

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“¹ Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

Matthew 7:1-5

(Bible, 1980, p. 936)

1. PERSONAL REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCHER ON THE TOPIC OF INCEST

During my training as ecosystemic therapist, I, a white, South African female, became acutely aware of my capacity and ability to empathise with and unconditionally accept ‘perpetrators’ in a therapeutic context. I acknowledge that this capacity of mine is strongly influenced by my religious beliefs of Christianity as can be seen in the above quote. I do not perceive myself as

infallible human being, and I realise that I also have the ability to hurt others even though it might not be in the same capacity as the participants in this study. However, I do realise that if I had been a “victim” of incestuous behaviour I may have found it difficult to show empathy and unconditional positive regard towards the participants in this study.

2. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Incest evokes intense reactions from the general public. Many people are of the opinion that such offenders are not punished heavily enough and that too much attention is paid to the rights of the perpetrators at the expense of the rights of the victims (Decter, 1994). Newspapers and magazines, which do not shrink from treating even rape as a source of titillation, seem to agree with the public that incest is too distasteful to report. English news editors have been heard to say it is not something that people want to read at the breakfast-table or read in a family newspaper. The same feelings of revulsion have caused professionals to shy away from the controversial problem of incest (Kempe & Kempe, 1978). Despite an apparently “universal taboo”, incest has occurred throughout history and in virtually all societies. Incest occurs across the entire spectra of age, race, religion, nationality, family relationships and socio-economic class (Fruman, 1992).

Because of continued research and a reawakened interest in the field of sexual abuse, many researchers are currently investigating phenomena such as

incest. Most libraries seem to contain shelves of books, articles, chapters, pamphlets, and encyclopedia entries on incest.

Extensive research has been conducted within a linear modernist framework, into the psychological and emotional experiences of the victims of incest, the typifying characteristics of the incest perpetrator, the etiology and treatment of incest perpetrators, etcetera. However, the subjective emotional experiences of the incest perpetrator regarding his/her incestuous behaviour have not always been considered as important. Furthermore, within a linear modernist framework, incest perpetrators have been diagnosed, categorised and treated accordingly, often at the expense of their own 'voices' and unique lived emotional experiences.

In advancing this, this study was done from a more collaborative and inclusive stance. The incestuous fathers were given the opportunity to voice their emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour. Thus, this study is one of the few studies if not the first that attempted to gain a broader understanding of the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers from a postmodern, social constructionist perspective.

3. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

In the following section, the terms, emotional experiences, incestuous fathers and social constructionism are defined so that the reader may have a clear understanding of the key concepts relevant to this dissertation.

3.1 Emotional experiences

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Thompson, 1995 p. 442) defines 'emotional' as: "of or relating to the emotions". It also defines 'experience' as: "actual observation of or practical acquaintance with facts or events" (Thompson, 1995, p. 474). In this research the phrase 'emotional experiences' refers to the emotions that the incestuous fathers have experienced during and after their incestuous behaviour.

3.2 Incestuous father

In this research, the term 'incest' is consistent with the definition of incest used by Cole (1992) that includes any sexual contact or behaviour for the purpose of sexual stimulation, between an adult (or another child in a position of power over the victim) and a child related within a family structure. This child can be related biologically, can be an adopted or stepchild or can be a child under the guardianship of the incest perpetrator. The sexual contact can include contact such a sexual fondling, indecent exposure, masturbation, hand-genital contact, oral-genital contact, or intercourse, as well as such activities as showing erotic materials or making sexually suggestive comments to a child.

Due to the limited scope of this dissertation, the researcher has narrowed the focus of the research to father-child incest. Therefore, in this research, an incestuous father is the biological, adoptive, step, or guardian father of the child that he had sexual contact with.

The researcher would like to note that the linear terms, ‘incestuous father’ and ‘incest perpetrator’ are used throughout in this study. Although these terms fit better within an epistemology of modernism, the researcher chose to remain with these terms within the postmodern, social constructionist approach to the research. These terms, which are only used for practical purposes in this study, do not suggest that the fathers are wholly described by their offending acts or that they are synonymous with their offending behaviour.

3.3 Social constructionism

This brief theoretical description will be expanded on in chapter 3, but for the purposes of clarity, the reader will be introduced to the social constructionist epistemology.

The roots of social constructionism were founded in the larger postmodern epistemology. Social constructionists seem fundamentally interested in personal stories whilst having the awareness that dominant stories in the larger society may dominate those individual experiences. Furthermore, social constructionists believe that more than one reality or account of reality exists. However, social constructionists hold the postmodern premise that all accounts of reality do not hold equal validity.

4. THE AIM OF THIS STUDY

Existing literature and research on incestuous fathers are largely based on the linear modernist approach, with psychopathology drawing strongly on the

categorisation, diagnosis and treatment of conditions within the individual. However, as previously mentioned, the emotions that an incestuous father experiences while behaving incestuously as well as the emotions that he experiences afterwards have not always been considered as important. These experiences are unstated or insufficiently emphasised in the available literature.

The aim of this research, therefore, is to relate the emotions that two incestuous fathers have experienced regarding their incestuous behaviour while they were behaving incestuously as well as afterwards. Through this the researcher attempted to gain a deep understanding of the subjective emotional experiences of incestuous fathers regarding their incestuous behaviour.

However, although the researcher attempted to remain true to the participants' emotional experiences, she cannot be excluded from what she observed. The conversations with the participants were co-constructions between her reality and the reality of the participants. Therefore, the researcher does not claim that her understanding of the participants' emotional experiences is the ultimate 'truth'. The researcher's descriptions of the participants' emotional experiences are merely the understanding that she has reached after a journey of exploring the emotional experiences of two incestuous fathers. The results of this study are not meant to be generalised to a larger population. Nevertheless, readers will no doubt consider the ideas of the researcher and create new ideas in his or her own process of co-construction.

Furthermore, the researcher also hoped to offer the incestuous fathers a context in which they can express and explore the emotions that they experienced regarding their incestuous behaviour. Last, the researcher hopes that this experience would open opportunities for herself, the research participants as well as other researchers to develop and grow within themselves.

5. THE DESIGN OF THIS STUDY

This study is designed according to the nature of the research aims set out above. Although the epistemological stance, conceptualisation of the design, and the method of the research are more fully articulated in chapters 3 and 4, a basic outline is in this section provided here, showing coherence between the research aims, the chosen epistemological approach, and the nature of the research.

Since the purpose of this research was not to gather facts or to generalise findings, but rather to gain an understanding of the emotional experience of two incestuous fathers, this study was done from a social constructionism approach. Social constructionism is a postmodern theoretical stance that allows the inclusion and emphasis of multiple realities and personal stories (Doan cited in Rapmund, 2000). It is also relevant as theory and context wherein this study was conducted. Social constructionists are interested in accounts that honour and respect the community of voices inherent in each individual (Doan, cited in Rapmund, 2000).

Social constructionism as a theoretical stance also seemed particularly suited to this study since it exemplifies a collaborative and respectful framework, in which the researcher co-constructed alternative emotional experiences of incestuous fathers that may have opened opportunities for change and growth.

The view of qualitative research of understanding people in context and regarding each person as having his or her own reality is consistent with the social constructionist principles of multiple realities (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). Furthermore, the qualitative approach ascribes to the discovery of subjective meanings and the description of specific cases (Neuman, 1997). Therefore, the qualitative approach is particularly appropriate since the researcher inquired about the emotional experiences of two incestuous fathers and especially since the results of this study are not meant to be generalised to a larger population.

Research participants who could provide rich descriptions of their emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour were selected. The researcher used criterion-based sampling to select these participants. Since the researcher was working within the qualitative framework that is concerned with in-depth analysis and detail, she deliberately selected a small sample of two participants.

6. THE FORMAT OF THIS STUDY

This study comprises a literature review, a theoretical, as well as a practical component. The format of the study is as follows:

Chapter 2 provides the intellectual background that serves as the starting point for this study. It surveys the existing body of academic views and research on incest and specifically on father-child incest and incestuous fathers.

Chapter 3 entails an epistemological journey, tracing the evolution of epistemology through from modernism, to first-order and second-order cybernetics, and then through to postmodernism. Fundamental concepts of postmodernism are briefly discussed, followed by a look at the theoretical stances referred to as 'constructivism' and 'social constructionism'.

Chapter 4 provides an outline of the research approach and methodology. Qualitative research, which is the chosen research approach for this study, as opposed to a traditional quantitative research approach, is delineated.

Chapter 5 contains the reconstructions of the participants' emotional experiences in the form of prominent themes. These themes are identified according to the researcher's frame of reference and are, therefore, *her* story of the participants' stories.

Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter. An overview of the common patterns and themes that emerged from the two incestuous fathers' stories are provided. A summary of the themes that did not re-occur is also provided. A meta-perspective in terms of reflections on this study is discussed and recommendations for future research and clinical practice are proposed.