978, p. 94).

In this theory a child whose experience was brutal and coerced would be less traumatized than one whose experience was more consensual. The consensual child would have to deal with the fact that he/she somehow caused the experience to happen with all the attendant self-blame of such a realization. The coerced child, however, would know that the act had been against her will, and although perhaps more painful at first, would be spared the long-term harm of

guilt and self-doubt. (Benward and Densen-Gerber, 1975, p. 11). As one victim put it:

R: If it had been an isolated incident, especially if it had happened when I was so young, I would have understood I had no control. But it lasted so long, and it made me feel there was something in me that made him continue. It was my fault in the sense that this continued (Armstrong, 1978, p. 175).

This theory predicts the exact opposite of the findings reported here. On the one hand, it predicts more trauma for those whose experiences last longer and were more sexually involved -- both things implying complicity. And it would predict less trauma for those who were threatened or coerced -- something relieving a child of complicity. Neither of these predictions hold. Instead, the conclusion seems to be: it is not complicity, but coercion that causes trauma and determines how the experience is viewed retrospectively.

#### TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL

Guilt can enter the picture after the experience from various angles. A victim may feel guilty for participating as mentioned above. In addition, other people can reinterpret or label the experience, and thus create guilt in a victim where none had existed before.

The theory that other people make a child feel bad about the events is one of a set theories that emphasize that the main impact of a childhood sexual experience is determined by subsequent events. In such theories, what happened at the time is less important than what happens later on (Summit and Kryso, 1978). Later on, for example, guilt about the experience may come to be the predominant feeling. Or later on, other people reinterpret or label an experience, so that it comes to have a different meaning. Much of what happens later on is affected by the reactions of other people, and there is an interesting controversy surrounding what role third parties, like parents and confidants, play in the subsequent trauma, depending on how they react to the events.

A child may have an experience, for example, and not think much of it -- many things can be strange to a child -- until he reports the experience to his parents. When the parents become hysterical, interrogate the child, act as though a catastrophe has happened and perhaps blame the child in the process, suddenly the event assumes traumatic proportions it did not previously have (McCaghy, 1971). In this way, minor events can balloon into major traumas.

If one follows the logic of this theory, the healthiest course for many children would be not to tell their parents. Of course, ideally the children should tell their parents, and parents should react in a supportive fashion. But given that most adults in current society are likely to be

shocked, upset and anxious much as they try to hide it, it can be safely assumed that most parents are more likely to frighten a child than comfort her. Assuming such a parental reaction, proponents of this theory would tend to expect that on the whole children who tell their parents should be more traumatized than those who do not.

However, there is an alternative theory. This one hypothesizes that the most traumatic thing about such an experience is not being able to talk about it (Armstrong, 1978). According to this point of view, some people harbor the experience inside all their lives, unable to reveal it, and it leaves a permanent scar. Never able to get reassurance about the experience, never able to share it and find out what others think, they feel an ineradicable sense of differentness and stigma. Only by sharing the experience can the scar be healed. This theory predicts that children who don't talk about the experience should be more traumatized.

Our study supports neither of these theories. Only about a third of our respondents told anyone about their experiences, but those who did fared no better or no worse than those who didn't. For both boys and girls, there was virtually no difference in trauma between those who told someone and those who kept the experience to themselves.

One conclusion to draw is that perhaps it does not matter whether a child tells or not. Other factors about the experience are more important in creating trauma. This

would certainly contradict the idea (implicit in both the guilt theory and the reaction theory) that it is not what happens during the experience but what happens after that creates the trauma. Our data would indicate that the "during the experience" is probably more important (although we only measured one "after the experience" event: Did you tell anyone).

#### MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Various factors contributing to the negativity of an experience have been reviewed in this chapter: age, sex and relationship to partner, sexual activity, the use of force, the duration and whether anyone was told. In order to get a better sense of just how they compare to one another in affecting the negativity of the experience, all these variables were entered into a multiple regression equation.

A multiple regression equation allows us to see how closely associated two variables are, independent of the effect of other variables. Thus, for example, the data show that whether a partner was drinking or not made a difference in how negatively the experience was perceived. However, drinking contributes to trauma not in and of itself, but rather because all the only partners who drank in the sample were also adults and were much more likely to use force because drunk -- two other factors that are very crucial in producing a negative reaction. Thus the regression shows us which variables are really associated with the trauma, and



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which are just "reflecting" the effect of other variables.

Table 7-5 shows the results of the regression equations for girls and boys. They are consistent with what we have gleaned from an analysis of the individual tables in this chapter. In the experiences reported by girls, the overwhelmingly most important factor was force. After that, age of partner was also important.

The coefficients for other factors, although statistically different from zero, are so small as to be inconsequential in comparison to force and the age of the child's partner. The duration of the relationship made no contribution at all, and the seriousness of the sexual activity only added in a miniscule way to the trauma, confirming the surprising findings we mentioned earlier. Telling someone reduced the trauma slightly. Also an older child was slightly less affected. A more closely related relative actually decreased the negativity somewhat. But the only two factors that really had any impact on the trauma of the experience according to this regression analysis are whether force was used to gain the child's participation and how old the older partner was.

[Table 7-5 goes here.]

For girls, the regression equation explains 34% of the variation in negativity. This is a fairly high level of explanation for regression analysis of this sort. It

Table 7-5. Regression of Trauma on Characteristics of  
Childhood Sexual Experiences

Characteristic	Beta	
	Girls	Boys
Use of Force	.416***	.183**
Partner's Age	.313***	.041*
Told Anyone	-.068***	.026
Child's Age	-.064***	-.073**
Relatedness	-.024***	.046*
Homosexual	-.018***	.282**
Seriousness of Sex Act	.013***	.051*
Duration	---	-.220**
Multiple R squared	.345	.179

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

suggests that we have most of the important explanatory variables included.

For boys, the degree of explanation is not so great. Only 18% of the variance is explained. Boys appear to have been affected most, in addition to the use of force, by the duration of the relationship and whether it was homosexual or not. Homosexual relationships were more traumatic for the boys. Homosexual anxiety is generally greater for boys than for girls, so that it makes sense that the homosexuality should be a factor in boys', but not girls', trauma. Surprisingly, boys reacted worse to relationships of short rather than long duration. Probably, short relationships were unpleasant ones that the boys terminated, whereas the fact that a relationship lasted longer indicated that it had some positive meaning for the boys.

#### CONCLUSION

This chapter has cast doubt on many of the conventional assumptions about what promotes a traumatic reaction to sexual victimization experiences. In particular, there is little evidence from our respondents reactions that the length of a relationship or the presence of intercourse or other serious sex made the experience more traumatic. Experiences with relatives and more closely related kin were also not necessarily more negative than those with strangers and more distantly related kin, with the one exception of father-daughter incest. Nor is there any evidence that

being able to confide in a parent or friend about the experience eases the ultimate pain.

Only two factors stood out. Experiences were much more negative for the child if force was involved. And for girls, the older the partner the more unpleasant the experience.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS OF SEXUALLY VICTIMIZED CHILDREN

The literature on sexually abused children is rich in speculation in what is special in their backgrounds. But only once or twice in the whole history of this problem have the backgrounds of children who have been abused been compared to those who have not been abused within the same population.

This is something that needs to be done, and this is what we will do in this and the following chapter. We will contrast the family backgrounds of the 125 children in our sample who had experiences with older persons and the 671 children who did not. We will make a similar comparison for those who did and did not have incestuous experiences.

The kind of reasoning we will be applying is crucial for advancement of both the theoretical and practical parts of the sexual victimization problem. From the practical point of view, it is essential to know how the backgrounds of sexual abuse victims are different, 1) so we can more easily identify victims, especially since the circumstances of the problem so often defy identification, and 2) so that we can begin to conceive of measures to prevent sexual victimization in those environments where it is most likely.

From a theoretical point of view, if we know how the backgrounds of victims are different, we will begin to have a catalogue of things associated with sexual victimization that our theories should explain.

#### SOCIAL ISOLATION: THEORY

As we pointed out in Chapter III, one of the most prominent theories about incest relates it to extreme social isolation. Isolated families are more turned in on themselves, ingrown, and this situation is said to encourage family members to interact sexually. Where in other families sexual interests would be directed outside the family, in these families sex turns inward. Isolated families are also more insulated from public scrutiny, so they may be more lax about social taboos that other better integrated families more rigorously maintain.

However, from another perspective, isolation may not be the cause of incest so much as a symptom of other underlying causes more directly related to incest. For example, one frequently encountered point of view is that there are certain subcultures which are more tolerant of incest behavior. Such cultures, by choice or by exclusion, may make themselves peripheral to the social mainstream. Or isolation may be a symptom of poverty or family disorganization or social incompetence, since all these factors may cut a family off from full participation in community life. But whatever the cause of incest, a degree

of isolation is usually believed to accompany it.

Researchers, however, have only been able to marshal limited evidence in support for the social isolation theory. Of course, one of the most common stereotypes about incest is that it occurs frequently among isolated backwoods families, such as in the hollows of Appalachia or the rural reaches of Maine. The movie Deliverance capitalized on this stereotype, implicitly suggesting that the backwoods Georgians it portrayed had a deviant kind of sexual culture.

Theorists, too, have capitalized on the stereotype to give the social isolation theory plausibility. But the idea does have more substance than mere stereotype. Studies have been done on rural incest in Sweden (Riemer, 1940), in Japan (Bagley, 1969), Poland (Pilinow, 1970) and in France (Scherrer, 1959) and the similarities in these diverse cultures are great enough to lead Bagley (1969) to identify them as a phenomenon in itself which he calls "functional incest" in whose etiology rural isolation plays an important part.

But it is possible that incest is only more conspicuous in rural areas, not more common. There have been no surveys comparing incidence rates in urban and rural populations. The best evidence is highly inferential. Benward and Densen-Gerber (1975) found no tendency for drug-abusing incest victims to come from more rural regions of the country. On the other hand, the 20 incest families Tormes' (n.d.) studied in New York City were more likely to be



recent immigrants from the (presumably rural) South than a comparison group. Landis (1955) in his survey of childhood sexual experiences noted that students from rural and urban backgrounds reported not so much different rates as different kinds of sexual abuse experiences: urbanites encountered more exhibitionists and rural residents more fondling, but the differences were not large.

Certainly there is no dearth of incest and sexual abuse in urban areas (De Francis, 1969; Szabo, 1958; Weinberg, 1955). The reporting rates for such areas as New York and San Francisco are quite high, and studies in urban areas have had no difficulty finding cases. In fact, Miller (1976) in a large random sample of Illinois teenagers found molestation most common in suburban and least common in rural areas. So the evidence that incest is typically associated with rural isolation is of poor quality and inconclusive.

#### SUBCULTURE: THEORY

Isolation need not be geographical. It can also be social and cultural. One aspect of the social isolation hypothesis emphasizes that incest families belong to subcultures that are more approving of incest behavior. These subcultures are often geographically isolated; that is one of the ways in which they maintain their deviant values, but it is not the only way to do so. They may also be isolated in urban settings.

As with the rural incest, there are a few case studies of such subcultural incest. The Mormons of Utah in their isolated subculture apparently practiced incest along with polygamy up until the turn of the century when it was outlawed (Bagley, 1969). Weinberg (1955) in his study of incest in urban Chicago noted that there appeared to be an overrepresentation of Sicilian and Polish ethnics in his sample of court drawn cases, suggesting that they came from subcultures more tolerant of incest. Higher rates of sexual victimization have also been noted among blacks (DeFrancis, 1969; Miller, 1976). The theory of subcultural incest (like the subculture of violence) does give a simple explanation for incest behavior, but unfortunately the evidence is much too sketchy.

#### SOCIAL CLASS: THEORY

The evidence connecting incest and sexual abuse to poverty, in contrast, is much stronger, relatively speaking, although not in any absolute sense. Up until recently, virtually every study done on the subject showed the majority of incest and sexual abuse victims coming from deprived backgrounds. The mean income, for example, of families of sexual abuse victims was \$5100 (De Francis, 1969, p. 54) in the New York study of reported cases. Benward and Densen-Gerber (1975) found incest victims over three times more likely to come from families with income under \$7000 than members of a comparison group. The major

literature reviews (Devroye, 1973; Maisch, 1972) find extremely few cases of incest reported from the wealthier social classes.

This social distribution of incest and sexual abuse is certainly consistent with the social isolation hypothesis. Poverty can in itself be isolating, and it also tends to accompany other isolating circumstances such as rural residence and unemployment. But the connection of poverty with incest and sexual abuse may have little to do with isolation. Rather poverty may be an indication of crowding, family disorganization, social incompetence, all factors which have been connected to incest, independent of isolation.

Recently, however, there has been an outcry against the conventional association in popular thinking between incest and poverty. The new position is that incest is indeed common in middle and upper middle class families, but it has merely been better concealed there. On the whole, wealthier families are better organized, have more social resources at their disposal, and thus have been able to keep their secrets from becoming public.

The statistical association in other studies between incest and low-income, it is now argued, is a result of the way in which these samples were recruited. It is natural for low-income backgrounds to predominate in reports based on police records, court cases and child protective investigations, since it is low-income families who are the

main clients of these institutions (Rhinehart, 1961). As the taboo on discussing incest has lifted and as "respectable" mental health programs for treating the problem have been established, a massive amount of middle-class incest has come to light. The clinicians in these programs report no class bias among their clientele at all (Anderson, 1977; My husband, 1977). And in fact a study with a scientifically selected, unbiased sample did show that a large number of upper-middle-class girls had been molested (Miller, 1976).

#### FINDINGS

Our data cast some light on each of these questions. Tables 8-1 and 8-2 present the rates of childhood sex with older partners and incest for various socio-demographic subgroups, and show a comparison of these rates to the rates for the sample as a whole. Not all the subgroups identified in the study are presented here, only those of some theoretical interest, or those where an important relationship seemed to be indicated.

At the top of each table appear the rates for incest and sexual victimization for the survey as a whole.\* For the girls, 19% experienced sexual victimization, 28% incest and

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\*The reader will recall sexual victimization refers to experiences of children under 12 with persons five or more years older (or children 13-16 with persons ten or more years older). Incest refers to sexual experiences with relatives including aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nuclear family members and steprelatives.

1.3% father-daughter incest. For the boys, 9% experienced sexual victimization and 23% incest. There is some overlap between categories of incest and sexual victimization; they are not mutually exclusive. About 9% of the women fell into both categories as we have defined them. This was true for only about 2% of the men however. In their case, there is much less overlap between categories.

#### Rural Residence

What conclusions can we draw about the social isolation hypothesis from our data?

Here we have survey evidence for the first time that incest and sexual victimization are higher in rural areas. The subgroup in the sample with the highest rates was the group of girls who spent their childhoods on farms. Two-thirds of them had had an incest experience. Such children were over two and a half times more likely than the rest of the sample to have had an incest experience and over twice as likely to have been sexually victimized by an older person. The rates were high for the boys too, but given a smaller sample of boys, failed to reach statistical significance.

High as these rates are, they only apply to a small group within the sample; there were a mere 27 students from farm backgrounds. The smallness of the group does not vitiate the validity of the findings. The significance test takes account of the small sample size, and if anything,

because it requires a much larger actual difference to produce a significant finding with a small sample, the validity with a small sample is greater (Bakan, 1972).

[Tables 8-1 and 8-2 go about here.]

But the finding is not generalized to all rural residents, just those with farm backgrounds. Our sample, as we pointed out in Chapter III, has an unusually large representation of students from non-urban backgrounds. Most of these come from small towns, of under 25,000 in size, a kind of residence that is usually thought of as rural. However, it is not these small town residents that show particularly high sexual victimization and incest rates, but only those from actual farms. The rates for those from very small towns (under 5000) is somewhat elevated for boys, but not for girls. So it is something special about farms, not just rural areas. Since farms tend to be particularly isolated, this is strong support for the social isolation thesis.

However, there is one anomaly. In spite of the high incest rate, none of the cases of father-daughter incest occurred on farms. They still occurred primarily in rural areas, but in the small towns. Six out of seven father-daughter incest cases came from towns of under 5000. We have no ready explanation for the difference between father-daughter and other kinds of incest. The social

Table 8-1. Girls' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Older Partners and Incest for Selected Social and Demographic Characteristics

Subgroup	Older Partner (%)	Incest (%)	Father-Daughter Incest (a) (%)
Whole Sample (N=530)	19	28	1.3
Catholic (N=279)	17	26	-
Protestant (N=184)	24	31	3.3
Irish (N=88)	19	27	-
Italian (N=54)	19	28	-
French-Canadian (N=106)	17	29	-
English (N=179)	24	30	3.4
Town < 5000 (N=71)	24	28	2.8
Farm (N=16)	44*	75***	-
Blue-collar Father (N=326)	26*	34	1.2
Low Income (N=72) (Under 10,000)	33*	46***	.8
Father not HS Grad (N=91)	29	42*	1.1
Mother not HS Grad (N=77)	38***	52***	5.2

(a) No significance test calculated  
Chi-square statistic compares rate for subgroup with rate for sample as a whole.

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

Table 8-2. Boys' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Older Partners and Incest for Selected Social and Demographic Characteristics

Subgroup	Older Partner (%)	Incest (%)
Whole Sample (N=266)	9	23
Catholic (N=144)	5	25
Protestant (N=86)	5	22
Irish (N=40)	22***	28
Italian (N=15)	7	13
French-Canadian (N=52)	6	27
English (N=74)	15	24
Town < 5000 (N=38)	15	32
Farm (N=11)	18	36
Blue-collar Father (N=118)	4	22
Low Income (N=47) (Under \$10,000)	9	34
Father not HS Grad (N=49)	6	22
Mother not HS Grad (N=50)	6	26

Chi-square statistic compares rate for subgroup with rate for sample as a whole.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



isolation thesis would tend to predict equally high rates of all kinds of incest in the most isolated settings. Unfortunately, with our small subgroup of both farm residents and father-daughter incest victims, we cannot pursue the analysis any further.

#### Ethnic and Religious Background

To test whether incest and sexual victimization was a product of a particular subculture, we looked at the rates of incest for various ethnic and religious subgroups. These ethnic and religious subgroups are, on the whole, too big to constitute real incestuous subcultures. But even if pockets of incest tolerance existed within a larger ethnic group, these might show up in the form of slightly higher rates. Weinberg (1955) had noted higher rates for certain of his ethnic categories -- Poles and Italians. And some social workers in Northern New England have led us to believe we might encounter high incest levels among the French-Canadian population.

None of these immigrant, Catholic ethnic groups, however, had high incest rates. Rather it was the Yankee stock that showed consistently higher rates all across the board, although these differences are not statistically significant.

However, our figures do give one important piece of evidence for subcultural factors in sexual victimization. Boys from Irish backgrounds report an unusually large number

of sexual abuse experiences. They are almost 3 times as likely to have had a childhood experience with an older partner as other boys in the sample. This is a surprising and unanticipated finding.

Two additional facts should be noted about this peak among the Irish. 1) It only applies to boys. 2) It only applies to older partner experiences, not to incest. Since sexual experiences with older partners who are relatives appear in both categories, what accounts for the high Irish rate is a large number of homosexual sexual experiences with older unrelated men. Further inquiry is needed about whether certain aspects of Irish culture, (e.g., intense sexual guilt or the role of alcohol) can help explain this finding. We are not prepared to speculate on exactly what the subcultural factors at work here are, but our evidence clearly suggests that they exist.

#### Social class

Table 8-1 also supports the idea that for girls, at least, these forms of sexual deviance are more common among lower social classes. Three separate indicators of lower social class membership are presented -- father's occupation, family income and parents' educational attainment. All three show significantly higher levels of the kinds of childhood sexual experiences we have been examining.

But only for girls is this true. Only in the case of income, and only in the case of incest (not experiences with older partners) did class tend to make boys more vulnerable. Consistent with many of the other findings in the survey, the data for boys show much less coherence than the data for girls. So for the rest of this chapter we will be speaking, except where noted, of girls' experiences alone.

Occupation. The relationship between class and sexual experiences is weakest in the case of father's occupation, but then, blue-collar status is occupied by over half the fathers in the sample. Two smaller occupational groups show higher rates. Predictably, families with farmer fathers have high rates of incest and older partner experiences, and incest also is more frequent in families where fathers have no occupation at all.

Income. Lower income families also have markedly higher incest rates for boys and girls, and sexual abuse rates for girls alone. Such children are over 60% more vulnerable to such experiences than the ordinary child in the sample.

It must be borne in mind, moreover, that as we pointed out in Chapter III, our sample underrepresents and is not representative of lower-income families. The lower-income people it does represent are probably the healthiest and most upwardly mobile of that class. Thus, we suspect that in an even more accurate sampling of lower-income persons, the disproportion of incest and sexual victimization

experiences in that class would be even greater.

This is not to say that incest and sexual victimization are rare among the wealthier classes; quite the contrary. If anything, the fact that our largely middle-class sample shows a high incidence of incest and sexual victimization is evidence that indeed these things are common in the middle class. This seems to be the important point that many observers have been trying to make recently in arguing that incest and sexual abuse show no social class bias. They are both right and wrong: it is much more common in the middle-class than was previously thought and is not limited to impoverished environments, but it is still even more common among the poor.

Education. The figures for parents' education reinforce the findings from income and occupation. What appears to be interesting about the education figures is that mother's education makes so much more difference than father's education. In addition, families of poorly educated mothers manifested almost all of the father-daughter incest.

Since most spouses have similar education, different results for husband and wife education are a bit unusual. They appear to indicate something special about the mother's connection with the problem; that it is the relationship between mother and father and not just social class which is influential. For this reason, we will put off further discussion of this finding until the next chapter when we

take up internal family characteristics and their relationship to incest and sexual victimization.

Now that we know about the social class influence, could it be that our earlier findings on rural incidence and the present findings on lower-class incidence are just different sides of the same phenomenon? Is incest common on farms, for example, because people on farms are poorer? This does not appear to be the case. Controlling for high or low income, rates on farms still appear to be higher than in the sample as a whole. And controlling for urban-rural residence, low income still appears to contribute to incest and sexual victimization.

In conclusion, there appears to be substantial support for the social isolation hypothesis. We found incest and sexual abuse to be more common in rural areas. We also found at least one ethnic group with a peculiarly high incidence rate that suggests that subcultural patterns play a role. And we can give some substantiation to the belief that this kind of sexual victimization is more common among lower class groups.

## CHAPTER IX

### FAMILY BACKGROUNDS OF SEXUALLY VICTIMIZED CHILDREN

The family has become more and more important in attempts to explain sexual victimization, as we pointed out in Chapter II. Whereas once investigators looked only at what was wrong with the offender or what was wrong with the victim, today researchers ask who are the family members, how do they interact and what are the family values about sex and so forth. We outlined in Chapter II several rudimentary theories about how families contribute to sexual victimization. In this chapter we will see if we can cast any light on these theories by contrasting the family backgrounds of those who have been sexually victimized and those who have not.

#### MARITAL CONFLICT AND DISRUPTION: THEORY

There is hardly a social problem that has not been attributed to marital conflict and family disruption, and sexual victimization is certainly no exception. The literature is full of suggestions that children are more sexually vulnerable when parents fight or parents leave.

The stereotype that most quickly comes to mind is that of the "oedipal triangle". In this model incest occurs when husband and wife become estranged, and a father turns to his daughter for sexual outlet. However, since marital conflict is extremely common but father-daughter incest is not, we know that much more than this marital conflict and family alliances are necessary for incest to develop. Moreover, father-daughter incest constitutes but a small fraction of the total amount of sexual victimization we have been discussing (see Chapter III). So if marital conflict is connected to sexual victimization, there must be other mechanisms beside this "oedipal triangle" at work.

Other authors have proposed explicitly or implicitly three such mechanisms and they are the following:

- 1) When children grow up in families marked by parental conflict, they receive contradictory messages, especially about sex. This leaves them confused, unclear about appropriate sexual values, and less capable of handling themselves in potential abuse situations. They may be particularly vulnerable to older persons who entice them into sexual situations with offers of advice and instruction, and assurances about the appropriateness of the behavior (Weiss et al., 1955).

- 2) Similarly, in highly conflictful families or ones that have been disrupted, children are less well supervised, and under such conditions more vulnerable to sexual victimization (De Francis, 1968).

3) If the family has been disrupted by the conflict or if separation has been threatened, the children in the family may be anxious about losing loved ones. This may produce a kind of desperation in a child or "abandonment anxiety" and lead to a sexualization of ties to family members and other adults in an attempt to stave off loss (Lustig et. al., 1966).

No specific research has ever tried to investigate one or another of these mechanisms. But a number of studies confirm the general connection between marital conflict, marital disruption and sexual victimization. The empirical evidence comes mostly from clinical studies, and is thus subject to the clinical fallacy. But the finding has appeared consistently and has been heavily emphasized by investigators.

For example, De Francis' study of 250 cases of sexual abuse found that in 60% of the families, the children's natural father was not in the home. In 31% of the families the mother was the sole parent, and of the families where two parents were present, 39% were marked by moderate-to-violent marital conflict (1969, pp. 76-77). Similarly in one of the few non-clinical studies that actually had a control population against which to compare victims' backgrounds, Landis (1956, p. 17) showed that "collaborative" victims at least were more likely to report that their parents' marriages were unhappy. In another survey, Miller (1978, p. 87) found molested girls more



likely to come from homes where the biological father was missing.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTHERS: THEORY

A number of theories focus on how a mother contributes in various direct and indirect ways to the sexual victimization of her daughter. Such theories usually implicate the mother specifically in incest, either because she abdicates her maternal responsibilities (Browning and Boatman, 1977), or because she tries to exchange roles with the daughter (Machotka et. al., 1966) or because she is unable to protect daughters from their fathers (Tormes, n.d.) or because she knows about the incest but refrains from doing anything (Poznanski and Blos, 1975).

But it has also been suggested that mothers contribute to their daughter's resistance or vulnerability to sexual victimization in general, not just incest. When mothers do not model self protective behavior, do not provide daughters with information or do not adequately supervise them, the likelihood of sexual victimization is increased.

A number of studies have offered empirical evidence on the way mothers contribute to both incest and sexual abuse in general. Tormes (n.d.) reported that the mothers in her incest sample, had married younger, had less education, were more intimidated by their husbands and were more powerless than mothers of a comparison group. Gligor (1967) described the mothers of her incest sample as being more rejecting

than the mothers in the control group. Finally, Landis (1955), showed that the victims in his sexual abuse sample had poorer relationships with their mothers, and that these mothers were less educated and gave their daughters less sex information.

Miller's (1976) study dissents somewhat from the consensus of these earlier findings. She too, finds that girls with poor affective relationships with their mothers are more likely to be victims. But in her study mothers are no more important than fathers. In the case of either parent, if closeness is missing and supervision poor, molestation is more frequent.

In summary, two themes stand out in theories about the family contribution to sexual victimization: that marital conflict and inadequate mothers make children vulnerable. Both have received some empirical support. Can we add anything from our survey?

In Tables 9-1 and 9-2, we have assembled information to enable us to explore how family patterns may contribute to sexual victimization and incest. Both tables show the rates for these two kinds of sexual experiences among respondents with various kinds of family backgrounds. These rates can be compared (and have been with statistical tests) with the rates for the sample as a whole. Column 1 shows childhood sexual experiences with older partners (at least 5 years older for children 12 and under and 10 years older for children 13-16), what we are calling sexual victimization.

Column 2 shows experiences with both older and same age and younger family members (nuclear family, cousins, step-relatives, inlaws), what we are calling incest. (For more detail, the reader can refer back to Chapter III and Chapter VI.) As with Tables 8-1 and 8-2, not all comparisons are listed, only ones of some theoretical interest.

#### MARITAL CONFLICT AND DISRUPTION: FINDINGS

The evidence in our study is very strong that marital conflict and family disruption are associated with sexual victimization of girls. Female children whose parents had unhappy marriages had higher rates of experiences with older persons. So did girls who had ever lived without their natural mother or natural father before the age of 16. If their parents' marriage was unhappy, they were about 25% more likely to experience sexual abuse. If missing a father, the increased vulnerability was 50%; if missing a mother, increased vulnerability was nearly 300% that of others in the sample. This supports three of the theories mentioned earlier: sexual victimization is related to family conflict and to family disruption. Moreover, missing a mother is the most damaging kind of disruption.

Note however, that girls who were missing fathers or whose parents had an unhappy marriage were not likely to have more incest experiences; only more sexual victimization. This is curious. It suggests that of the various links between marital conflict and sexual

victimization, the abandonment anxiety theory mentioned above is not a good explanation. If a child were worried about losing family members, we might expect that it would be the family ties that would be sexualized first. Instead, what inceases most is sexual experiences with older persons who are not family members. Either of the other two theories presented above, the absence of supervision or the presence of contradictory messages about sex, might account for this increase with non-family members only. Neither of them imply a necessary increase in incest, only a vulnerability to exploitation. These are adequate to explain the connection between marital disruption and sexual victimization.

[Tabls 9-1 and 9-2 go about here.]

However, if we look at some of the other figures in Table 9-1 we will see how the situation of children in disrupted households is much more complicated. If it were mostly a matter of inadequate supervision or conflicting messages that made a little girl more sexually vulnerable in a broken family, we might expect that a reconstituted family would provide her with increased surveillane and consistent messages and hence increased protection. Nothing could be further from the case.

Table 9-1. Girls' Childhood Sexual Experiences with Older Partners and Incest for Selected Family Characteristics

Subgroup	Older Partner (%)	Incest (%)	Father-Daughter Incest(a) (%)
Whole Sample (N=530)	19	28	1.3
Ever Live w/o Father (N=86)	29*	35	3.5
Stepfather (N=30)	47***	33	6.7
Ever Live w/o Mother (N=19)	58***	53*	-
Stepmother (N=17)	35	35	-
Non-natural Brothers (N=32)	38*	44	3.1
Non-natural Sisters (N=30)	30	30	-
Large Family (6+) (N=121)	21	30	-
4 or More Brothers (N=38)	42***	40	2.6
Non-nuclear Family (N=143) In Household	22	30	.7
Crowded Home (N=137) 2+ people/room	20	29	2.2
High Father RWI(b) (N=235)	23	30	2.6
Father Often Ill (N=80)	25	31	2.5
Father Often Drunk (N=117)	20	23	1.7
High Mother RWI(b) (N=241)	23	32	2.5
Mother Often Ill (N=134)	35*	34	3.0
Mother Often Drunk (N=23)	26	26	4.3
Mother Nervous (N=358)	22	32*	2.0
Less Happy Marriage (N=155)	25*	29	1.9
Only Child (N=110)	19	10	-
Oldest Child (N=149)	17	25	2.7
Middle Child (N=187)	19	36	1.6
Youngest Child (N=144)	28	28	-

(a) No significance test calculated

(b) Role Weakness Index

Chi-square statistic compares rate for subgroup with rate for sample as a whole.

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

Table 9-2. Boys' Rates of Childhood Sexual Experiences with Older Partners and Incest by Selected Family Characteristics

Subgroup	Older Partner (%)	Incest (%)
Whole Sample (N=266)	9	23
Ever Live w/o Father (N=39)	5	21
Stepfather (N=12)	8	25
Ever Live w/o Mother (N=8)	-	50
Stepmother (N=5)	-	20
Non-natural Brothers (N=27)	-	26
Non-natural Sisters (N=23)	4	26
Large family (6+) (N=46)	17*	26
Non-nuclear Family (N=73) in Household	7	29
Crowded Home (N=61) 2+ people/room	12	30
High Father RWI (a)	9	21
Father Often Ill (N=43)	14	21
Father Often Drunk (N=39)	15*	31
High Mother RWI (a) (N=108)	11	25
Mother Often Ill (N=69)	10	22
Mother Often Drunk (N=15)	20	27
Less Happy Marriage (N=67)	8	19
Only Child (N=12)	8	10
Oldest Child (N=78)	5	17
Middle Child (N=89)	10	22
Youngest Child (N=75)	7	26

(a) Role Weakness Index

Chi-square statistic compares rate for subgroup with rate for sample as a whole.

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

Rather the addition of a stepfather to a girl's family causes her vulnerability to skyrocket. Girls who are merely without fathers were about 50% more vulnerable than the average girl. But girls with stepfathers were almost 250% more vulnerable. The addition of a stepfather has been shown to dramatically increase victimization rates in another study, too (Miller, 1976). Why would having a stepfather so jeopardize a young girl?

#### Stepfather Incest

The increased possibility of incest with a stepfather comes immediately to mind. Clinicians have noted that in many cases of "father-daughter" incest the offender was really a stepfather not a natural father. The situation is so stereotyped that even the true romance magazines have a well formulated opinion about how the dynamics work. A stepfather moves into a family with a sexually attractive girl who is a stranger to him. He does not feel himself to be really a father to this teenage or pre-teen girl he is suddenly living with. He has not had the parenting experiences with her as a young child, and so is more likely to respond to her sexually than paternally. Moreover, there is often a rivalry between daughter and mother at this stage so the daughter is competing for the stepfather's attention and affection. In such a situation, sex is a possible outcome.

Indeed our data give support to this picture. The rate of father-daughter incest is much higher in the families with stepfathers than in any other subgroup in the whole survey. Over 5 times as much father-daughter incest takes place in stepfather families as in the other families in the survey. The stereotype does indeed have some validity, and this is the first survey we know of to present evidence to this effect.

However, the numbers in our study are so small that this evidence must be accepted with a great deal of caution. There were but two cases of stepfather incest, and although this is large in comparison to the fairly small number of girls who had stepfathers (30), studies with larger base populations are needed to confirm findings like these.

#### Stepfathers Increase General Vulnerability

Exactly because the number of cases of stepfather incest is so small, it does not adequately explain the dramatic increase in the number of sexual experiences with older partners that occur to girls in stepfather families. If they were like the other families in the sample, the stepfather families should have accounted for 6 cases of sexual victimization. Instead they accounted for 14. But only 2 of those additional 8 cases were cases of stepfather-daughter incest. Something else is increasing the child's vulnerability.



Part of the explanation might be that stepfathers are not the only steprelatives living in such families. Stepfathers sometimes have sons and daughters that accompany them into their new families. Even when the other steprelatives are not brought right into the same household, the child is likely to be exposed to a new group of relatives on visits and family outings.

Steprelatives may be more likely to sexually victimize a child than natural relatives. When no real blood tie exists, older males may feel less of the constraint of the incest taboo. Once again, not having seen the girl in her childhood, these other relatives, as in the case of stepfathers themselves, may view her less as a child to be protected, and more as a sex object.

However, this explanation of the "stepfather effect" on sexual victimization is not really supported by our data. Most notably, having a stepfather is not associated with any increase in incest, just an increase in sexual victimization by older persons. In our tabulations stepbrothers and sisters, stepcousins, and so forth are counted as relatives, and so sex experiences with them would be counted as incest. If other steprelatives beside stepfathers were more likely to molest girls we should see higher rates of incest too for children in families with stepfathers. But this is not the case. Incest rates are not higher in stepfather families.

It is particularly noteworthy that sibling incest is not at all higher in families with non-natural brothers and sisters (this finding does not appear in Table 9-1 and 9-2). However, the presence of non-natural brothers (mostly stepbrothers) does, as in the case of stepfathers, increase the likelihood of sexual victimization. Once again, this is a case where steprelatives seem to increase vulnerability not because they directly take advantage of relatives but because other non-family members do.

Thus what needs to be explained is why in families with stepfathers and stepbrothers, girls have more sexual experiences with older persons who are not family members. Answers to this question are pure speculation, but there are three possibilities.

- 1) Stepfathers (and stepbrothers) may bring into the family a coterie of friends and acquaintances who are not so protective toward a stepdaughter (and stepsister) as they might be toward the real daughter (or sister) of a friend.

- 2) The problem may still be one of supervision. Instead of increased supervision, the entrance of a new father into a household may take up the mother's time and energy and actually mean less supervision of the child than previously.

- 3) Something in the "oedipal triangle" situation may make the child more vulnerable, such as a daughter's sense of betrayal and anger at the mother, rivalry, and so forth.

In fact, what needs to be explained is a problem that goes beyond sexual victimization. Other research has shown the stepfather-stepdaughter relation to often have a disastrous outcome. Women who had stepfathers have higher rates of divorce (Pope and Mueller, 1976, Table 4) and higher rates of psychological disturbance (Langner, 1962) than women who lost a father or never had one. These later life difficulties might well be related to experiences of sexual victimization or they all may have a common root.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTHERS: FINDINGS

Our data also give strong confirmation to the importance of mothers in preventing sexual abuse. These findings are very consistent with those reported in the literature and mentioned previously. The group of girls in the sample most vulnerable to sexual victimization was the 19 girls who at some time before the age of 16 had lived without their mothers. Fifty-eight per cent of those girls had been sexually victimized, three times the rate for the sample as a whole.\* Such girls were also more vulnerable to incest, although surprisingly, not father-daughter incest. So mothers do play an important protective function.

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\*Miller (1976) presents some findings quite at odds with this, showing in fact motherless girls to have lower rates of child molestation. She argues that this makes sense because these are girls who live in families which have been disrupted primarily by the mother's death, not by divorce with all its accompanying conflicts and rivalries. However, her question on family composition ("With whom are you living now?") is significantly different from the one asked in this survey ("Was there any time before age 16 when you did not live with your mother?"), and this may account for her divergent findings.

It reinforces this conclusion when we see that, unlike the case with stepfathers, when motherless girls then obtained a stepmother, their likelihood of victimization dropped. They were still much more likely than usual to have an experience, but the presence of a stepmother reduced the vulnerability somewhat, suggesting that the presence of a mother, even a stepmother, acts as a protection.

Not just mother absence, but also mother inadequacy can contribute to sexual victimization. Two findings are relevant here. In Table 9-1, we see that having a mother who was often ill is associated with more sexual experiences with older partners. And on Table 8-1, daughters of poorly educated mothers have about twice as many such experiences as is normal. Ill mothers, we presume, cannot supervise daughters and cannot be good role models. Poorly educated mothers may likewise be inadequate, and perhaps most importantly, in line with Landis' (1956) findings, they may not be able to give their daughters good sexual information.

To further test out the maternal inadequacy theory, we constructed an index of "role weakness". This index included questions about whether the respondent's mother was energetic, was ambitious, took charge of things, had problems with relatives, was nervous, ill, drank heavily or complained about finances. The index as a whole was not predictive of sexual victimization or incest, however, even though individual items were --- the main one being illness.

Of factors indicating maternal inadequacy, poor education and alcoholism were factors particularly associated with father-daughter incest. This is quite consistent with the clinical picture of father-daughter incest. In the case literature mothers are often described as weak, dominated by the fathers, unable to act in their own interest and on behalf of their daughters. The story of one of our interviewees illustrates well how mothers who are themselves victims have a hard time protecting their daughters:

R: My father was an educated man, and he was extremely critical of my mother because she had only a sixth grade education. He always corrected her grammar. That was the one big thing I remember. Every word he corrected the grammar of it.

She was very, very passive, very accepting, and indicative of this was the fact that she stayed with him through all those years, through all his running around, through all the abuse of the children and her. I mean she was physically beaten many times. And through the conditions she had to live with: no water, no food, being cold. I don't think she ever would have left him, ever. I think she would have stayed until he killed her. She was very passive.

I was embarrassed of her many times. I was embarrassed by the fact that she wore hair curlers to the market, for instance. And I didn't respect her. I didn't think she had much wits about her. Of course, that was very much supported by my father because I was the smarter one and he made me feel that way.

She was the first person who told me that there was anything wrong about what was going on. She called me in from the apple orchard once when she noticed that my father had asked me to take my underpants off. So I came in and she scolded me and said that was wrong. After that I started being aware that these things were wrong, so I started telling her what my father was making me do. I remember threatening my father, saying, "I'm going to tell mother if you don't stop." He probably chuckled too because he knew it would do no good to tell my mother.

I did tell her a couple of times and she didn't really respond. It was like anything, no matter what you told her, she never really responded about anything. I would say, "Gee, he did it again last night." And she would say, "This man, I don't know what I'm going to do about him."

I always thought that one of the reasons she never really made a big deal of his advances to us was because it relieved her of the sexual burden. I think she was also very concerned in a distorted manner for the welfare of the children. She figured if anything happened to him, she wouldn't have the almighty dollar. She had to weigh that. I think she was almost willing to sell her children for that financial support.

These findings, all together strongly suggest that the oppression of wives is connected to the sexual victimization of their daughters. When mothers themselves are victims, when they are not equal parents, they apparently cannot transmit effective coping and self-protective skills to their daughters. Such girls are more likely to be victimized both within the family, particularly by their fathers, and outside the family. In addition mothers play an important supervisory and guardian function. Girls who are without mothers or whose mothers are ill or extremely oppressed, miss the protection a mother provides. They are particularly likely to be taken advantage of sexually.

## LARGE FAMILIES AND OVERCROWDING

Theory

A favorite theme in the early literature on incest was that it took place in conditions of overcrowding. When many people were crowded into few rooms, it was hypothesized, privacy broke down, family members were much more sexually accessible to one another, and incest took place (Weinberg, 1955).

Weinberg criticized this oversimplified notion and showed that the ratio of rooms per person for his sample of over 200 incestuous families in Chicago was no worse than the average for the city.

Although the emphasis on overcrowding has abated, the idea that incest families and sexually abusive families are quite large has persisted. Tormes (n.d.) found that incest families had an average of 4.7 children compared to 3.9 for non-incest families. In De Francis' (1969) study of sex abuse victims, 55% of their families had 6 or more members compared to the 14% of such families that would be expected by census estimate. So the evidence about large families is stronger than the evidence on the overcrowding theory.

There has been little theorizing about why size per se (independent from crowding) might increase incest or sexual abuse. In large families increased sex abuse may be connected to the larger age span between youngest and oldest siblings. Younger children are more vulnerable when older siblings and their friends are beginning to experiment



sexually, and may not have learned to control sexual impulses. The difference in age, as with stepsiblings, means that the usual incest deterrents are not operating.

### Findings

We looked at several measures of family size and crowding to see what light they might shed on this discussion. Several of the figures are presented in Tables 9-1 and 9-2.

Within in our sample, crowding in families does not promote sexual victimization or incest, at least for girls. Boys from crowded families (ones which had more than 2 people per bedroom) have slightly higher rates of experiences with older partners and incest, but not enough to be statistically significant.

The situation is similar in the case of non-nuclear family members living in the household. We hypothesized that the chance for incest and sexual victimization to occur might increase if there were extraneous people living in the household -- grandparents, cousins, boarders. Such people would not only make conditions more crowded and effectively increase family size, but they are also people who because of their transience or more distant connection to the family might be less inhibited from taking sexual liberties with children in the household. Once again, this had a small impact on the likelihood of an incest experience for the boys, but it made no difference to the experience of the

girls in the sample.

By contrast absolute family size did significantly effect at least one kind of sexual victimization. The largest families were not riskier environments for the girls in our sample, but they were risky environments for the boys. The boys from families of more than 6 people reported twice as many experiences with older persons than was normal for the other boys in our sample. But surprisingly, they did not report an unusually large amount of incest. This is paradoxical, because our theories about family size would lead us to expect that it would increase sex within the family, not outside. It is also unusual that the size should affect the boys' experiences and not the girls'.

A further analysis shows, however, that this initial impression is misleading. Girls are in fact at risk in large families too, but only a particular kind of large family -- those with many brothers. When a girl has 4 or more brothers, she is twice as vulnerable to sexual victimization and about 50% more vulnerable to incest. She has to contend not only with her brothers, but obviously with many of their friends and playmates, and this exposes her to increased possibility of sexual victimization both from within and outside the family.

Hence, our conclusion is that an oversized family does contribute to sexual victimization, but not through the mechanism of crowding, as has sometimes been thought in the past. Some other factor -- the age span between the oldest

and youngest or the decrease in individual adult supervision -- must explain the phenomenon.

#### ORDINAL POSITION OF SIBLINGS

The literature on incest pays a lot of attention to ordinal position of siblings. It has been found that victims of father-daughter incest are almost always the oldest daughters (Tormes, n.d.). This fact illustrates well that father-daughter incest is not just a special alliance that occurs between a father and a particular daughter he may be close to. Rather, it is a family role configuration that is inherent in a particular kind of marital relationship. As the oldest daughter matures, she is being prepared for a role in such a family. Sometimes other daughters become victims too, but it is usually after the oldest daughter has rejected the father or left home.

No one to our knowledge has investigated whether ordinal position has any bearing on a child's likelihood of being sexually victimized in general. Within in our sample it was possible to do so, and the results appear in Tables 9-1 and 9-2.

Ordinal position is not related to a child's chance of being sexually victimized or having an incest experience. Although oldest daughters are the most likely choice of fathers, they are not necessarily the most likely choice of other male relatives. If any position holds a slight edge, it is the youngest who are most likely to be sexually

victimized and the middle girls who are most likely to have incest experiences. However, neither of these differences is statistically significant.

The pattern is similar for the boys. It is the youngest and middle children who if anything are more vulnerable, but once again the differences are small. The only conclusion to draw is that ordinal position does not make any difference.

#### CONCLUSION

Our investigation into the family backgrounds of childhood sexual victims and incest participants has yielded some valuable and provocative results. On the whole, they are consistent with other research findings to this point, rudimentary as these have been, but they have helped to make the conclusions more specific.

Marital conflict and family disruption are environments which contribute to the risk of sexual victimization. Being the child of an unhappy marriage, missing a father or particularly missing a mother leave a girl especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. In addition, a stepfather and stepbrothers, when they are present in the family, are associated with sexual victimization, not just because they themselves take advantage of a girl, but because they increase the likelihood of a non-family member also doing so.

Another conclusion that this research has reconfirmed is the importance of a mother's role in protecting a girl from sexual abuse. Girls without mothers are at very high risk, and so are girls whose mothers are inadequate or incapacitated because of illness, alcoholism or poor education.

On the question of crowding, the findings are more equivocal. Crowding itself does not seem to increase sexual victimization and incest, but large families do. The increased vulnerability due to large families is not that great however, and in the case of girls only applies to families where there are four or more boys in the family.

## CHAPTER X

### COMPARISON OF THE FINDINGS WITH OTHER STUDIES

In this chapter we turn our attention to two very commonly asked questions about the sexual victimization of children: 1) Is it increasing? 2) Is there any difference between the kinds of cases that are reported and those that are left unreported? To get some leverage on these questions we will compare the findings of our own study first with studies that have been done at earlier times, and second with studies that have only looked at reported cases of sexual abuse.

Given the inadequacy of almost all work that has ever been done on this subject, including our own, we need to recognize that these comparisons do not amount to "hard science", but are rather partially grounded speculations. We have some fragments of evidence that yield some plausible conclusions but they are of almost entirely unsubstantiated validity. Nonetheless, trying to answer these questions even with flimsy evidence, may be good intellectual preparation in anticipation of a time when we have something better to go on.

### IS SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION INCREASING?

Reports of child sexual victimization have been increasing dramatically in the last few years. Child protective workers all over the country report that they are overwhelmed by the influx of new sexual abuse cases. Whereas ten years ago there was hardly a case anywhere, today the reporting rate is increasing exponentially and shows little sign of abating (Giaretto, 1976). The situation has been called an "epidemic".

Despite the enormous increase, few observers have been willing to argue that the true incidence of sexual abuse has actually increased. Most believe what we are witnessing is a revolution in consciousness, a situation where, because of changed mores, professionals are more sensitive to identifying instances of sexual abuse and victims and their families are more willing than before to get help for their problem.

#### The Recent Past

The curious history of interest in the problem of sexual abuse does allow us to make some comparisons that shed light on this question. Unlike physical abuse, which has only recently worried the public seriously enough to prompt empirical investigation, child molestation experienced a wave of interest in the 1940s and early 1950s, which produced, among other research, two sets of survey data of fairly high quality and comparable to that reported

in the present study.

One of the studies was by Kinsey, who in the last wave of his interviewing, between 1947 and 1952, posed questions to 1200 women about childhood sexual experiences with adults. Although not analyzed in his 1953 book, these data were later analyzed by John Gagnon and appeared in an article in 1965. In the other study, Judson Landis conducted a survey of 1800 University of California at Berkeley students in 1952 on a similar topic. Although Kinsey and Landis gathered their data around the same time, Kinsey's effectively gives information on an earlier time period since his respondents were on the whole older. The overall incidence rates for only the women in these two studies and the present one are shown in Table 10-1. They show a marked decrease between then and now.

[Table 10-1 goes about here.]

#### A Decrease in Sexual Abuse?

Could this decrease be due to methodological factors? The methodologies although not exactly similar, are fairly comparable. Respondents in all three studies were college educated women, reporting retrospectively on childhood experiences. Landis used a questionnaire, as in this study; Kinsey as practically everyone knows, used personal interviews. The experiences counted were virtually identical, ranging from a sexual approach, exhibition,



Table 10-1. Incidence (per 100) of Childhood Sexual Victimization of Women as Reported in 3 Studies

Study	As Originally Reported	Under 13 Only	Non-Exhibition Only	N
Kinsey-Gagnon (1947-53)	28 (a)	28	14	(1200)
Landis (1951-53)	35 (b)	19	16	(d)
Finkelhor (1978)	19 (c)	16	15	(530)

Sources: Gagnon (1965): Table 3  
 Landis (1956): Tables 1,2

- (a) Children before puberty with person 5 years older
- (b) Children up to 21 with "adult sexual deviate"
- (c) Children under 12 with person 5 years older and children 13-16 with adult 10 years older
- (d) No N available for females. Males+Females=1800

fondling and genital touching, through attempted coitus and coitus. However, the studies show some differences in their definitions of "child" and "adult". For Kinsey (as analyzed by Gagnon) childhood sexual experiences with adults meant only experiences prior to puberty with a person at least five years older. Landis, however, had a broader definition that included adolescent experiences with adults, although he did not state a precise definition of adult (but says he excluded instances that appeared to be consensual). The figures from the three studies can be recalculated to refer to as comparable an age group as possible, the experiences of victims 12 and under. The three revised rates appear in Table 10-1 in Column 2. They still show a substantial decline.

#### A Decline in Exhibitionism

One important part of the decrease can be pinpointed more exactly. Both Landis and Kinsey-Gagnon show much higher rates of experiences with exhibitionists than in the current study: Kinsey-Gagnon 50% of the experiences, Landis 55%, compared to this study, 20%. The rates for non-exhibition experiences only are shown in column 3. (It was not possible from the published statistics to correct these for age as in column 2, but since Landis reports that the experiences with exhibitionists were much more common for the older girls, eliminating the exhibition experiences makes the Landis study more comparable in its age

distribution to the other two.) After eliminating experiences with exhibitionists, the findings of the three studies are remarkably similar. This would lead to the conclusion that the major thing that has declined over the last thirty years has been the incidence of exhibitionism.

But the large difference in the amount of exhibitionism between the earlier studies and this one may be due to factors other than a historical decline. Exhibitionism is an offense thought to be more often committed in urban areas, where the kind of anonymous public conditions conducive to the offense are more prevalent (Landis, 1956; MacDonald, 1973). The present study may be artificially low in its reports of exhibitionism because it has a large representation of rural and small town respondents.

However, a comparison within the current study of urban and rural students shows no difference in rates of experiences with exhibitionists. The decline observed earlier in rates of exhibitionism would still hold if we compared Landis' and Kinsey-Gagnon's findings to only our urban resident group and excluded the large rural contingent. So we think on the whole that the drop is better attributed to historical change than to urban-rural differences between the samples.

In fact a historical decline in exhibitionism has been noticed elsewhere (Kutchinsky, 1973), and is usually related to increasing social acceptance of sexuality. Studies have shown that many exhibitionists are motivated by the desire

to shock and humiliate their victims by exposing their genitals (Mohr et al., 1964). As people become more and more blasé about sexual matters, exhibitionists can no longer count on success. Hence, its frequency declines.

So the answer to our original question, is sexual victimization increasing or declining, is as follows: In the last thirty years the incidence of adults actually physically molesting girls has probably stayed about the same. The incidence of exhibitionism toward girls has probably declined. (However, two cautions pertain to this speculation. One, it only applies to girls. We have no comparative data on boys. And two, it does not apply to the experiences of children within the last five years or so, since it has been at least five years since even our most recent interviewees were children).

#### The Distant Past

If we extend our historical comparison further back into history, not a mere generation or two, but a whole century or two, we are almost certainly on solid grounds in asserting that child sexual victimization has decreased. Historians of childhood report that child molestation was probably the rule rather than the exception for children of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe (Aries, 1962; de Mause, 1974). For example, the detailed diary kept about the childhood of no less a personage than Louis XIII of France by his personal

physician reveals a child who was subject to the sexual whims of practically every adult in his environment, relatives and courtiers, not to mention servants and nurses (de Mause, 1974). Stone (1977) remarks that no one, including the child's parents, found this activity unusual. He doubts that this was a deviant developmental history, and thinks it likely that such sexual behavior toward children was a common practice of the period.

#### Social Change and Sexual Victimization

Taking now another speculative approach to the problem, how would we expect the incidence of sexual victimization to change given what we know about contemporary historical developments? Would the most recent changes in the nature of family and society be likely to ameliorate or to aggravate the problem.

Take for example, the increasing rate of divorce. The new willingness of parents (particularly women) to terminate unsatisfying marriages probably means that fewer children than before are trapped in brutal situations. And to the extent that incest and child molesting are connected with parental authoritarianism, sexual problems and marital discord, this would seem to bode well.

However, our findings and others indicate that loss of a parent or acquisition of a stepparent increases vulnerability to sexual victimization. There is some dispute about whether the current high rate of marital

dissolution deprives more children of parents than in earlier historical times when high mortality rates had a similar effect (Bane, 1976). But remarriage rates have undisputedly increased (Carter and Glick, 1976). So children today have more stepparents and may possibly live more often in single parent families, both factors conducive to sexual victimization. So the impact of the new family patterns accompanying divorce might either increase or decrease rates of sexual victimization.

Another phenomenon whose impact is ambiguous is the decline of extended family relations and the fact that children today grow up in contact with fewer people of older and younger generations. In such circumstances, children probably have contact with fewer adults (for example extended relatives living with the family) who would be in a position to take sexual advantage of a child's trust. But by the same token, there are fewer adults in the child's environment to supervise him or her and thus deter such situations from arising. So the change cuts both ways.

Finally, as we indicated in Chapter I, it has been argued that increased sexual freedom makes children both more and less vulnerable to molestation. On the one hand, under liberalized conditions, children learn more about sex and are better prepared to handle themselves. Fear and shame about revealing that something has happened should be reduced. The consciousness of parents and other caretakers will increase. And even potential child abusers may benefit

by having alternative and now less guilt-ridden sexual outlets.

On the other hand, sexual freedom appears to bring with it, at least in the short run, a greater sexualization of everybody, including children, as we have seen in advertising and in the recent blossoming of "kiddie porn". Moral inhibitions about all kinds of sexual activity undergo a loosening, and this may weaken the taboo against sexual activity with children too, especially among certain people with already weak controls. So sexual liberation too may promote sexual victimization of children, or it may lessen it, or it may do both simultaneously. This open question is one, unlike many others, that we may all live long enough to find out the answer to.

#### Sexual Liberalization and Sexual Abuse in Denmark

At least one study on another country shows that social progress and sexual liberalization result in a decline not an increase, in sexual abuse. Kutchinsky (1973) has done a meticulous analysis of police reports on child molestation in Denmark during the period 1959 to 1971. This period saw dramatic increases in sexual freedom combined with dramatic decreases in the number of reported sexual offenses. Kutchinsky tried to see if the marked decline there could be attributed to changed reporting practices on the part of public or police rather than an actual decline. Eliminating other possible explanatory factors, he concluded that some

of the decrease in child molesting has been real, and reflects the fact that in a more sexually liberal society potential child molesters have other alternative sources of sexual gratification.

It is curious however, that sexual liberalization occurred simultaneous to a decrease in reported cases of sexual abuse in Denmark, whereas it appears to be occurring simultaneous to an increase in this country. If sexual liberation in effect makes it easier to talk about such matters, and this accounts, as many have argued, for the particular reporting epidemic we are currently experiencing, then why did not a similar increase in reports occur in Denmark. This suggests that the social dynamics in the two countries relating the two phenomena are not the same. It will be interesting to know whether rates continue to fall in Denmark or whether they experience the same kind of rise they are experiencing in this country under the impact of what is increased international awareness about the problem.



## REPORTED AND UNREPORTED CASES

If the current "epidemic" of sexual abuse is really (or at least in part) an epidemic of reporting and not an actual increase in incidence, the question of why some cases are reported and others not becomes very interesting. All researchers believe that there are a vast number of unreported cases for every reported case, but what is not known is whether these unreported cases are very similar or quite different.

This is an important issue for both researchers and practitioners. Since most research has been based on reported cases, it is crucial to know whether there are special characteristics about such reported cases which would prevent us from generalizing research findings on their basis. For example, some people think there are a large number of "positive" adult-child sexual experiences, which naturally, never come to the attention of therapists, child protective workers and police (Nobile, 1978). Others think that what characterizes reported cases is not the presence of taboo sex but the presence of family conflict. If either of these things was true, what many researchers are analyzing as the "sexual abuse syndrome" would only apply to the limited number of cases that come to public attention, not to the apparently large majority of cases "out there".

For practitioners the question is of interest in the process of case finding. If unreported cases are different, then using profiles based on known cases as a way of trying to identify other unknown cases will not bring great success.

On this question there has been much speculation but little evidence. Some think that more serious cases are less likely to be reported than superficial ones. A family, in this view, will be less likely to report an uncle than a stranger, whom they have no desire to protect (Green, 1977).

Others argue the opposite however: that more serious cases are more likely to be reported. Families only involve outsiders when a truly difficult situation arises. Unless it involves great force, a case of exhibitionism or fondling by a stranger or a neighbor will be handled by the family on its own (Rosenfeld, 1977). Only under conditions of serious threat and prolonged family conflict do outside authorities become involved.

Answers to most of these kinds of questions will have to await much more sophisticated analyses than we can do here, analyses involving detailed descriptions and comparisons of cases that were and were not reported. However, it is possible to make some global comparisons using the study presented here, and studies that have been done on the basis of reported cases. Differences about such things as sex, age and relationship to victim may give some clues about the differences between reported and unreported

cases of sexual victimization.

There is one serious bit of presumptuousness to this procedure. We do not know for sure how many of the cases in the sample of the current study actually were reported to police or social agencies. No such explicit question was asked of respondents. Our presumption that the sample is made up mostly of unreported cases is based on two pieces of evidence. 1) In previous surveys of this sort, only a small portion of victims had had their experience reported to the police. Kinsey-Gagnon found only 6% and Landis only 10% of their victims had reported experiences to police (Gagnon, 1965; Landis, 1958). 2) Two-thirds of our respondents said they did not talk about their experiences to anybody, parents or siblings, let alone police. Since a virtual precondition of reporting to police is telling parents or some other adult, we can be confident that the experiences of at least two-thirds, and probably quite a bit more of the sample, never reached public attention.

#### Fewer Boys Among Reported Cases

In our study and in one other survey which questioned them, (Landis, 1956) boys revealed substantial number of childhood sexual experiences with adults, about 9%. This runs about half the incidence of experiences reported by women. Yet, most studies of reported cases display an overwhelming preponderance of girls. A ratio of ten girls to one boy, coming from the De Francis (1969) study is the

figure most commonly quoted in the literature. A great many studies fail to report on the experiences of boys at all, so small is the number of cases they receive. (For two recent notable exceptions see Queens Bench Foundation, 1976, and Swift, 1977).

There are many possible reasons why the sexual victimization of boys does not come to public attention so readily. Processes are probably at work at various stages along the route to "becoming a case" that screen out experiences of boys. For example:

1) Boys appear less likely to report the experience to anyone (See Table 4-3 and also Landis, 1956, p. 99). This may be because they feel greater shame or because they have been indoctrinated into an ethic of greater "self-reliance". In either case, if no one is told, the case is never reported.

2) Boys are older when they have their experiences (see Table 4-3 and Table 10-2) and thus less likely to report to adults.

3) Boys appear to be less frightened by their experiences (Table 4-3 and Landis, 1956, Table 5), and thus perhaps manifest fewer symptoms by which others might recognize their experience.

4) Professionals may be less prepared for the possibility of sexual victimization of boys and thus less likely to identify it.

5) Sexual victimization of girls may arouse a more protective response and thus be promoted to "case" status by various public and family authorities.

In short, there is a victim role for women in the society, into which women are cast both by themselves and others (Chapman and Gates, 1978). This may facilitate the discovery and establishment of cases of sexual abuse against girls more readily than against boys.

#### Younger Children More Often Reported

In Table 10-2, we have assembled the mean or median age (whichever was reported or calculable) of victims reported in various studies categorized according to whether the data came from a survey of the general population, reported cases or research on offenders. These last are in effect reported cases, which have made it all the way through the labyrinth of the justice system. The ages of victims are usually gleaned in such studies not from offender self-reports but from court records associated with the case (see Gebhard et al., 1965).

These studies more than amply confirm the finding reported earlier in this study that most sexual victimization of children occurs prior to puberty. They also confirm our finding that boy victims are on the whole older than girl victims (Table 4-3). But most important for current concerns, they also show a tendency for the ages of girls in reported cases to be younger than the ages of girls

in general survey cases. The average age for girls from reported cases is 9.1, but from general surveys 10.2.

[Table 10-2 goes about here.]

This is not an anticipated finding. Most observers have felt that younger children are less likely to come to public attention because they are less able to act autonomously, and that parents and other caretakers would try to protect them from the trauma of police or agency investigation.

However, it would seem from these data that it is the older children who are less likely to report. Possibly teenagers are more conscious of embarrassment and less willing to report. Perhaps cases involving teenagers are more morally and legally ambiguous, and both families and victims fear that blame for the sexual experience will be placed on the victim. Perhaps older victims have more control over whether, once discovered, a report is made, and act to discourage reporting. All these are mere speculations about why older victims would report less. Much more study of this issue is warranted.

Table 10-2. Mean Age of Victim in Selected Research Reports of Childhood Sexual Victimization

	Girls	Boys	Both
<u>General Surveys</u>			
Finkelhor (1978)	10.2 (122)	11.2 (22)	10.6 (144)
Landis (1956)	10.4 (531)	15.4 (215)	
Gagnon (1965)	9.9 (400)		
Benward(a) (1975)	10.3 (60)		
M =	10.2	15.0	
<u>Studies based on Victims' Reports to Public Agencies</u>			
Burgess et al. (1977)	8.8 (44)		
Queen's Bench (1976)	8.7 (89)	8.5 (42)	8.6 (131)
Peters (1976)			7.9 (64)
Weiss (1955)	9.9 (73)		
De Francis (1969)			11.6 (250)
M =	9.1	11.1	
<u>Studies Based on Incarcerated Offenders</u>			
McCaghy (1967)		9.0 (158)	
Gebhard et al. (1965)	11.3 (643)	12.8 (291)	
Mohr (1964)	9.4 (33)	12.2 (25)	10.0 (68)
Frisbie (1959)	8.8 (594)	12.4 (271)	
M =	10.1	11.8	

(a) Only sexual experiences with family members

Source and type of population:

Landis: Table 2. College students  
 Gagnon: Table 4. Adult women  
 Benward: Table 10. Female drug abusers  
 Burgess et al.: p. 237. Visitors to hospital clinic.  
 Queen's Bench: Table 1. Cases reported to police  
 Peters: p. 414. Visitors to pediatric emergency room  
 Weiss: Table 4. Psychiatric referrals from prosecutor  
 De Francis: p. 56. Cases in files of protective agency  
 McCaghy: p. 79. Convicted sex offenders against children  
 Mohr: Table I. Court referred offenders to psychiatrist  
 Gebhard: Tables 132, 133, 124. Convicted sex offenders  
 Frisbie: Mohr, Table II. Convicted sex offenders

### Likelihood of Report According to Relationship to Offender

As mentioned earlier, some have thought relatives would tend to be less likely to be reported when discovered; others have thought the opposite. Fortunately, quite a few studies have published figures on the nature of the relationship between offender and victim in the cases studied, and although they have not always used equivalent categories, Table 10-3 presents them in as comparable a form as possible.

The most striking feature about Table 10-3 is the variability in the findings. It is not easy to find uniformities in the table. But two hesitant generalizations hold.

[Table 10-3 goes about here.]

1) Cases involving parents are more likely to appear among reported cases than their proportion in the general population would indicate. 2) Offenders who are known to victims are more likely to be reported. Experiences with strangers are underreported.

Parents (this is mostly fathers and step-fathers) make up a larger proportion of reported cases for several reasons. For one thing, they are conspicuous cases, create concern, and are thus likely to be pursued by those who know about them until they become official statistics. For another thing, although many families try to contain



Table 10-3. Relationship of Female Victim to Offender in Selected Research Reports of Childhood Sexual Victimization

Study	Offenders Known to Child					N
	Parent (%)	Other Relative (%)	Friend (%)	Total Known (%)	Total Stranger (%)	
<u>General Surveys</u>						
Finkelhor	6	37	33	76	24	(120)
Landis		34		34	65	(531)
Gagnon	2	13	26	42	58	(400)
Benward	31-	42	27	(a)	(a)	(60)
<u>Studies Based on Victims' Reports to Public Agencies</u>						
Burgess et al.	56	44	(a)	(a)	(a)	(44)
Queen's Bench	14	9	33	65	45	(89)
Peters (b)	14	18	59	78	22	(64)
De Francis (c)	17	11	37	75	25	(250)
Weiss	33	7	45	85	15	(72)
<u>Studies Based on Offenders</u>						
Mohr	15	6	43	85	15	(33)

(a) Incest and near incest cases. No strangers considered.  
 (b) May include males  
 (c) Males and Females

Source:

Landis: p. 97  
 Gagnon: Table 5  
 Benward: Table 9  
 Burgess: p. 238  
 Queen's Bench: Table IV  
 Peters: p. 416  
 Weiss: Table 3  
 De Francis: Table 27  
 Mohr: Table V

knowledge about parent-child incest, the dynamics are so volatile and the potential for conflict so great, that they must be much harder to hush up permanently than other kinds of child sexual abuse. Thus even though the motivation for silence may be greater, the actual ability to contain it is not as great.

The underreporting of strangers is really an underreporting of exhibitionists. In Table 10-3, we see that Landis and Gagnon figures show a higher number of strangers compared to the studies of reported cases, but the present study shows a much smaller number of strangers. The Landis and Gagnon studies, as mentioned earlier, are characterized by a large number of exhibitionists compared to the present one. The present study's figures by contrast are quite in line with those from reported cases.

Exhibition may not be reported because children and parents do not take it seriously enough to bother. Moreover, once reported, the victims of exhibitionists are much less likely to be referred from the police to a social agency, since there is little role (or widely considered to be little role) for the social worker.

This is illustrated by the variation of the rates in different studies according to the kind of agency involved. The Queen's Bench study which was an actual police blotter count shows a fairly high proportion of strangers. Burgess and Peters, however, are hospital based studies, and probably see few victims of exhibitionists. Similarly, De

Francis' study was based on a child protective agency and thus was also less likely to be referred cases of "flashers". As the strangers are harder to locate, fewer of them are found and convicted and thus it is not surprising that fewer of them appear in the Mohr study of convicted offenders.

In summary, although it would appear that there are motivations for both reporting and not reporting cases of sexual victimization involving kin and acquaintances, on the whole the balance tips slightly toward reporting, as compared to cases involving strangers, where the balance is against reporting. No doubt the vast majority however, of both kinds of cases are never reported.

#### Younger Offenders Not Reported

Table 10-4 shows the age distribution and median ages of offenders for five studies: one general survey, two reported victim studies, and two convicted offender studies. The comparison shows that ages of offenders are lowest in the general survey and highest in the offender studies.

[Table 10-4 goes about here.]

As a caveat, it must be pointed out that only the ages in the offender studies are exact. In the studies based on victim reports, victims have mostly estimated the ages of their partners, often in situations, as with strangers,

Table 10-4. Age of Offender in Selected Research Reports of Childhood Sexual Victimization

Study	Age Group					Median
	10-19 %	20-29 %	30-39 %	40-49 %	50+ %	
Finkelhor (N=119) (1978)	34	24	18	17	8	27.9
De Francis (N=250) (1969) (a)	21	20	27	16	10	31.3
Queens Bench (N=123) (1976)	20	24	21	15	13	32.8
Mohr (N=53) (1964)	19	21	24	13	21	35.3
McCaghy (N=158) (1967)						37.3

(a) Includes offenders against both boys and girls.

Source:

De Francis: Table 23  
 Queen's Bench: Table VI  
 Mohr: Figure 2  
 McCaghy: p. 79

where they have had little time and little peace of mind in which to make their observations. For some reason such estimates might be systematically low and thus explain the fact that victim reports are lower than offender reports. But another feature of the situation gives a more compelling explanation: although many acts of sexual abuse are committed by juveniles, such offenders are not likely to be in prison. They are disposed of by the juvenile justice system, instead.

It is only a little harder to explain why offenses by younger persons in addition to not reaching the courts and prisons also are not so frequently reported to police and social agencies. It is likely that potential reporters -- adults, friends and parents -- are somewhat more reluctant to report a juvenile. They feel less threatened by the situation, realistically so, better able to handle the situation without recourse to outside interaction and perhaps even more compassionate of the offender.

#### Reported Cases Not More Coercive

This study has emphasized the importance of force and coercion in affecting the impact of the experience on a child. On this basis and on the basis of other analysis (Gagnon, 1965, p. 182), we might expect that one characteristic of reported cases is that they involve more force and violence. In cases of force the victim is more obviously a victim and others would be less likely to

suspect collaboration. That should be exactly the kind of situation victims and parents would feel most comfortable about reporting to police.

The comparison shown in Table 10-5, however, does not support this conclusion. A little over 50% of victims in this survey reported that force was used against them, yet three studies of reported cases find an average use of force that was about equivalent. The expected greater degree of force in reported cases does not show. In a study done of offenders, the use of force in these reported cases was even found to be much lower. But this finding should probably be discounted, since offenders are likely to minimize the extent to which they coerced their victims.

If we consider more critically this finding of no greater reporting of incidents involving violence however, it is hard to know whether equivalent evaluations of force are used in the various studies. The present study, for example, relied on respondents' own perception of whether force or threat of force was used. The other studies do not indicate how they arrived at their determination, but it is likely that they used different criteria. So our figure may be inflated with respect to the others, and the comparison shown in Table 10-5 inaccurate.

[Table 10-5 goes here.]

Table 10-5. Use of Force or Threat of Force in Selected Research Reports of Childhood Sexual Victimization

	Force or Threat (% of cases)	N
Finkelhor (1978)	55	(144)
Queen's Bench (1976)	44	(131)
Peters (1976)	31	(64)
De Francis (1969)	60	(250)
McCaghy (1967)	24	(158)

Source:

Queen's Bench: Table VI

Peters: p. 48

De Francis: Table 11

McCaghy: p. 80

Reported Cases: Conclusion

We have assembled here some fragmentary evidence of the ways in which reported cases differ as a group from the cases of child sexual victimization one finds in the population at large. Girl victims are more often reported to police and social agencies, also younger children, and cases where the offender is known, or an older person or a parent. We also saw that reported cases are not necessarily more violent cases. Interesting as this evidence is, it is not adequate to answer concerns about whether reported cases are so special as to undercut any attempt to extrapolate from discovered to undiscovered instances of sexual victimization.

Unfortunately, we are still a long way from knowing why some cases get reported and others do not -- our original question. What is missing from this analysis is an appreciation of the process involved in a case coming to public attention. Like the branching of tracks in a railroad yard, some cases must take a route past a set of crucial junctures that lead to them becoming reported, while others become permanently sidetracked at one or another point.

Some of these crucial junctures might be: 1) The degree of discomfort the child feels about the situation. 2) The confidence the child feels about being able to get some remedy for the situation by telling versus the fear the child feels of the possibility of being hurt or blamed. 3)



The family dynamics surrounding the sexual victimization. Situations of intense family conflict may work either to stifle reporting or to promote it, depending on power relations within the family. 4) Family members' and even the local subculture's attitudes to bringing in outside authorities. This may depend in part on whether such agencies are connected to or remote from the family's operating network.

Finding out about some of these things is a high priority. As they become known, they will certainly help to explain some of the conclusions we have brought to light here.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

The last ten chapters have touched on many issues. We shall review some of the salient findings of the study, and then try to draw them together in a commentary on some of the questions posed at the outset.

#### FINDINGS REVIEWED

This study should leave no doubt that a large number of children are sexually victimized. Nearly one in five girls and one in eleven boys say they have had a sexual experience as a child with a much older person. The experiences cut across social class and ethnic lines, and involve children of all ages. Boys as well as girls are frequent victims.

Boys' experiences are somewhat different from girls'. They are primarily homosexual. They less often involve family members. But boys do seem to be the victims of force and coercion just as often as girls. Both girls and boys report that in over half the experiences some form of coercion was used.

It is preadolescent children who are the most vulnerable. The youthfulness of the children who are most often victimized suggests to us that it is not the onset of physiological puberty that makes children prone to sexual

victimization. Rather, we theorize that it is the independence of pre-adolescents and their inexperience with newly learned sex-role gestures that accounts for why this age group is so vulnerable.

The experiences are perceived primarily in the negative. Girls feel more negative about their experiences than boys do, however. Very few children of either sex say anything about their experiences to anybody. Most are afraid that parents will be angry or will blame them for what happened.

The victimizers are mostly men, and a very small number of women. They are more often young than old. Contrary to the image of the child molester, a large number are friends and relatives of the children they victimize. About 75% of the girl victims know their older partners. Almost half are family members.

Parents and siblings are all too often the culprits. If this sample is any estimate of the population as a whole, about one and a half per cent of all women have had incest with a father. As many as five per cent have been victimized by a much older person within their nuclear family. Even in cases where incest took place between siblings and cousins, we find that often there is a great age disparity between partners and in many cases force is used.

Very few women are reported as older partners to the children in the sample. We argue that this is not because women play a physiologically passive role in the sex act, but because women have a different orientation toward sex and toward children. In the case of the few female offenders in the sample, however, children's experiences with them are not very different from their experiences with men. Yet the experiences with women are somewhat less traumatic, and for some of the boys they are pleasurable "initiation rites".

The study found that the sources of trauma in the experiences are not quite so obvious as many others have thought. Based on respondents ratings of the experiences, neither the duration of the relationship, the seriousness of the sexual activity nor the degree of family closeness of the partner directly relate to the negative perception about the experience by girls. (However, father-daughter incest is by far the most traumatic type relationship). The factor that produces the most trauma is the use of force. Next to force is the age of the partner. The experiences get worse as the partners get older. From these findings, we conclude that it is not true that children end up feeling worse about experiences they have somehow cooperated in. Rather they feel worse about experiences that are intrinsically unpleasant.

The study confirms various long-standing impressions about the kinds of backgrounds most commonly associated with sexual abuse. Social isolation is connected to victimization, as demonstrated by the large number of victims among those who grew up on farms. People from low income families are more often affected. At least one ethnic group -- the Irish -- displays particularly high rates of victimization for boys, indicating that some subcultural factors may contribute to a child's vulnerability.

A child's parents play a crucial role in affecting her likelihood to be sexually victimized. Girls whose mothers are absent, sick, or poorly educated, run a particularly high risk. Similarly, having a stepfather increases a girl's chances of being sexually abused, not just by the stepfather, but by other persons outside the family. Where the parents' marriage is unhappy, rates are also high.

Comparing this study to some earlier ones, we are able to marshal evidence that sexual victimization of children has not increased in the last thirty years. Offenses involving actual physical contact have stayed at about the same level over this period, while the number of experiences with exhibitionists has probably declined. The fact that sexual victimization of children has not increased despite the decline in sexual restrictions over the last generation is a good sign, but we do not know whether it holds true for the last five years or whether it will continue to hold true

in the future. Certain recent changes in family life like increases in the number of compound families may have the potential to create a rise in the amount of sexual victimization.

Based on a comparison of this study with agency based studies, some interesting differences were found between reported and unreported cases of sexual victimization. Reported cases involve fewer boys, younger children, and offenders who are both older and more likely to be relatives.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

##### Incidence

We have devoted a great deal of attention in this study to gathering descriptive data about childhood sexual victimization experiences. We have shown how widespread they are. But the sample leaves something to be desired in the study, casting some doubt on whether these results are generalizable to other groups. One obvious priority for future research is to obtain better estimates of the incidence of sexual victimization using more refined sampling techniques. Miller's work (1976) and also Gagnon's (1977) suggest that interviews of randomly chosen respondents, adolescents or college students, can be done. A sample such as one of theirs combined with a questionnaire as detailed as the present one might produce some excellent results.

The frequency with which boys are victimized is another important finding of the study. The extent of the sexual victimization of boys would appear to be widely underestimated. More work is needed on this subject; a good start would be a survey with a much larger sample of men. The experiences of boys need to be looked at in comparison to the experiences of girls, particularly with an eye to deciding whether boys' experiences are as "victimizing" as girls'. If indeed, as we tend to believe, boys' experiences are similar to girls' in this respect, then public energies need to be mobilized to find and intervene in the large number of cases where boys are victims.

Despite its usefulness in uncovering findings such as this, the descriptive and statistical approach needs to be counterbalanced by a study of how such experiences are perceived by the victims themselves. In probing this, there is much to be learned about childhood and the nature of sexual development. In the testimony of victims themselves, there are also certain to be new insights about the causes of the problem. The second phase of this study, the analysis of interviews with victims, should begin to fill this need.

### Trauma

This research has challenged some assumptions about what is traumatic about sexual victimization experiences. Chapter VII offered substantial evidence that certain classic features of these experiences such as how long they lasted or whether they involved intercourse did not predict the degree of trauma.

In the future, this whole matter of trauma needs to be approached in a much more complicated, multi-dimensioned way. First we need to assess trauma with more objective indicators, ones based on life experiences and life adjustment, as well as on the kind of subjective measures we have used here.

Second, a complex causal analysis needs to be done. Efforts have to be made to distinguish the trauma causing factors in the general environment -- poverty, family disruption, social and emotional isolation -- from the traumatic features of the sexual experience itself. We need to distinguish the trauma induced by the experience itself from the trauma induced by the reactions of friends, family and institutions. The problem is certain to involve conditional relations and interaction effects that need to be disentangled.

Our understanding of trauma could best be enhanced by a longitudinal study, perhaps as part of a whole family study, which managed to observe children prior to and subsequent to experiences of sexual victimization. Such studies are



expensive, invasive and rare. In their absence, regression techniques on survey information can be used to good advantage to get at some of the complexities alluded to.

### Historical Trends

We have suggested that important theoretical implications can be derived from knowledge about whether sexual victimization is increasing or decreasing over time. The findings of this study compared to those done a generation ago suggest that rates have stayed the same, or in the case of exhibitionism, dropped. However, other of our findings suggest that changes in contemporary family life -- for example increasing numbers of compound families and increasing social isolation -- could potentially spell a rise in the amount of sexual abuse. Unfortunately, it is hard to obtain statistics for a past that is now out of reach. However, we can certainly do studies which compare the experiences of cohorts of people of different ages who are still alive today. And we can begin to compile statistics that will be of use in answering this question in the future. Both these things need to be done.

### Why Are Cases Reported?

This study has illustrated one approach to discovering whether reported cases of sexual victimization are consistently different from unreported cases. The findings of this study, most of whose cases are unreported, were

compared to findings from studies of reported cases. Reported cases appear to differ in that they involve fewer boys, younger children and offenders who are older and more likely to be relatives.

This whole topic of inquiry needs to be extended, but by some methods that yield more trustworthy results. For example, if a large enough sample can be taken of a normal population, an analysis could be made contrasting the reported and unreported cases within that same sample. The problem here would be getting a large enough group of reported cases.

Moreover, as we suggested in Chapter X, reporting needs to be examined as a process, not just an an outcome. An experience of sexual victimization has the opportunity of becoming reported at various junctures. Various forces influence whether it is more or less likely to happen. We need to study the factors and conditions that determine who tells whom about the experiences and how these decisions culminate in a case that is "official".

#### A Theory of Sexual Victimization

Ultimately we return to the question, why are children sexually victimized. Unfortunately, we do not believe it is going to be possible to find a simple one or two factor explanation for this problem. We need to recognize, as some are beginning to do (Summit and Kryso, 1978), that there are many different kinds of sexual abuse, and that each kind may

require a separate explanation. For sexual victimization that occurs in isolated rural areas, we will need one kind of explanation that takes into account the effects of isolation or an unusual subculture. For sexual victimization that occurs as part of a psychotic episode, we would be better off with an explanation based on individual psychology, how certain patterns of development lead to such behavior.

This study cannot distinguish well among the many different types of sexual victimization that are represented in its sample. In that respect, it does not have a good vantage point from which to theorize. More importantly, it was not part of the design of this research to articulate and test theories. As an exploratory study in an area of little research, its objective has been to describe some of the main features of a kind of experience about which all too little is known. Still, the findings can point the way for future theoretical developments. What follows are suggestions for directions to pursue in future attempts to explain sexual victimization.

We hope we have firmly established the idea that the family plays a crucial part in creating vulnerability to sexual victimization. In Chapter II, we tried to show that it was increasingly the consensus in the literature that attempts to understand sexual abuse must focus on the family environment. And in Chapters VIII and IX, we demonstrated that there are indeed family factors that are empirically

associated with higher rates of sexual abuse -- family size, ethnicity, social class and family composition. More efforts need to be made to apply what we know about other aspects of the family -- family interaction, socialization, the development of values specific to individual families, power relationships among family members, the strains of parenting, and so forth -- to understanding why some children are sexually victimized.

Mothers. Based on the findings here, we believe special attention ought to be paid to the relationship between mothers and daughters. Our data show that girls without natural mothers are particularly vulnerable to sexual victimization, as are the daughters of poorly educated, ill and alcoholic women. Girls without mothers or with incapacitated mothers are probably not well protected or supervised. Their education about sexual matters may well be incomplete. They lack strong models from whom they can learn how to defend themselves. In fact, since their mothers may be victims of various sorts, the girls' most available model may be that of woman as victim.

It is a highly plausible inference from this finding that the oppression of women as wives and workers promotes the sexual victimization of their daughters. If girls are going to learn self-protective coping behavior, especially in sexual situations, they will have to do so from their mothers. When mothers themselves are demoralized and disorganized, victims themselves in their relationships with

husbands and other men, they are in a poor position to transmit these skills. This is a good example of how the oppression of women can have repercussions that extend for generations, affecting not only the women themselves, but their children and conceivably their grandchildren.

More research is needed on this possible connection between the oppression of wives and the victimization of daughters. More substantial indicators of sexual inequality and incapacitation than the ones used here need to be employed. For example, is sexual victimization more common in families where husbands beat their wives? Where large inequalities exist in matters of family decision-making? Where wives have no income?

Moreover, more needs to be known about the way in which the mother-daughter relationship provides protection against sexual victimization. Is it the direct supervision and concern a mother maintains over her child? Is it the education and information she provides? Is it the modeling of coping behavior? The testimony of victims on their relationships with their mothers will be helpful in deciding among the alternatives, but actual observations of mother-child interactions could provide us with the richest source of information on this subject.

Stepfathers. Another intriguing family factor highlighted in this research is the role played by stepfathers. Girls with stepfathers suffer higher rates of sexual victimization. And although the stepfathers

themselves account for some of the increased victimization, that is not the whole story. Such girls are also more vulnerable to victimization by persons from outside the family.

Future research needs to give us a more detailed understanding of why this is so. One can imagine various connections. The key problem may be in the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship itself. This relationship may be a very easily sexualized one. And once sexualized, it may lead to a girl's victimization either at the hands of the stepfather or at the hands of other men as she transfers to the outside, styles of relating she has learned inside the family.

On the other hand, the difficulty may arise via the girl's mother. A girl who watches her mother go through courtship and remarriage learns things about sexual behavior other girls may not learn. Perhaps by imitating this prematurely she attracts potential sexual abusers. Or even more simply, perhaps a girl is angry with or jealous of a mother who remarries. Vulnerability to sexual victimization may develop from the emotional conflict.

Or maybe the environment of remarriage is somewhat precarious as far as sexual victimization is concerned. A child may be poorly supervised. A child may be exposed to more strangers, and more relatives.

In any case, our findings here fit into the pattern of previous knowledge about the relationship between stepfathers and stepdaughters which show that girls with stepfathers often have later life difficulties with mental and marital instability. The fact of sexual victimization is another piece of a puzzle which needs to be explained.

Social Isolation. Social isolation is an important ingredient in some kinds of sexual victimization. We have pointed out how research on different aspects of the problem has converged on social isolation as a possible cause. And our finding in Chapter VIII that girls from farm backgrounds are more commonly victims supports this analysis.

We think the concept of social isolation needs to be understood in a broad sense. It should include not just geographic isolation, but isolation due to poverty, family constellation, shyness or unusual value systems. Such isolation may foster sexual victimization because family members take advantage of one another for sexual gratification, because such families develop deviant values which encourage victimization or because such families are not exposed to community supervision. These different possibilities need to be disentangled.

It also seems a strong possibility that social isolation, while associated with sexual victimization may not be a causal factor in it at all. It may be a spurious association. In other words, other problems -- poverty, unusual values, or family disorganization -- may be

responsible for both the sexual victimization and the isolation. Even if it is not a causal factor, however, knowledge about the connection between social isolation and sexual victimization will be important to pursue because of its usefulness to the process of prevention and case identification.

Research needs to be done to establish more clearly the aspects of social isolation that are associated with sexual victimization. Are weak ties with extended family, or children with few friends and outside contacts, or few organizational and community involvements indicators of the kind of family where sexual victimization is most common? We need to refine our understanding of what is social isolation.

If, in fact, there are communities, for example in rural areas, where incest and sexual abuse are more common, it might be extremely fruitful to conduct in-depth studies of these communities. Hard as it might be to penetrate these communities, such a study would be likely to give us a clearer picture of the sources of at least one particular type of sexual abuse.

#### SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION AND FAMILY SEXUALITY

In Chapter I, we pointed out that there may develop a controversy about the wisdom of increasing sexual openness and interaction among family members. Specifically the issue pits certain sex reformers, who are eager to free



society from the burden of sexual repression, against those concerned with the large amount of sexual trauma sustained by children at the hands of family members.

We suggested several questions that had bearing on this debate, among them: 1) Is sexual abuse the consequence of too much sexual repression in the family or not enough? 2) Is there evidence that enhanced family sexuality promotes benefits in family life and in subsequent personal development? 3) Is sexual contact among family members harmful to children, and if so, does it stem from something intrinsic to families or only to the prejudices of our culture about such experiences? and 4) Are the benefits and dangers of sexual openness in the family of equal magnitude for men and women?

Although nothing from this study gives a conclusive answer to any of these questions, it is interesting to look at the findings in light of these questions. Do the findings tend toward one point of view or another? Do they suggest other avenues of research?

The strongest argument in the research in favor of liberalizing family sexuality is the evidence that sexual victimization has not increased in the last thirty years. Society as a whole, and families in particular, have undergone dramatic liberalizing in that period. Sexual oriented media has become much more available. Sex is now more freely discussed. Attitudes toward childhood sex play and masturbation have relaxed. If these changes have not

increased, and have in fact possibly decreased the number of children who are sexually abused, then further liberalizations may also take place without harm.

Of course, these changes of the last three decades have not sexualized the family quite so directly, as would some of the more zealous proposals now being made. There may be little correspondence between the effects produced by an increased toleration of masturbation and those produced by overt displays of parental sexuality in front of children -- the kind of family sexualization now being proposed in some cases.

In favor of the point of view concerned with protecting against sexual abuse, on the other hand, one must cite the sheer quantity of sexual victimization. This burden does not fall equally on all children; girls sustain the disproportionate share. The data here suggest one girl in five is a victim during childhood. On top of that, studies have shown that over half of all college women report being the victim of sexual aggression during college (Kanin and Parnell, 1977), and the Justice Department estimates that two women per thousand are raped every year (Schultz, 1977). The chances that any given woman will encounter sexual victimization in her lifetime are quite high. This would certainly argue in favor of a policy that gives priority to reducing harm before experimenting with new freedoms.

Of course, some have argued that increased family sexual openness is the road to reducing victimization as well. In this view, sexual abuse is the result of too much repression. More controls, in an effort to promote the protection of women, will only aggravate matters.

One finding from the study supports the idea that more repression does lead to more victimization. We know from this study that lower-class families display more sexual abuse. We also know that they are much more sexually repressive (Newson and Newson, 1968; Sears et al., 1957). It is possible in such families that the repressive atmosphere leads to the abuse, but there are many other reasons why we might find both in lower-class families.

On the other hand, much other evidence from this study points to the conclusion that it is weak controls rather than tight controls that are associated with sexual victimization. For example, victimization is more common when mothers are weak, absent or sick, possibly because such women cannot enforce norms and protect their daughters. It also occurs more often in the presence of stepfathers, possibly because they and their affiliated kin feel less strongly the sanction of the incest taboo. When sexual abuse occurs in rural situations where it is apparently more frequent, it may be because the family is isolated from community supervision. Or when it takes place in a large family, it may be due to a similar lack of supervision.

We know well by now that responsible behavior is not merely produced by rigid rules of correct conduct. But we also know that in many contexts, especially where people are not otherwise well integrated into family and community, weakening of norms or social supervision can result in an increase of anti-social behavior. There is some reason to be concerned, on the basis of the findings indicated here, that a weakening of taboos on sexual interaction between adults and children would have that effect in some family environments.

What about the idea that the harm of adult-child sex is mostly in the societal reaction, that the experience becomes traumatic only because people react to it as being so? This is a point of view in favor of deemphasizing the dangers of family sex and encouraging a freer, less self-conscious family atmosphere. What we can contribute, on the basis of the present study, is the assurance that within our own culture these experiences are certainly negative ones. In the majority of cases, they are foisted on the children, they involve force and coercion at least of a psychological sort, and they are reacted to negatively especially by the girls. In our statistical profiles of the experiences, there is not any room for romanticizing these experiences. There is clear evidence that they are noxious and traumatic.

The discomfort may be aggravated by the reaction the child receives from others about the experience. However, our study finds that there is much that is discomforting

within the experiences themselves, independent of the reaction of others. In short, the general impression that adult-child sex is in fact abusive is not just an anachronistic prejudice. It accurately describes the majority of experiences.

Our conclusion is that priority needs to be given to the problem of sexual victimization. We must say in all honesty that this was a conclusion we held at the outset of the study, and that drew us to the topic in the first place. But we feel it is a conclusion warranted and advanced by the findings here.

This is not to argue that sexual liberalization of the family is an evil. Rather, if there are culprits to the problem of childhood sexual victimization, we suspect they are things like family disorganization, the commercial exploitation of sexuality, sexual inequality and values that encourage the sexual exploitation of others.

To give priority to the issue of sexual victimization means trying to act on it directly, teaching children who may be potential victims how to avoid it, and re-emphasizing for the benefit of potential abusers that such behavior is damaging and wrong. It means doing more than merely creating a sexually more open environment and hoping that in the fall-out, children will understand more about sex, and adults will find healthier modes of sexual expression.

There is always the fear that in emphasizing the dangerousness of sex we will reinforce the old puritanical attitudes. This is an unrealistic fear, based on the idea that there are only two postures one can take toward sexuality -- permissive or repressive. There is no reason why we cannot raise children who can recognize both the dangers and delights of sex, who can be realistic about the possibility of being victimized, yet at the same time have a positive and exploratory outlook.

## APPENDIX

Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
University of New Hampshire

### FAMILY AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Dear Student:

We would like to ask you to participate in this study of the family and sexual behavior by filling out this questionnaire.

Some of the questions here are very personal. Because they are personal, social scientists have been reluctant to investigate them in the past. But as you are certainly aware, family life has been undergoing profound changes in recent years, as have people's attitudes toward sex. If social scientists are to help families become healthier environments for living and growing up, if we are to help answer questions about important social issues like teen-age pregnancy, sex education, child abuse and so forth, we need to know more about these personal things.

We hope with this in mind, and the knowledge that everything you answer here is completely anonymous, that you will decide to participate.

To help you decide, we want to say a little more about the questionnaire. The highly personal questions here include questions about sexual attitudes and sexual experiences, as well as questions about your family. Some of the information you will be providing here is probably not information you would want others to know about. For one thing, it may be personally embarrassing or painful. For another thing, it may involve people beside yourself, who would not want information divulged. Finally, believe it or not, some of the things you may be reporting in the questionnaire may be against the law. This gives you some idea of how sensitive an area this is. So consider carefully whether you really want to participate.

However, we do not want you to take risks that might endanger yourself or others in any way. As a matter of fact, we feel that you are perfectly safe in participating in the study, and we want to tell you the steps we are taking to safeguard your privacy.

First of all, you are under no obligation to participate. It is not a course requirement. Much as we would like your co-operation, you should feel free not to fill out a questionnaire. In fact, if at any point while filling out the questionnaire you decide you no longer wish to participate, you may stop wherever you are and fill out no more. Moreover, if there are any particular questions which you want to skip, you may do so.

If you decide not to participate you may do so very discreetly. All questionnaires have a blank cover sheet. If you decide not to fill out any part, just turn in your questionnaire at the end of the period along with everyone else, and no one will be aware that your questionnaire is incomplete.

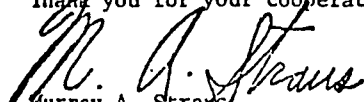
CONTINUED NEXT PAGE


Secondly, all questionnaires are completely anonymous. Nowhere on the questionnaire do we ask for your name, and we have carefully avoided asking questions that might identify you indirectly. Your questionnaire will be one of over 800 that we will be collecting, so the possibility of anyone identifying your questionnaire is virtually nil. All questionnaires will be guarded by us with the utmost care. No one but the researchers will have access to them.

Thirdly, because of the sensitive nature of the research, it is important that we have your fully informed consent to use your questionnaire. If you choose to participate, make a check in the box below indicating your consent.

Unfortunately, if there are some of you here who are not at least 18, and thus still legally minors, we will not be able to use your questionnaire. According to law, minors need to obtain parental consent in order to participate in scientific research of this sort. If you are under 18, we are sorry to exclude you from the research, but unfortunately we have no other choice. So please just turn in a blank questionnaire.

Thank you for your cooperation,

  
Murray A. Straus  
Professor of Sociology

  
David Finkelhor  
Graduate Student

I have read the above and I agree to participate [  ]

I have read the above and decided not to participate [  ]



-3-

## PART A

1. Your sex (circle one answer number):
  1. Male
  2. Female
2. Your age at last birthday \_\_\_\_\_
3. Marital status (circle one answer number)
  1. Single
  2. Married
  3. Separated or divorced
  4. Widowed
4. In what religion were you raised?
  1. Roman Catholic
  2. Eastern Orthodox
  3. Episcopalian
  4. Congregationalist
  5. Methodist
  6. Presbyterian
  7. Other Protestant \_\_\_\_\_
  8. Jewish (please indicate)
  9. No religion
  10. Other \_\_\_\_\_  
(please indicate)
5. What is your predominant ethnic background (circle no more than 2):
  1. Irish
  2. Italian
  3. German
  4. French-Canadian
  5. Polish
  6. Other Eastern European
  7. Black
  8. Spanish
  9. English
  10. Scotch
  11. Other \_\_\_\_\_  
(please indicate)
6. In the first 12 years of your life, did you live mostly in (pick the one you lived in longest)
  1. a farm
  2. a town of under 5000
  3. a town of between 5000 and 25,000
  4. a town of between 25,000 and 100,000
  5. a town of between 100,000 and 500,000
  6. a town larger than 500,000

We would like to gather some information about MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY.

7. First, about your FATHER
  - a. Is he:
    1. Living with your mother
    2. Divorced or separated from her
    3. Widowed
    4. Living apart for some other reason
    5. Deceased
  - b. What is (was) his year of birth?  
(If unsure, put current age or approximate age.) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with him?
    1. Yes
    2. No

If Yes, give your age, e.g. 6 to 10  
Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. When you last lived with him, how close did you feel to him?
    1. Very close
    2. Close
    3. Somewhat close
    4. Not close
    5. Distant
8. Did you also have a STEPFATHER?
  1. Yes
  2. No If No, GO to P.4 →

↓

  - a. Is your stepfather:
    1. Living with your mother
    2. Divorced or separated from her
    3. Widowed from her
    4. Living apart for some other reason
    5. Deceased
  - b. What is (was) his year of birth?  
(If unsure, put current age or approximate age.) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with him?
    1. Yes
    2. No

If Yes, give your age  
Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. When you last lived with him, how close did you feel to him?
    1. Very close
    2. Close
    3. Somewhat close
    4. Not close
    5. Distant

## 9. Now, about your MOTHER

## A. Is she:

1. Living with your father
2. Divorced or separated from him
3. Widowed
4. Living apart for some other reason
5. Deceased

B. What is (was) her year of birth?  
(If unsure, put current age or approximate age.) \_\_\_\_\_

C. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with her?

1. Yes
2. No

If Yes, give your age, e.g. 6 to 10

Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

D. When you last lived with her, how close did you feel to her?

1. Very Close
2. Close
3. Somewhat close
4. Not close
5. Distant

## 10. Did you also have a STEPMOTHER?

1. Yes
  2. No
- If No, GO TO NEXT COLUMN

## A. Is your stepmother:

1. Living with your father
2. Divorced or separated from him
3. Widowed from him
4. Living apart for some other reason
5. Deceased

B. What is (was) her year of birth?  
(If unsure, put current age or approximate age.) \_\_\_\_\_

C. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with her?

1. Yes
2. No

If Yes, give your age

Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

D. When you last lived with her, how close did you feel to her?

1. Very close
2. Close
3. Somewhat close
4. Not close
5. Distant

-4-

## Now, about your BROTHERS

(If none, GO TO NEXT PAGE, COLUMN 2) →

Start with Oldest Brother, and work down to Youngest.

## 11. A. Oldest brother, is he:

1. A natural brother
2. A step-brother (no parents in common)
3. A half-brother (one parent in common)
4. An adopted brother

B. What is his year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

C. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with him?

1. Yes
2. No

If Yes, give your age, e.g. 6 to 10

Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

D. When you last lived with him how close did you feel toward him?

1. Very close
2. Close
3. Somewhat close
4. Not close
5. Distant

## 12. Next BROTHER (if none, GO TO NEXT PAGE COLUMN 2)

## A. Is he:

1. A natural brother
2. A step-brother
3. A half-brother
4. An adopted brother

B. What is his year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

C. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with him?

1. Yes
2. No

If Yes, give your age.

Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

D. When you last lived with him how close did you feel toward him?

1. Very close
2. Close
3. Somewhat close
4. Not close
5. Distant

13. Next BROTHER  
(If none, GO TO NEXT COLUMN) →

- a. Is he:
1. A natural brother
  2. A step-brother
  3. A half-brother
  4. An adopted brother
- b. What is his year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with him?
1. Yes
  2. No
- If Yes, give your age.
- Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
- d. When you last lived with him, how close did you feel toward him?
1. Very close
  2. Close
  3. Somewhat close
  4. Not close
  5. Distant

14. Next BROTHER (If none, GO TO NEXT COLUMN)

- a. Is he:
1. A natural brother
  2. A step-brother
  3. A half-brother
  4. An adopted brother
- b. What is his year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with him?
1. Yes
  2. No
- If Yes, give your age.
- Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
- d. When you last lived with him, how close did you feel toward him?
1. Very close
  2. Close
  3. Somewhat close
  4. Not close
  5. Distant

Now about your SISTERS  
(If none, GO TO NEXT PAGE, COLUMN 2.) →

Start with Oldest Sister, and work down to the Youngest.

15. a. Oldest sister, is she:
1. A natural sister
  2. A step-sister (no parents in common)
  3. A half-sister (one parent in common)
  4. An adopted sister

b. What is her year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

- c. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with her?
1. Yes
  2. No

If Yes, give your age, e.g. 6 to 10

Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

- d. When you last lived with her, how close did you feel toward her?
1. Very close
  2. Close
  3. Somewhat close
  4. Not close
  5. Distant

16. Next SISTER (If none, GO TO NEXT PAGE → COLUMN 2.)

- a. Is she:
1. A natural sister
  2. A step-sister
  3. A half-sister
  4. An adopted sister

b. What is her year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

- c. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with her?
1. Yes
  2. No

If Yes, give your age.

Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

- d. When you last lived with her, how close did you feel toward her?
1. Very close
  2. Close
  3. Somewhat close
  4. Not close
  5. Distant

17. Next SISTER (If none, GO TO NEXT COLUMN) →

- a. Is she:
  - 1. A natural sister
  - 2. A step-sister
  - 3. A half-sister
  - 4. An adopted sister
- b. What is her year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with her?
  - 1. Yes
  - 2. No

If Yes, give your age.

Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

- d. When you last lived with her, how close did you feel toward her?
  - 1. Very close
  - 2. Close
  - 3. Somewhat close
  - 4. Not close
  - 5. Distant

18. Next SISTER (If none, GO TO NEXT COLUMN)

- a. Is she:
  - 1. A natural sister
  - 2. A step-sister
  - 3. A half-sister
  - 4. An adopted sister
- b. What is her year of birth? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Was there any time before you were 16 when you did not live with her?
  - 1. Yes
  - 2. No

If Yes, give your age.

Age \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

- d. When you last lived with her, how close did you feel toward her?
  - 1. Very close
  - 2. Close
  - 3. Somewhat close
  - 4. Not close
  - 5. Distant

19. Which of these family members were you living with at age 12.

- a. Father
- b. Stepfather
- c. Mother
- d. Stepmother
- e. 1st brother
- f. 2nd brother
- g. 3rd brother
- h. 4th brother
- i. 1st sister
- j. 2nd sister
- k. 3rd sister
- l. 4th sister

PART B

The rest of the questionnaire applies to your family when you were age 12. All questions should be answered with reference to the members of your family when you were age 12 (unless otherwise indicated). That means when a question asks about your "father," it means the father you lived with when you were 12.

If you did not live with one or both parents when you were 12, answer for that parent at some earlier age when you were living with him or her.

20. What were your parents' occupations when you were 12.

Father	Mother	
1	1	Semiskilled or unskilled worker (factory worker, hospital aide, truck driver, etc)
2	2	Skilled worker or foreman (machinist, carpenter, cook)
3	3	Farmer (owner operator or renter)
4	4	Clerical or sales (but not manager)
5	5	Proprietor, except farm (owner of a business)
6	6	Professional (architect, teacher, nurse (or managerial position (department head, store manager)
0	0	No occupation outside home
X	X	Don't know

21. When you were 12. Which of the following came closest to your parents annual income before taxes.

Father	Mother	
0	0	Not employed
1	1	Less than \$4000
2	2	\$4000 to \$5999
3	3	\$6000 to \$7999
4	4	\$8000 to \$9999
5	5	\$10,000 to \$11,999
6	6	\$12,000 to \$14,999
7	7	\$15,000 to \$19,999
8	8	\$20,000 to \$29,999
9	9	\$30,000 and over
X	X	Don't know

22. What was the highest level of education attained by your parents?

Father	Mother	
1	1	Some grade school
2	2	Completed grade school
3	3	Some high school
4	4	Completed high school
5	5	High school and some other training but not college
6	6	Some college
7	7	Completed college
8	8	Some graduate work
9	9	Graduate degree (M.D., M.A.)

23. How many of your grandparents were born in the United States

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
0. None

24. Did either of your parents grow up on a farm?

1. mother
2. father
3. both
4. neither

25. How many bedrooms were there in the house your family lived in when you were 12?

\_\_\_\_\_

26. How many people were living in the house at the time?

\_\_\_\_\_

27. At age 12, did you share a bedroom with

1. No one, had own bedroom
2. One brother
3. More than one brother
4. One sister
5. More than one sister
6. One or more brothers and sisters
7. One or both parents
8. Some one else
9. Other combination \_\_\_\_\_

(please indicate)

28. Did any other people live with you for more than a year while you were growing up, besides mother, father, sisters and brothers. (Circle as many as apply.)

- A. Grandfather
- B. Grandmother
- C. Uncle
- D. Aunt
- E. Other relative
- F. Other non-relative (e.g. boarder, housekeeper, etc.)

29. When you were 12, did you have

1. Many good friends
2. A few good friends
3. One or two good friends
4. No good friends

-8-

30. Answer the following questions about the set of parents you had when you were 12.

How true was this of your Mother and Father?	Father					Mother				
	No father					No mother				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
A. Influenced other people or took charge of things	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
B. Was ambitious, worked hard	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
C. Lacked energy	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
D. Had problems with relatives	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
E. Was tense, nervous, worried	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
F. Was ill	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
G. Drank heavily	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
H. Complained about finances	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I. Kissed you	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
J. Hugged you	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
K. Put you on his/her lap	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
L. Roughoused or played tickling games with you	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

31. When you were 12 how happy would you say your parents' marriage was?

1. Unhappy
2. Not very happy
3. Somewhat happy
4. Happy
5. Very happy
- X. Not applicable. Only one parent

32. How often do you remember your parents:

Kissing	Hugging	Holding Hands	
1	1	1	Never
2	2	2	Rarely
3	3	3	Sometimes
4	4	4	Often
5	5	5	Very often
X	X	X	Not applicable

33. Did you ever see or hear your parents in the act of sexual intercourse?

1. Yes
2. No

34. If you had to make a guess, how often would you estimate that your parents had sexual intercourse when you were 12. (You are not expected to know, just make a guess.)

0. Never or less than 1 time per year
1. 1 to 6 times per year
2. 1 time per month
3. 2 or 3 times per month
4. 1 time per week
5. 2 times per week
6. 3 or 4 times per week
7. More than 4 times per week
- X. NA. Only one parent

- 9 -

35. Would your Father and Mother have agreed or disagreed with the following statements. (Circle number from 1 to 4 to indicate degree of Agreement or Disagreement).

( <input type="checkbox"/> No Father)	<u>Father</u>				<u>Mother</u>			
( <input type="checkbox"/> No Mother)	<u>Agree</u>			<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>			<u>Disagree</u>
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
A. Children should never be allowed to talk back to their parents or they will lose respect for them	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
B. In making family decisions, parents ought to take children's opinions into account.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
C. Women should not be placed in positions of authority over men.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

36. Every family has different, sometimes unspoken rules about personal contact among family members. Think about your family when you were twelve. Who would you do these things with?

Answer yes or no to each question in the case of a) your mother b) your father c) the sister closest in age to you and d) the brother closest in age to you

	Mother ( <input type="checkbox"/> None)		Father ( <input type="checkbox"/> None)		Sister closest in age ( <input type="checkbox"/> None)		Brother closest in age ( <input type="checkbox"/> None)	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
If you were going on a trip, who would you								
a. Hug goodbye-----	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
b. Kiss goodbye-----	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
c. Kiss on the lips goodbye-----	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
In your house when you were getting up in the morning, who could								
d. See you in your underwear without embarrassing you-----	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
e. See you naked without embarrassing you	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
f. Go into the bathroom if you are already there without embarrassing you-----	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
g. Who could you tell a dirty joke to----	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
h. Who could you tell about a sex experience you had-----	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
i. If you were in your bedroom alone who could enter without knocking-----	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0

37. The next series of question are about how and when you learned about sex. How old were you when you first learned about the following things? Where did you learn them from? If you can't remember exactly how old, make an approximate guess. In case of several sources of learning, circle all that apply.

- |           |                      |                          |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Source:   | 1. Mother            | 6. Friend (opposite sex) |
| (Code for | 2. Father            | 7. Sex education course  |
| answers   | 3. Brother           | 8. Other adult           |
| below)    | 4. Sister            | 9. Book or magazine      |
|           | 5. Friend (same sex) | 10. Self-discovery       |
|           |                      | 11. Other or don't know  |

	Age you first learned	Source you learned it from
a. That men and women have different sexual organs--	_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
b. That babies result from sexual intercourse-----	_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
c. That your parents engaged in sexual intercourse--	_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
d. How to obtain and use contraceptives-----	_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
e. How to cope with menstruation (for women)-----	_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
f. How to arouse a sexual partner-----	_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
g. How to arouse yourself-----	_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

38. In response to each of the following statements, please answer the question in each of the five columns:

	How do you feel about this?		Did your Mother ever tell you this?		How do you think she felt about this idea?		Did your Father ever tell you this?		How do you think he felt about this idea?	
	Agree	Dis- agree	Yes	No	Agree	Dis- agree	Yes	No	Agree	Dis- agree
a. Men often try to take advantage of women sexually	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4		
b. Masturbation is unhealthy---	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4		
c. Sexual relations between two persons of the same sex are abnormal-----	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4		
d. Sex games among small child- ren are unhealthy-----	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4		
e. Sexual relations between brothers and sisters are unhealthy-----	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4		
f. Sexual relations between children and their parents are unhealthy-----	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4	1 0	1 2 3 4		



-11-

## Part C

It is now generally realized that most people have sexual experiences as children and while they are still growing up. Some of these are with friends and playmates, and some with relatives and family members. Some are very upsetting and painful, and some are not. Some influence peoples later lives and sexual experiences, and some are practically forgotten. Although these are often important events, very little is actually known about them.

We would like you to try to remember the sexual experiences you had while growing up. By "sexual," we mean a broad range of things, anything from playing "doctor" to sexual intercourse--in fact, anything that might have seemed "sexual" to you.

39. Did you have any of the following experiences before the age of 12, (6th grade) (circle any that apply).

- a. An invitation or request to do something sexual.
- b. Kissing and hugging in a sexual way.
- c. Another person showing his/her sex organs to you.
- d. You showing your sex organs to another person.
- e. Another person fondling you in a sexual way.
- f. You fondling another person in a sexual way.
- g. Another person touching your sex organs.
- h. You touching another person's sex organs.
- i. Intercourse, but without attempting penetration.
- j. Intercourse.
- k. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

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<sup>-13-</sup>  
Experience with other children (continued)

	Experience #1	Experience #2	Experience #3
46. Did other person(s) threaten or force you? 1. Yes 2. A little 3. No	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
47. Did you threaten or force other person(s)? 1. Yes 2. A little 3. No	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
48. About how many times did you have a sexual experience with this person?-----	_____	_____	_____
49. Over how long a time did this go on? (Give number of days, months, years)-----	_____	_____	_____
50. Which of these would best describe your reaction at the time of the experience? 1.Fear 2.Shock 3.Surprise 4.Interest 5.Pleasure	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
51. Who did you tell about this experience, at the time? 1. No one-----1 2. Mother-----2 3. Father-----3 4. Other adult-----4 5. Brother/Sister-----5 6. Friend-----6		1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6
52. If mother, how did she react? (IF YOU DID NOT TELL YOUR MOTHER, HOW DO YOU THINK SHE WOULD HAVE REACTED) a. Angry 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all b. Supportive 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
53. If father, how did he react? (IF YOU DID NOT TELL YOUR FATHER, HOW DO YOU THINK HE WOULD HAVE REACTED) a. Angry 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all b. Supportive 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
54. In retrospect, would you say this experience was: 1. Positive-----1 2. Mostly positive-----2 3. Neutral-----3 4. Mostly negative-----4 5. Negative-----5		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Now go back to page 12 and answer the questions about Experience #2

Now go back to page 12 and answer the questions about experience #3

If no more experiences go to next page

If no more experiences go to next page

-14-

Now we want to ask you to think of three sexual experiences--or however many up to three--that you had before the age of 12 with an adult (a person over 16) including strangers, friends or family members like cousins, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, mother or father. Pick the three most important to you and answer the following questions.

No such experience [ ] Go to page 16

With regard to the first experience

	Experience #1		Experience #2		Experience #3	
55. About how old were you at the time-----	_____		_____		_____	
56. About how old was the other person-----	_____		_____		_____	
57. Was the other person: Circle 1 for male 2 for female	1	2	1	2	1	2
58. Was the other person:						
a stranger-----	1		1		1	
a person you knew, but not a friend-----	2		2		2	
a friend of yours-----	3		3		3	
a friend of your parents-----	4		4		4	
a cousin-----	5		5		5	
an uncle or aunt-----	6		6		6	
a grandparent-----	7		7		7	
a brother-----	8		8		8	
a sister-----	9		9		9	
a father-----	10		10		10	
a stepfather-----	11		11		11	
a mother-----	12		12		12	
a stepmother-----	13		13		13	
59. What happened (Circle 1 for Yes or 0 for No)	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
a. An invitation or request to do something sexual	1	0	1	0	1	0
b. Kissing and hugging in a sexual way-----	1	0	1	0	1	0
c. Other person showing his/her sex organs to you-	1	0	1	0	1	0
d. You showing your sex organs to other person----	1	0	1	0	1	0
e. Other person fondling you in a sexual way-----	1	0	1	0	1	0
f. You fondling other person in a sexual way-----	1	0	1	0	1	0
g. Other person touching your sex organs-----	1	0	1	0	1	0
h. You touching other person's sex organs-----	1	0	1	0	1	0
i. Intercourse, but without attempting penetration	1	0	1	0	1	0
j. Intercourse-----	1	0	1	0	1	0
k. Other: please mention #1	_____		_____		_____	

#2

#3

Go to next page      Go to next page      Go to next page

-15-

Experience with an adult (continued)

	Experience #1		Experience #2		Experience #3					
60. Who started this? 1. You 2. Other person	1	2	1	2	1	2				
61. Did other person threaten or force you? 1. Yes 2. A little 3. No	1	2	3	1	2	3				
62. Did you threaten or force other person? 1. Yes 2. A little 3. No	1	2	3	1	2	3				
63a. Had other person been drinking? 1.Yes 0.No	1	0	1	0	1	0				
63b. Had you been drinking? 1.Yes 0.No	1	0	1	0	1	0				
64. About how many times did you have a sexual experience with this person?-----	_____		_____		_____					
65. Over how long a time did this go on? (Indicate number of days, months, years)-----	_____		_____		_____					
66. Which of these would best describe your reaction at the time of the experience? 1.Fear 2.Shock 3.Surprise 4.Interest 5.Pleasure	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
67. Who did you tell about this experience, if anyone?										
1. No one-----	1	1	1							
2. Mother-----	2	2	2							
3. Father-----	3	3	3							
4. Other adult-----	4	4	4							
5. Brother/sister-----	5	5	5							
6. Friend-----	6	6	6							
68. If mother, how did she react? (If you did not tell your mother, how do you think she would have reacted?)										
a. Angry 1. Very 2. Mildly										
3. A little 4. Not at all	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
b. Supportive 1. Very 2. Mildly										
3. A little 4. Not at all	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
69. If father, how did he react? (If you did not tell your father, how do you think he would have reacted?)										
a. Angry 1. Very 2. Mildly										
3. A little 4. Not at all	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
b. Supportive 1. Very 2. Mildly										
3. A little 4. Not at all	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
70. In retrospect, would you say this experience was										
1.Positive 2.Mostly positive 3.Neutral										
4.Mostly negative 5. Negative	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Now go back to page 14 and answer the questions about Experience #2

Now go back to page 14 and answer the questions about Experience #3

If no more experiences go to next page

If no more experiences go to next page

- 16 -

Now we would like you to think of sexual experiences you had after the age of twelve with a family member or relative, including cousins, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, grandparents, mother or father or a guardian or close friend of a parent. (If this relationship was described in a previous section, do not repeat it.) Pick the three most important to you and answer the following questions.

No such experience [ ] Go to page 18

<u>With regard to the first experience</u>	Experience #1	Experience #2	Experience #3
71. About how old were you at the time-----	_____	_____	_____
72. About how old was the other person-----	_____	_____	_____
73. Was the other person: Circle 1 for male or 2 for female	1 2	1 2	1 2
74. Was the other person:			
a cousin-----	1	1	1
an aunt or uncle-----	2	2	2
a grandparent-----	3	3	3
a brother or sister-----	4	4	4
a parent-----	5	5	5
a step-parent-----	6	6	6
a guardian-----	7	7	7
a close friend of a parent-----	8	8	8
75. What happened? (Circle 1 for Yes or 0 for No for each)	<u>Yes</u> <u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u> <u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u> <u>No</u>
a. An invitation or request to do something sexual--	1 0	1 0	1 0
b. Kissing and hugging in a sexual way-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
c. Other person showing his/her sex organs to you--	1 0	1 0	1 0
d. You showing your sex organs to other person-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
e. Other person fondling you in a sexual way-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
f. You fondling other person in a sexual way-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
g. Other person touching your sex organs-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
h. You touching other person's sex organs-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
i. Intercourse, but without attempting penetration--	1 0	1 0	1 0
j. Intercourse-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
k. Other: please mention #1	_____	_____	_____
	#2	#2	#2
	#3	#3	#3

Go to      Go to      Go to  
next page next page next page

Experiences with a relative (continued)

	Experience #1	Experience #2	Experience #3
76. Who started this? 1. You 2. Other person	1 2	1 2	1 2
77. Did other person threaten or force you? 1. Yes 2. A little 3. No	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
78. Did you threaten or force other person? 1. Yes 2. A little 3. No	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
79a. Had other person been drinking? 1.Yes 0.No	1 0	1 0	1 0
79b. Had you been drinking? 1.Yes 0.No	1 0	1 0	1 0
80. About how many times did you have a sexual experience with this person?-----	_____	_____	_____
81. Over how long a time did this go on? (Indicate number of days, months, years)-----	_____	_____	_____
82. Which of these would best describe your reaction at the time of the experience? 1.Fear 2.Shock 3.Surprise 4.Interest 5.Pleasure	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
83. Who did you tell about this experience, if anyone? 1. No one----- 2. Mother----- 3. Father----- 4. Other adult----- 5. Brother/sister----- 6. Friend-----	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6
84. If mother, how did she react? (If you did not tell your mother, how do you think she would have reacted?) a. Angry 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all b. Supportive 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
85. If father, how did he react? (If you did not tell your father, how do you think he would have reacted?) a. Angry 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all b. Supportive 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
86. In retrospect, would you say this experience was 1.Positive 2.Mostly positive 3.Neutral 4.Mostly negative 5.Negative	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Now go back to page 16 and answer the questions about Experience #2

Now go back to page 16 and answer the questions about experience #3

If no more experiences go to next page

If no more experiences go to next page

-18-

Finally, we would like you to think of any sexual experience that occurred to you after the age of 12, which you did not consent to. That is, a sexual experience which was forced on you, or done against your will, or which you didn't want to happen. (Once again, do not repeat describing a relationship you described earlier). Pick the three most important and answer the following questions:

No such experience [ ] Go to Page 20

With regard to the first experience

	Experience #1	Experience #2	Experience #3
87. About how old were you at the time-----	_____	_____	_____
88. About how old was the other person-----	_____	_____	_____
89. Was the other Person: Circle 1 for male or 2 for female	1 2	1 2	1 2
90. Was the other person:			
a stranger-----	1	1	1
a friend of yours-----	2	2	2
a friend of your parents-----	3	3	3
a cousin-----	4	4	4
an aunt or uncle-----	5	5	5
a brother or sister-----	6	6	6
a parent-----	7	7	7
a step-parent-----	8	8	8
a guardian-----	9	9	9
91. What happened? (Circle 1 for Yes or 0 for No for each)			
	<u>Yes</u> <u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u> <u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u> <u>No</u>
a. An invitation or request to do something sexual-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
b. Kissing and hugging in a sexual way-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
c. Other person showing his/her sex organs to you-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
d. You showing your sex organs to other person-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
e. Other person fondling you in a sexual way-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
f. You fondling other person in a sexual way-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
g. Other person touching your sex organs-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
h. You touching other person's sex organs-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
i. Intercourse, but without attempting penetration-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
j. Intercourse-----	1 0	1 0	1 0
k. Other: please mention #1	_____	_____	_____

#2

#3

Go to next page      Go to next page      Go to next page



Nonconsensual experience (continued)

-19-

	Experience #1		Experience #2		Experience #3	
92. Who started this? 1. You 2. Other person	1	2	1	2	1	2
93. Did other person threaten or force you? 1. Yes 2. A little 3. No	1	2	3	1	2	3
94. Did you threaten or force other person? 1. Yes 2. A little 3. No	1	2	3	1	2	3
95a. Had other person been drinking? 1. Yes 0. No	1	0	1	0	1	0
95b. Had you been drinking? 1. Yes 0. No	1	0	1	0	1	0
96. About how many times did you have a sexual experience with this person?-----	_____		_____		_____	
97. Over how long a time did this go on? (Indicate number of days, months, years)-----	_____		_____		_____	
98. Which of these would best describe your reaction at the time of the experience?  1. Fear 2. Shock 3. Surprise 4. Interest 5. Pleasure	1	2	3	4	5	1 2 3 4 5
99. Who did you tell about this experience, if anyone? 1. No one----- 2. Mother----- 3. Father----- 4. Other adult----- 5. Brother/Sister----- 6. Friend-----	1	2	3	4	5	6
100. If mother, how did she react?(If you did not tell your mother, how do you think she would have reacted?) a. Angry 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all b. Supportive 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all	1	2	3	4	1	2 3 4
101. If father, how did he react? (If you did not tell your father, how do you think he would have reacted?) a. Angry 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all b. Supportive 1. Very 2. Mildly 3. A little 4. Not at all	1	2	3	4	1	2 3 4
102. In retrospect, would you say this experience was  1. Positive 2. Mostly positive 3. Neutral 4. Mostly negative 5. Negative	1	2	3	4	5	1 2 3 4 5

Now go back to page 18  
and answer the questions  
about Experience #2

Now go back to page 18  
and answer the questions  
about Experience #3

If no more experiences  
go to next page

If no more experiences  
go to next page

-20-  
PART D

103. Everyone gets into conflicts with other people and sometimes these lead to physical blows such as hitting really hard, kicking, punching, stabbing, throwing someone down, etc. The following questions ask about how often these things happened to you, and how often you saw them happen to others. Try to remember these events for a year when you were around 12.

0 = Never  
1 = Once  
2 = Twice  
3 = 3-5 times  
4 = 6-10 times  
5 = 11-20 times  
6 = More than 20 times  
X = No such person in family

During that ONE YEAR:

- a. One of my brothers or sisters did this to me-----0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X  
b. A brother or sister did to another brother or sister---0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X  
c. I did to a brother or sister-----0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X  
d. My father did to me-----0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X  
e. My father did to a brother or sister-----0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X  
f. My mother did to me-----0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X  
g. My mother did to a brother or sister-----0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X  
h. Father did to mother-----0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X  
i. Mother did to father-----0 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

104. When you were 12 years old, how often would your Mother or Father spank you?

<u>Mother</u>	<u>Father</u>	
1	1	Never
2	2	Once or twice
3	3	A few times each year
4	4	Once a month
5	5	Every week
6	6	More often than once a week
X	X	No such parent

-21-

105. Were you ever punished, scolded or warned about any of the following by your Mother or Father?

(Circle only highest number that applies)

		3 = punished
		2 = scolded
		1 = warned about
		0 = none of the above

<u>Mother</u>	<u>Father</u>	
3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	Touching your sex organs
3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	Not having clothes on
3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	Playing sex games with other children
3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	Saying dirty words
3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	Asking questions about sex
3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	Doing something sexual on a date
3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	Looking at sexual pictures or books
3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	Masturbating
X	X	No such parent

106. How old were you when the following things first happened to you. If you can't remember exactly give approximate age. (Write age in space. If this never happened leave blank)

- Age
- \_\_\_\_\_ started going out on dates.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (Men) first ejaculated.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (Women) first menstruated.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ first had sexual intercourse
  - \_\_\_\_\_ first sexual experience with someone of the same sex after the age of 12.

107. Within the recent past, how often have you engaged in sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite sex?

- Not at all in last year
- Once or twice in last year, but not in last month
- More than twice in last year, but not in last month
- Once in last month
- Twice in last month
- 3 times in last month
- 4 times in last month
- 5 to 10 times in last month
- 10 to twenty times in last month
- More than 20 times in last month

108. The last time you had intercourse, did you or your partner use any kind of contraceptive device or method for avoiding pregnancy?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- NA

109. Within the last month, how often have you "made out" (b through h on page 11) with a person of the opposite sex.

- Not at all
- Once or twice
- 3-4 times
- 5-10 times
- more than 10 times

110. In the last year, how many sexual experiences have you had with someone of your own sex? (For more detail on what is included as "sexual experiences," see page 11.)

- None
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 5-10
- 11 or more

-22-

111. Below are some descriptions of attitudes about sex. Indicate on the right whether you Agree or Disagree with this attitude.

1 = Agree  
2 = Agree somewhat  
3 = Disagree somewhat  
4 = Disagree

- a. I find I spend too much time thinking about sex-----1 2 3 4
- b. I often find myself in awkward sexual situations-----1 2 3 4
- c. I really like my body-----1 2 3 4
- d. If I'm sexually interested in someone, I usually take the initiative to do something about it-----1 2 3 4
- e. After sexual experiences, I often feel dissatisfied-----1 2 3 4
- f. Someone my age should be having more sex than I am-----1 2 3 4

112. We would like to know how strongly you disapprove of the items listed below.

One item ("wife-beating") has arbitrarily been assigned a score of 100. Please rate each item according to its seriousness compared to wife-beating. If an item seems less serious than "wife-beating" give it a number less than 100. If it seems more serious than wife-beating, give it a number higher than 100. You may use any whole numbers greater than 0.

DO NOT GIVE ANY 2 ITEMS THE SAME RATING. Even if you think they are about equally bad, give them slightly different ratings.

\_\_\_\_ Premeditated murder

\_\_\_\_ Premarital intercourse

\_\_\_\_ Sexual intercourse between a father and his teen-age daughter

\_\_\_\_ Sexual intercourse between a mother and her teen-age son

\_\_\_\_ Adultery

100 Wife-beating

\_\_\_\_ Rape

\_\_\_\_ Sexual intercourse between an uncle and his teen-age niece

\_\_\_\_ Sexual intercourse between a teen-age brother and sister

\_\_\_\_ Beating-up someone

113a. Tom and Janice Lawrence are a couple in their mid-forties. How often would you guess that a couple like that have sexual intercourse?

0. Never or less than 1 time per year
1. 1 to 6 times per year
2. 1 time per month
3. 2 or 3 times per month
4. 1 time per week
5. 2 times per week
6. 3 or 4 times per week
7. More than 4 times per week

-23-

## \* PERSONAL INTERVIEW

We are grateful for your participation in this survey. If you have found any of it frustrating or unclear, then you probably realize how difficult it is to capture a person's real experience with a questionnaire. For this reason, we would like to ask you to volunteer for a personal interview.

Obviously we cannot interview everyone. So we will limit ourselves to those of you who have had sexual experiences with relatives and members of your families.

Such experiences may be hard to talk about. If you have had such an experience, however, we urge you to consider seriously giving an interview. Information of this kind is badly needed to help other people with similar experiences.

All the information from the interview will be strictly confidential. Your name, address and identifying information will not be attached to it anywhere. In fact, after your interview, we will destroy any record of your identity, so the information will actually become anonymous. In appreciation of your help you will also be paid \$5.00.

If you would like to be interviewed, please indicate on the accompanying card how we can get in touch with you to schedule an interview. Please include a phone number and a good time to call. If there are only a few people living at your phone number, you can merely give us a first name or nickname by which to ask for you. This will insure even further anonymity since we will not know your last name.

Finally, if you wish even more anonymity than this, you can just call to make an appointment. All you have to do is phone the number listed below and ask for an interview appointment for the Family Survey. There is no need for you to give your name.

Interviews will be conducted by a male and a female member of our research team. If you have a strong preference, indicate this on the card. We will try to accommodate such preferences, as our schedules permit.

Remove the accompanying card. They are to be submitted independently of the questionnaire. They will not be used as any way of identifying the questionnaire.

Family Survey. Phone: (603) 862-1888.  
Department of Sociology, University of New Hampshire, Durham, N.H. 03824

From Maine, Rhode Island and for other long distance calls, call collect.  
When the operator asks for your name, just say it is about the "Family Survey."

## PERSONAL INTERVIEW

I would like to arrange an interview.

Name or  
Nickname \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to call \_\_\_\_\_

I would prefer to be interviewed by

A female interviewer  A male interviewer

no preference

I will arrange to call you to make an appointment  
(603) 862-1888 in Durham, New Hampshire  
From Maine, Rhode Island and for other long distance  
calls, call collect.

FOLD OVER AND HAND IN. PLEASE HAND IN THIS CARD EVEN IF  
BLANK, EXCEPT IF YOU NEED IT FOR THE PHONE

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