

The Offspring of Aeolus - On the Incest Taboo

By Sam Vaknin, Ph.D.

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Incest is not such a clear-cut matter as it has been made out to be over millennia of taboos. Many participants claim to have enjoyed the act and its physical and emotional consequences. It is often the result of seduction. In some cases, two consenting and fully informed adults are involved. Many types of relationships, which are defined as incestuous, are between genetically unrelated parties (a stepfather and a daughter), or between fictive kin or between classificatory kin (that belong to the same matriline or patriline). In certain societies (the American Indians or the Chinese) it is sufficient to carry the same family name (=to belong to the same clan) and marriage is forbidden. Some incest prohibitions relate to sexual acts - other to marriage. In some societies, incest is mandatory or prohibited, according to the social class (Bali). In others, the Royal House started a tradition of incestuous marriages, which were imitated by lower classes (Ancient Egypt). The list is long and it serves to demonstrate the diversity of this most universal taboo. Generally put, we can say that a prohibition to have sex with or marry a related person should be classified as an incest prohibition, no matter the nature of the relationship.

Perhaps the strongest feature of incest has been hitherto downplayed: that it is, essentially, an autoerotic act. Having sex with a first-degree blood relative is like having sex with yourself. It is a Narcissistic act and like all acts Narcissistic, it involves the objectification of the partner. The incestuous Narcissist over-values and then devalues his sexual partner. He is devoid of empathy (cannot see the other's point of view or put himself in her shoes). For an in depth treatment of Narcissism and its psychosexual dimension, see: "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited" and "Frequently Asked Questions" (scroll down for a complete list of FAQs).

But incest involves more than a manifestation of a personality disorder or of a paraphilia (incest is considered by many to be a class of pedophilia). It harks back to the very nature of the family. It is closely entangled with its functions and with its contribution to the development of the individual within it.

A family is a mechanism of allocation of genetic and materialistic wealth. Worldly goods are passed on from one generation to the next through succession, inheritance and residence. Genetic material is handed down through the sexual act. It is the mandate of the family to increase both, either by accumulating property or by exogamy (marrying outside the family). Clearly, incest prevents both. It preserves a limited genetic pool and makes an increase of material possessions through intermarriage all but impossible.

Once allocated, the family is an efficient venue of transferring material wealth, as well as transmitting information and messages horizontally (among family members) and vertically (down the generations). A large part of the process of socialization still rides on the back of this property of the family. It is still by far the most heavyweight agent of socialization. Gender roles, for instance, are learned, emulated and assimilated mainly through the family. Incest, in itself, isolated from its social context and judgement, should not have affected this function in particular. There is no logical reason why incest should interfere with socialization, role learning or with the allocation of material resources (except, perhaps, when it comes to inheritance). Paradoxically, it is the reaction of society that transforms incest into such a disruptive phenomenon. The condemnation, the horror, the revulsion and the social sanctions distort the internal processes of the incestuous family. It is from society that the child learns that something is horribly wrong and that he should not adopt the offending parent as a role model. The formation of the Superego is stunted and it remains infantile, ideal, sadistic, perfectionist, demanding and punishing. The Ego, on the other hand, is likely to be replaced by a False Ego version, whose job it is to suffer the consequences of the socially hideous act. To sum up: social control in the case of incest is most likely to produce a Narcissist. Disempathic, exploitative and in eternal search for Narcissistic supply – the child becomes a replica of his offending parent.

One of the main businesses of the family is to teach to its members self control, self regulation and healthy adaptation. Family members share space and resources, for instance. Siblings share the mother's emotions and attention. Similarly, the family educates its young members to master their drives and to postpone the gratification and satisfaction, which attaches to acting upon them. The incest taboo teaches children how to control their erotic drive by abstaining from ingratiating themselves with members of the opposite sex within the same family. There could be little question that incest constitutes a lack of control and impedes the proper separation of impulse (or stimulus) from the response to it. Additionally, it probably interferes with the defensive aspects of the family's existence. It is through the family that aggression is legitimately channelled, expressed and externalized. By imposing discipline and hierarchy on its members, the family is transformed into a cohesive and efficient war machine. It sucks in economic resources, social status and members of other families. It forms alliances and fights other alliances over scarce goods, tangible and intangible. This efficacy is adversely affected by incest. It is virtually impossible to maintain discipline and hierarchy in an incestuous family wherein some members assume sexual roles not normally theirs. Sex is an expression of power – emotional and physical. The members of the family involved in the incest surrender power and assume it out of the regular flow patterns that have made the family the formidable apparatus that it is. This weakens the family, both internally and externally. Internally, emotive reactions (such as jealousy of other family members) and clashing authorities and responsibilities are likely to undo the delicate unit. Externally, the family will be vulnerable to ostracism and more official forms of intervention and dismantling.

Finally, the family is an identity endowment mechanism. It bestows identity upon its members. Internally, the members of the family derive meaning from their position in the family tree (coupled with societal expectations and maxims). Externally, through exogamy, the family absorbs other identities and develops its own. Exogamy, as often noted, allows for the creation of extended alliances. It reduces the solidarity of the

nuclear, original family by extending it to "strangers". The "identity creep" of the family is in total opposition to incest. The latter even increases the solidarity and cohesiveness of the incestuous family – but at the expense of its ability to digest and absorb other identities of other family units.

Freud said that incest provokes horror because it touches upon our forbidden, ambivalent emotions towards members of our close family. This ambivalence covers both aggression towards other members (forbidden and punishable) and (sexual) attraction to them (doubly forbidden and punishable). Others had an opposite view (Westermarck) that "familiarity breeds contempt" and that the incest taboo simply reflects emotional reality rather than fight against inbred instincts.

There is little doubt that incest has nothing to do with genetic considerations. In today's world incest does not need to result in pregnancy and the transmission of genetic material. Good contraceptives should, therefore, encourage bad, incestuous, couples. In many other life forms, inbreeding or straightforward incest is the norm (chimpanzees, to mention close relatives). Finally, incest prohibitions apply to non-genetically-related people in most countries.

The more primitive the society, the more strict and elaborate the set of incest prohibitions and the fiercer the reactions of society to its violation. It appears that the less violent the dispute settlement methods in a given culture – the more lenient the attitude to incest. Incest seems to interfere with well-established and rigid patterns of inheritance. This interference led, in all probability, to disputes. In more primitive societies, arms were resorted to in an effort to resolve conflicts. To prevent recurrent and costly bloodshed was one of the intentions of the incest taboo.

The incest taboo is, therefore, a cultural trait. Protective of the efficient mechanism of the family, society sought to minimize disruption to its activities and to the clear flows of authority, responsibilities, material wealth and information horizontally and vertically. Incest threatened to unravel this magnificent creation. Alarmed by the possible consequences (internal and external feuds, a rise in the level of aggression and violence) – society introduced the taboo. It came replete with physical and emotional sanctions: stigmatization, revulsion and horror, imprisonment, the demolition of the errant and socially mutant family cell. As long as societies revolve around the relegation of power, its sharing, its acquisition and dispensation – there will always exist an incest taboo. But in a different society and culture, it is conceivable not to have such a taboo. This would be either utopian or dystopian, depending on the reader.

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Hair of Women

By Joyce C. Lock

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At this writing, my hair is a closed hand's breath above my waist. It has been some variation of long mostly since being a teen, out of preference.

Though, after having read an old book on the thoughts and beliefs that originated around a woman's hair, with much name calling toward the female gender, I did thorough research of scripture in reference to hair.

Having discovered sheep verses goats being symbolic of types of people, I traced to find a definition of their hair as being the offspring seed of each.

Paul referred to himself as a type of father. Without going into the various symbolic definitions of the term 'woman', even as we perceive it to mean today, some are mothers by having literal children.

But, even those without children, who teach children in Sunday School, take on a partial role of motherhood.

Though, greater yet is when we take upon a spiritual nurturing role to spiritual babes. The offspring of a woman's spiritual seed would bring much more glory than the appearance of her physical head.

On rare occasion, God allows me to see a small glimpse of His glory rising in people who've been blessed through my ministries. And, my heart glows to see such beauty, a bit of God blossoming in each one of them. However, only God can count the number of hairs ~ the number of times that seed has been multiplied.

These are conclusions God led me to, giving me much peace.

But, if literal hair is, in any way, a testimony for which we can minister to those who believe as tradition, let God be glorified.

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Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 1 Peter 3:3-4

<http://my.homewithgod.com/blessingsandlessons/>

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In addition to being a published author and poet, Joyce C. Lock created the religion column, "Christianity Made Simple" for Peru Daily Tribune, continues to write inspirational articles for area newspapers, and shares further in online and e-mail ministries.

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