

## CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter provides an overview of the common patterns and themes that emerged from the two incestuous fathers' stories. A summary of the themes that did not re-occur in both participants' stories is also provided. Reflections on this study are discussed and recommendations for future research and clinical practice are proposed.

### 2. COMMON THEMES

The themes that were identified as common to both participants' stories emerged from the co-created conversations between the researcher and the participants. These themes are reflective of the way that she chose to frame her world, and as such, they are context bound to this research project. Therefore, generalisation of the themes to larger populations and a comparative analysis between the themes and the literature on incestuous fathers are nullified. Although it seems that very little literature on the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers exist, a few references were found and were included in the discussion of the themes. For the purpose of clarification, each

common theme will now be discussed separately, but the interconnectedness of the themes is apparent.

The following themes seemed to re-occur in both participants' stories and were identified as common themes:

## **2.1 Ambivalence**

Both David1 and David2's feelings of ambivalence seemed to have included feeling torn between varieties of opposing feelings. They both seemed to have experienced an internal struggle, deciding on which needs they wanted to react congruently on.

David1 liked Anna's inappropriate behaviour towards him as it turned him on sexually and it made him feel good about himself. However, he felt guilty about liking her behaviour and wanting to have sex with her. David1 also appeared to have felt ambivalent regarding his incestuous behaviour because he experienced a physical urge to behave incestuously towards Anna, but he also felt guilty about his behaviour.

David2 enjoyed the sexual satisfaction that he got from his incestuous involvement with Nick. He also enjoyed feeling powerful as he felt that he had control over Nick and their incestuous relationship. On the other hand, David2 felt guilty about his incestuous behaviour. David2 also appeared to have felt ambivalent regarding his incestuous behaviour, as he felt torn between wanting to behave incestuously and believing that his behaviour was morally wrong.

## **2.2 Powerlessness**

Both participants seemed to have experienced a loss of control, helplessness and strong feelings of powerlessness regarding their incestuous behaviour. According to Groth (1982), incestuous fathers often experience themselves more as helpless victims of external forces and events than as people in control of themselves and in charge of their lives.

David1 felt that he had no control over his incestuous behaviour. He experienced powerlessness and even though he wanted to stop his behaviour he felt incapable of doing so.

David2 also felt powerless regarding his incestuous behaviour. Even though he felt that his behaviour was morally wrong, he felt incapable of stopping it and even after he has stopped it, he felt powerless in preventing himself from behaving incestuously again.

## **2.3 Guilt**

Another emotional experience that seemed to re-occur in both participants' stories, is the experience of guilt. According to Meiselman (1978), the majority of incestuous fathers seem to feel intense guilt during and after the incestuous relationship.

David1 initially experienced feelings of guilt because he became sexually excited when Anna exposed herself to him. When he then involved Anna in incestuous behaviour, his feelings of guilt seemed to have increased and he

also seemed to have felt guilty towards God. During his therapy sessions, David1 became more aware of the impact that his behaviour might have had on Anna, which furthermore increased his feelings of guilt. A study conducted by Kennedy and Sangowicz revealed that the incestuous fathers felt guilty about the harm that the incest caused their children (Meiselman, 1978).

David2 also experienced guilt both while he was behaving incestuously as well as after he had stopped his incestuous behaviour. After he stopped his incestuous behaviour, he felt guilty for the impact that his behaviour had on Nick. It appeared as if most of David2's guilt was directed towards God as he felt that he had sinned in the eyes of God. However, David2 felt that God has forgiven him and that he only felt guilty for not feeling guilty any longer.

#### **2.4 The significance of the names 'David1' and 'David2'**

Both participants were invited to choose a pseudonym for themselves. Even though the participants did not have any contact with each other and were in therapy with different psychologists, they both choose to use the name David, referring to a specific person in the Holy Bible. The researcher regards the similarity of the participants' choices of pseudonyms as significant to their emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour.

Both participants felt that, just like David in the Bible, they had sinned in the eyes of God by behaving incestuously. However, the participants felt that just like David, God had forgiven them for their sins. David2 also felt that just like David from the Bible, he has learnt from his mistakes and after God had

forgiven him for his sins, God blessed him. David<sup>1</sup> felt that the fact that God could forgive David in the Bible for committing murder and adultery tells him that God would also forgive him for his behaviour.

From the incestuous fathers' stories, it was also evident that these fathers have experienced an enormous amount of blame from society. Society, seen by social constructionists as a 'dominant reality', applies social pressure to people to 'fit' in this 'dominant reality'. People's behaviour are therefore dictated and organised thereby (White & Epton, cited in Speed, 1991). It could therefore be hypothesized that the participants in this study, being judged, blamed and ostracized by the society for their incestuous behaviour, turned to the church in an effort to conform to society's expectations and to be socially accepted.

Although the above themes were common to both the participants, the descriptions of the emotional experiences were uniquely articulated by each of the participants. Therefore, there are differences in the way that each theme arose, yet the thematic punctuations remain similar.

### **3. RELATED THEMES**

The following prominent themes were also identified from the participants' stories. These themes did not re-occur in both participants' stories, but are none the less seen as valuable information regarding their emotional experiences.

### **3.1 A sense of self-worth**

Gaining a sense of self-worth seemed to be David1's most prominent emotional experience regarding his incestuous behaviour. Groth (1982) stated that incestuous fathers often experience low self-esteem and poor self-confidence and that their incestuous behaviour may serve to validate his sense of worth and bolster his self-esteem. It seemed as though David1 experienced a low sense of self-worth from a very young age. This appeared to have escalated when he experienced increased distance between himself and his wife.

At the same time, Anna became very affectionate towards David1. It seemed as though her attention, love, care and nurturance towards him made him feel special, appreciated and loved, which contributed to his sense of self-worth. Anna then started behaving inappropriately towards David1 and this appeared to have made him feel flattered and even more special. David1 then began behaving incestuously towards Anna. His incestuous behaviour, which seemed to have made him feel even more special, gave him a sense of acknowledgement that resulted in an even deeper sense of self-worth.

### **3.2 Self-hatred**

It seemed as though David1 started experiencing self-hatred while he was behaving incestuously. It also appeared that he still hated himself for what he did after his behaviour stopped. However, it seemed as if he, after a long time, started to forgive himself.

### **3.3 Feeling powerful**

According to Groth (1982), the incestuous behaviour may serve to restore a sense of power and control to the father. Feeling powerful seemed to be David2's most prominent emotional experience regarding his incestuous behaviour. It seemed as if he experienced powerlessness as a child. When Nick became a part of his life, he felt the need to control him and when he started behaving incestuously towards Nick, he enjoyed having control over Nick and having control in their incestuous relationship. This control as well as the fact that he could behave incestuously without being caught made him feel powerful. However, during therapy, David2 realised that he tends to be controlling, because he needs to feel powerful. Therefore, he felt that he has to remain aware of his needs, so that he does not act in order to gain control.

## **4. REFLECTIONS ON THIS STUDY**

Within a traditional modernist framework, studies are 'evaluated' in terms of its 'strengths' and 'limitations'. These terms suggest that parts of the study may need to be altered. From a social constructionist perspective, systems are structurally determined and there are no 'real' external entities that can be accurately mapped or apprehended (Anderson and Goolishian, 1988). Therefore, the terms, 'evaluation', 'strengths' and 'limitations' do not fit within the social constructionist framework of this study and reflections on this study are seen as more appropriate in the context of the study.

The aim of this study is to relate the emotions that two incestuous fathers have experienced regarding their incestuous behaviour. This study was not aimed at generating results that can be generalised to a larger population. The researcher believes that the aim of this study was accomplished, as the results provided a deep or perhaps even a 'new' understanding of the subjective emotional experiences of incestuous fathers regarding their incestuous behaviour.

The interpretive approach of the researcher generated a variety of thematic punctuations from the stories that the two incestuous fathers shared with her. As previously mentioned, these themes should not be viewed as all-inclusive. They are merely fractional reflections of the researcher, and as such, other themes could have been depicted as important. However, the researcher feels that the generated themes provide a rich understanding of the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers that seems to be unstated or insufficiently emphasised in the available literature.

As delineated, this study is rooted in the social constructionist approach and from this perspective there are no 'real' external entities that can be accurately mapped or measured. This implies that researchers have to resign their cherished position as 'experts' and their assumptions that there are 'facts' that they can come to know (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Most of the research on incestuous fathers has been coherent with the modernist epistemology whereby the researcher, from his or her objective vantage point, has been considered as a 'knower' that is in the best position to describe the emotional

experiences of incestuous fathers. This study, however, focussed on the incestuous fathers themselves who were considered as being in the best position to describe their emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour. These descriptions of their lived experiences fit well within the qualitative nature of this study and also with the hermeneutic method of data analysis that was used. Therefore, this study provides a different approach to modernist approaches that claim to be objective, use data that can be measured, and exclude the context of people's lives so that the 'truth' can be established.

The social constructionist nature of this study allowed the equal engagement of the participants and researcher as co-creators of a shared reality. This allowed the researcher and the participants to co-create a space of understanding, respect and curiosity. Thus, the researcher could explore the participants' stories on a deep level, which in turn led to rich descriptions of their emotional experiences. This co-created space also allowed the co-construction of different emotional experiences of the participants that opened opportunities for them to grow.

The social constructionist nature of this study furthermore enabled the participants to reflect on their emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour. These two participants, therefore had the opportunity to verbalise their thoughts and feelings without it being marginalised, subjugated and denied in favour of the dominant belief system that tends to pathologise those who do not meet its expectations (Doan, cited in Rapmund, 2000).

The final outcome of this study cannot be considered to be a reflection of an absolute 'truth' about the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers regarding their incestuous behaviour. Although the researcher attempted to remain 'true' to participants' emotional experiences, the researcher cannot be excluded from what she observed. The researcher's own biases, assumptions, and theoretical perspectives have shaped this translation of what the incestuous fathers told her. As such there could be many more thematic descriptions offered through another lens other than that of the researcher.

The findings of this study can therefore not be generalised to a larger population. Consequently, quantitative researchers might regard the outcome of this study as inferior to the so-called 'highly scientific' empirical findings of quantitative research. However, readers will no doubt consider the emotional experiences of the incestuous fathers as reconstructed by the researcher and create new ideas in his or her own process of co-construction.

Due to the qualitative and social constructionist nature of the research, the researcher could not be described as objective and neutral. The researcher approached and conducted each interview in a different way as her relationship with the participants evolved. She also punctuated the participants' emotional experiences according to her own frame of reference. The reliability of the results could therefore be considered as questionable according to a traditional, quantitative approach as the findings cannot be verified or 'proved' by duplicating future research of the same nature in exactly the same manner. Efforts were made to make the research process as explicit as possible in order

to allow the reader to make a reasonable 'judgement' regarding the dependability nature of the findings.

The issue of language posed a challenge for the researcher. Some of the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, which made the inclusion of extracts from the transcribed interviews problematic. In an attempt to substantiate the reconstructions and to help the readers make sense of the research findings, the researcher had to translate the interviews into English. The essence and meaning of the statements often proved difficult to communicate as some words did not allow for direct translation. The inability of the researcher to convey the intended message detracted somewhat from the intensity and the value of the original words. However, within the social constructionist framework of this study, the inevitable interpretations that the researcher has made in interpreting the transcriptions are regarded as part of the process of reconstruction and are, therefore, not seen as distracting from the meaning generating process.

Having discussed the reflections on this study, recommendations for future research studies and clinical practice will be proposed. These recommendations are based upon the researcher's impressions from conducting research of a qualitative and social constructionist nature.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE**

Due to the limited scope of this study, the research findings focused on the emotions that the incestuous fathers experienced regarding their incestuous behaviour while they were behaving incestuously as well as the emotions that they experienced afterwards. More research could be done to discover the emotional experiences of the incestuous fathers regarding their relationship with other family members, as well as their emotional experiences regarding the consequences of their incestuous behaviour, etcetera.

Perhaps research of a similar nature could be done in the area of emotional experiences of incestuous mothers or other members of the family system in which the incestuous behaviour occurred.

From the incestuous fathers' stories, it was evident that these fathers have experienced an enormous amount of blame from society. Both the participants found refuge in their churches where they reportedly experienced unconditional acceptance and support. Within the context of clinical practice, therapists should therefore realise the importance of empathy and unconditional positive regard. This means that as therapists, we need to be able to imagine what it would be like to be in these fathers' 'shoes' and to unconditionally accept them regardless of their actions or emotional experiences. This however poses a very challenging task and researchers should remain aware of their own 'blind-

spots' and biases. Perhaps then, we will be able to approach this deeply troubling human problem effectively through tough but tender intervention.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study has provided valuable and rich information regarding the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers. The qualitative research approach fitted with the social constructionist foundation of this research and allowed the co-creation and reconstruction of the participants' emotional experiences in the form of rich and descriptive themes. The themes provided a deep or perhaps even a 'new' understanding of the subjective emotional experiences of two incestuous fathers regarding their incestuous behaviour and appeared to have enriching benefits for the participants and the researcher. This study provides a contribution to the existing literature on incestuous fathers and is not aimed at replacing other approaches to incestuous fathers. It is hoped that future researchers and therapists will also benefit from the findings.

At the end of this study, the researcher acknowledges that this study has enriched her as human being. However, the researcher does not claim to now be an expert on the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers and she remains with the social constructionist position of not knowing. In the introductory chapter, the researcher clearly delineated her beliefs as Christian in the Holy Bible. Although the Bible is often seen as linear and paradoxical, the researcher has found a scripture in the Bible that fits well within her social

constructionist framework and that echoes her position of not knowing after she has completed this study.

**“If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.”**

**1 Corinthians 8 verse 2**

**(Bible, 1980, p. 1072)**