

Incest Does Not Just Happen

Grooming Behaviours and Processes among Paternal Incest Offenders

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Introduction

The prevalence rates for child sexual abuse in Canada and the United States are alarmingly high. A recent U.S. national study estimated that 15 to 32 percent of children are sexually abused (Vogeltanz et al. 1999). Approximately one in four girls will be sexually abused before age eighteen (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith 1990; Russell 1986). Children are frequently sexually abused by a relative or immediate family member (Russell 1986; Ward 1984). In many cases the abuser is the father or a father figure (Finkelhor 1984), and the breach of such a trusting relationship carries with it more severe long-term effects for the survivor (Finkelhor 1979; Russell 1986).

Sexual offences themselves do not just happen; rather, they have been described as "a culmination of a long series or chain of events" (Nelson & Jackson 1989: 167). In contrast to popular belief, there often lie many progressive planned steps between the initial urge to offend and the resulting sexual offence. While these planned steps are not causes of incest, they are "grooming behaviours" that allow incest offenders to access their victims, create the opportunity to offend, enhance the victims' compliance and lead up to the offence. This research project with incestuous child molesters identifies specific grooming behaviours in incest and paternal incest offenders' perceptions of the influence of societal factors on their offending behaviours.

Knowledge about the strategies offenders use to get close to their victims and gain their trust is critical for both prevention and recognition of incest. There is little research that examines the larger context of the abusive incident, specifically the pre-offence processes that are affected by the family environment, societal influences and the pe-

trator's feelings, thoughts and premeditated behaviours. We know very little about offender grooming behaviours from the perpetrator's perspective and no studies to date have examined the multiple contextual factors leading up to the offences from the offender's viewpoint.

Only a handful of studies have examined the grooming processes of incest offenders. Christiansen and Blake (1990) identified several specific grooming behaviours: (a) building trust by giving gifts to, and spending time with, the victim, (b) favouritism, (c) alienating the victim from friends, (d) boundary violations in personal environments such as hygiene tasks and (e) inappropriate sexual conversations. Young (1997) showed how offenders situate their grooming behaviours within the context of routine activities such as playing games, caretaking activities, domestic chores and family interaction and socialization. According to Young (1997), offenders used normalization to disguise their abuse and legitimate physical contact between the child and themselves. One study with twenty male sex offenders (Conte, Wolf & Smith 1989) revealed how offenders deliberately select child victims who appear more vulnerable. The offenders gained access to the children by desensitizing the children to touch and verbal discussions about sex. Gilgun and Connor (1989) interviewed fourteen male sex offenders and found that setting up the situation to abuse was crucial in the victimization process. This made the offence more pleasurable for the offender. These studies provide critical information on grooming behaviours; however, with the exception of Christiansen and Blake's (1990) research, the above studies did not focus exclusively on paternal incest offenders. They grouped intrafamilial and extrafamilial offenders together and included victims outside the family and victims of both sexes.

In our society, certain social values and beliefs may influence offenders' thinking and behaviour. Male and female socialization influence our attitudes and beliefs about how individuals should function within families. Male gender socialization has been implicated in sexual violence towards women and children (Lisak, Hopper & Song 1996; Russell 1986) and is critical in understanding incest. Finkelhor (1987) locates the problem of sexual abuse within the normal processes of male socialization. He proposes that male socialization teaches men to get their emotional needs met through sexual relationships which involve, in his terms, "sexualization of emotional expression." The "attraction gradient" encourages women to be attracted to older, larger and more powerful men and leads men to look for younger, smaller and less powerful persons than themselves. The fact that society also exempts men from caregiving responsibilities for children results in many men not understanding their role in children's care, nurturing and protection.

Media representations, such as those portrayed on billboards and

television and in magazines and movies, carry stimulating messages that sexualize women, youth and children, thus desensitizing society and contributing to violence against women as well as incest. There is also a proliferation of child pornography which views adult-child sexual activity as acceptable. Research suggests that both the societal acceptability of adult-child sexual activity and the exposure to sexually violent materials perpetuate and reinforce sex offender behaviour (Hayashino, Wurtele & Klebe 1995; Malamuth 1981).

Finkelhor (1986a), in an extensive review of theories which explain sexual abuse of children, concluded that no single-factor theory fully explains sexual abuse. Maddock and Larson's (1995) ecological model of incest recognizes the complexity of incestuous behaviour and the larger contextual elements that influence its occurrence. These include individual, structural and functional patterns of family interaction and sociocultural influences on gender identity and behaviour. Maddock and Larson explain incest as arising primarily from distortions in family sexuality. The structure of an incestuous family is dysfunctional: boundaries are distorted, and sexuality is used to exploit its members. According to Maddock and Larson, incest arises from a complex interaction of social context variables: intrapsychic influences (e.g., mental disorders, early life disturbances, low self-esteem); relational variables (e.g., power imbalances between the genders in the family); developmental variables (e.g., ineffective coping strategies for change) and situational factors (e.g., opportunity and disinhibitory substances such as alcohol use). We can thus conceptualize grooming behaviours as deliberately planned actions and processes leading up to the incest in which individual, familial, social and cultural forces play a role.

In order to better understand the interactions of these contextual elements and to further explore offenders' grooming behaviours, a study of paternal incest offenders was undertaken.

Interviews with Fathers

Thirteen audiotaped interviews with offenders took place at a Canadian minimum security federal penitentiary between April and August 1997. The participants were fathers or father figures who were primary caregivers to their female victim(s). The men participated in in-depth interviews which lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours.

The men were between twenty-nine and sixty-three years of age. Five men had less than grade twelve education, three had completed grade twelve, two had university or college courses and three had a university or college degree. Their sentences for sexual assault or sexual interference ranged from two to eight years. Time spent in group counselling ranged from three to twenty-one months. Three of the men had more than one victim. Five men had abused their biological daugh-

ters, and eight men had abused their step-daughters or their girlfriends' daughters. Eleven men described being emotionally, physically and/or sexually abused by family members or relatives.

A qualitative analysis of these interviews consisted of classifying emerging patterns and characteristics across and within interviews and highlighting relationships that connected statements and events within specific contexts. Also considered significant in the analysis were topics that participants spontaneously mentioned (e.g., derogatory comments about women).

Grooming Behaviours

Awareness of Grooming Behaviours and Patterns

It was difficult for participants in the study to identify and/or acknowledge specific grooming behaviours. Denial and minimization appeared prevalent among offenders even after treatment. One father, who had gone through extensive counselling, said:

That's probably the hardest thing as an offender to understand—and certainly for me. That's been something that I've struggled with—I can say "Nooo, it just happened" and that's the easiest way of—[laugh]—kind of, rationalizing it. No, there's planning ... it may not be overt and sort of in the front of your mind or say that I'm going to do this and do this and do this, but in the back of your mind set up the situation.

Many of the men maintained that they did not plan their offences. One father, who at the beginning of the interview denied any planning, later spoke of taking advantage of "opportunities" to put the children to bed when his wife was away from home. Another father rationalized not recalling any abuse, let alone his grooming behaviours:

I think what would happen was as soon as I'd offend, I'd blank them out ... because I knew I couldn't live with this ... she'd say nothing to me and I'd say nothing to her... I heard one time [my daughter] say something that this was just like the Brady Bunch—everything looks so good on the outside and yet...

Another father's denial of grooming also took the form of presenting his family as a kind of "Brady Bunch": "We probably had the best family in the world. We traveled all over the place, enjoyed each other. Every one of us was ... involved in all kinds of sports activities... We went to church."

Many of the men minimized their offending by stating that they

had a difficult time remembering details of the grooming since in some cases the abuse occurred thirty years earlier. In other cases, the men claimed that heavy alcohol and/or drug use at the time dulled their memory. One man recognized that his use of minimization and denial was so strong that, when confronted about the incest by his adult daughter years later, he stated,

I couldn't believe that those were things I've done.... The shock to me was so great that I was going to get a lawyer and countercharge her for defamation, or whatever it was, because I was under denial. I was denying it. It's not until I started taking programs and really looking into myself and dig down there.

One man at first denied planning his offence with the distortion that "the offence happened by accident." Thinking back, he said,

I would do those things without actually thinking that I am going to, uh, assault her, but I would do them with the idea that, "Well, I'll get her ready just in case I want to." That was more the kind of thinking. So things just didn't happen by accident ... say ninety percent of the time ... uh, when an assault took place there was a lead-up period to it.

Selecting the Victims

Selecting the victim was a critical component of the grooming process and often began with selecting women as partners who had certain characteristics. Some men sought out women whom they could control and manipulate, who lacked independence and assertiveness and who may have had a background of child or spousal abuse themselves. As one man stated, "I would spend hours looking for just that certain woman who ... had that appearance of being lonely or needful or whatever.... I would hunt them out." Another man commented that he looked mainly for "younger chicks ... young kinda girls" because the older ones were more "hip to your tricks." One father admitted that he was attracted more to his girlfriend's teenage daughter than to his girlfriend.

In terms of selecting a child victim, the majority of the men deliberately chose more physically developed children as they found them more desirable. Fewer men found a smaller, younger person more desirable. Several step-fathers recalled feeling sexually attracted to their step-daughters when they were pre-adolescents or adolescents and had begun to develop sexually. One step-father chose his victim based on her emerging adolescent sexuality and erroneous beliefs about

her sexual availability. He explained how his role in the family changed from "father" to "abuser":

I mean nothing sexual came [to me] about this girl until six months later ... after I moved in.... I wasn't, you know after her or anything at the time or right away.... I was just concerned about where she was going and that, like a father would be ... stuff like that. Then, uh, her mother told me that she got sexually assaulted by her father and you know, I felt sorry at the time and then that's when I started thinking like "Oh man, she's into sex!" stuff like that.... Then I started thinking, like "Oh wow, what would that be like to go with her?" and "She likes sex".... The most thing that really appealed to me was that I knew she was sexually active. That was the big thing.

Contact and Non-Contact Grooming Behaviours

The grooming process included both contact behaviours as well as non-contact behaviours. The more obvious grooming behaviours occurred through increased physical touching and body contact. One father took advantage of existing opportunities for desensitizing his daughter towards touching: "When she started swimming, she was competitively swimming and had trouble with her shoulders. That's where the massage came in." Another father stated, "At first it was me masturbating, then I started approaching, grooming ... like touching her head and touching her hand, you know holding her hand, stuff like that, petting her and stuff." Several fathers used affectionate touches, massages, tickling and physical contact games. Some fathers found the victims' weak points, which were usually their need for attention and affection. One father recounted,

She was looking for affection and she was also lonely, but not to the point of sexual loneliness where I was. I'd hug her and hold her too long.... Every girl should get hugs from her father [pause] but not as long as I did.

Non-contact grooming included setting up situations in which abuse could occur and giving victims gifts and special privileges with the expectation that this "exchange" would eventually become mutual. One father commented: "If I'm rewarding my victim and making her feel good, then when I come to ask for something, I'm going to get it in return.... It was all manipulation and coercion." One step-father manipulated both the mother and the daughter by using drugs, money and alcohol:

I used some of that money to get [um] sexual favours or even a kiss or a feel or whatever or have her watch me masturbate. I would give her maybe a gram of pot or whatever.... So I was using everything I can in order to get sexual favours from [the daughter].

The following scenario illustrates more subtle pre-offence intentions:

I did things like ... I'd go into the bathroom if she was in the shower.... Or she'd come into the bedroom after I'd showered. I'd leave the door—I wouldn't lock the door and I'd take a long time to dry off so if she came into the room, then she'd see me naked ... by the time I was offending her I'm sure she had seen me naked, you know, a few times and that was part of my grooming.

Grooming also took the form of setting up situations for the opportunity to abuse. In most of the cases, the abuse took place in the family home. Locating a time and place required thinking ahead: as one father stated, "Timing was critical for me. I had to find the right time to approach her which was mostly at night when everybody was in bed. Lots of times she locked her door."

Some offenders used specific parenting styles to groom children for later sexual compliance. Many fathers assumed an authoritarian parenting style which focused on exerting power and control: "It was my way or the highway. I was in control." In contrast, another father's overly permissive parenting was a part of his grooming process:

My kids never had curfews.... There was very little discipline.. They came and went as they pleased. Uh, which had more to do with the fear of being found out than [laugh], you know ... I was sexually abusing my children ... that gave them licence to come and go as they pleased. I wasn't going to put my foot down on them. It's part of the control issue, isn't it—part of the rewards for allowing me to violate them was that they had freedom of movement.

Five fathers actively interfered with the mother-child relationships, placing themselves in adversarial roles to the victims' mothers by acting more as a friend to the children than as a parent—allowing extra privileges and having the mothers administer the discipline.

Another common, subtle grooming pattern that emerged was discussing, or in some cases, *not* discussing sexuality issues. Talking to his children about sex under the guise of educating them was a common

form of grooming behaviour for one man. One step-father initiated a discussion about the noises his step-daughter had heard from her mother's bedroom: "I said, 'Well that's your mom and I just making noises from an orgasm' and I asked her if she knew what it was and by this time I was already setting her up and playing her along." One father deliberately avoided discussing sexuality issues with his children,

As for me talking to them about sexuality on real terms—NOT A CHANCE—never ... with any of them at any time ... because I had said nothing in the past, it was easy then to say "It's all right to do this ... because I'm your dad, would I hurt you?"

In another example, one step-father's desire to fit into his new family, as well as his cognitive distortions about sexuality and sex education, seemed to contribute to the sexual assault of his step-daughter:

A thought came to mind that a woman will always love her first lover and first man. That's the old wives tale or whatever, and I believed that and at the time I was telling myself ... "Hey, if I can teach her how to have an orgasm...." Hey that's something you would share having done and I was telling myself that I was going to create this terrific bond.... I'd convince her that it's okay.

Thus, while some grooming behaviours could be distinctly identified, others were more subtle and manipulative. Grooming a child for sex for most of the offenders was a long and subtle process. One father summed it up: "Pretty much everything I did with that child, from the time she was ten years old on, was to have her manipulated and groomed and put in a position to succumb to what I want." The grooming process also did not appear to change much over time (or between abuse incidents), except, as one father stated, it often required "more liberties or larger rewards."

The Larger Context of Incest

In talking with these men it was readily apparent that there were many stresses in their lives. Varying degrees of childhood abuse, distrust, decreased emotional intimacy in relationships, pervasive feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem and worthlessness, and multiple job and family pressures were prevalent. These feelings and stressors caused the offenders to isolate themselves, adopt multiple addictions and to use their partners and/or daughters to meet their needs. Most of the perpetrators spent much of their lives suppressing their feelings and

being emotionally shutdown. One man stated, "I was down quite often. Didn't recognize it, didn't feel it, didn't deal with it. And if you would ask me how things were going, most days I'd say, 'fine,' 'no problem' [laugh]."

Relationships with Female Partners, their Children and Women in General

The majority of the participants had emotionally distant and unhealthy relationships with their female partners and with women in general. Several offenders blamed their partners for their offending, saying that their partners were not fulfilling them sexually, were physically violent with the children, were verbally and physically abusive to the offender or were not available emotionally as a result of heavy drinking.

Some of the offending took place at a time when the men were emotionally estranged from their partners because of a fight, argument or separation. In many cases, the ability to control the mother facilitated the daughter's incest. One man said, "The mother was so easy to manipulate and whatever, I thought, 'I could get whatever I want from her.'" Another man explained,

Three quarters of the time when we went out drinking, my wife wouldn't come home. Like, we'd go to dances.... What would happen is I'd want to go home early. "If you want to stay for the dance you stay. I'm going home.... I can't stand these people."... There's the grooming.... I knew [my step-daughter] would be at home [babysitting].

While the men were not directly asked whether the mothers had a history of childhood sexual abuse, four of the men were aware that their partners had been sexually abused as children. Six men said that their partners had previously been involved in an abusive relationship as adults and had problems with alcohol or drugs. Several of the men were violent towards their female partners; but, as with the incest, the violence was often minimized:

I slapped her once. After that, I'd just walk away. Some people would say that that is abuse that I slapped her. I don't think ... like I never beat her up.... I take responsibility for slapping but I can't take responsibility for ever beating the shit out of her. Like, I'd never do that. I slapped her pretty hard and she got two black eyes.

Some of the men admitted they treated women like objects and manipulated them for their own gain. One man stated, "All my women

that I dated, I was always using them for something—either money or sex.” Another blamed his upbringing by saying, “I disrespected women. I don’t know, maybe that comes from my childhood.... I’ve used women probably most of my life. I’ve used them as sex objects you know?” Several men lacked emotional intimacy and mixed it up with sexual gratification. One man said, “That was my attitude at the time. Sex is sex.... That was the goal. You know, you go out to the bar, you get drunk, you pick up a woman. That’s the thing to do.” Another stated,

To me [sigh] what looked like love was sex in a sense. Affection had to do with sex I suppose ... like my father not only abused me sexually, uh, it didn’t matter to him if my mother was knocked out or not, he would still have sex with her.

Several derogatory views about women emerged. One respondent distanced himself from the offence by consistently objectifying and referring to his ex-common-law spouse in the interview as “the mother” and his step-daughter as “the girl.” Another man added, “The ones I wanted to marry, they dropped me and then I hated them—I hated women, I wanted to use them.”

Many of the fathers described being emotionally and physically distanced from their children. They played a very limited role in their children’s nurturing before and during the abuse. Several of the fathers felt less emotionally connected to their daughters. One man was proud of how he had raised his son; however, in reference to his daughter, whom he had been charged for offending against twice, he said, “I never had much to do with raising her. To teach her wisdom ... that wasn’t my end of it. I was more interested in the boys.”

Substance Abuse

Eleven of the thirteen men stated that alcohol and/or drugs played a role in their offending. They used substances to take away inhibitions before offending and to block out the memory of the offence. Many had begun abusing alcohol in their teenage years, and one man said he started drinking when he was eight years old. One father recognized that he relied on these substances to cope with his own history of abuse. Another father stated that he did not feel that he could have assaulted his daughter if he had not been under the influence of alcohol.

Family-of-Origin Issues

Witnessing and experiencing family violence was common for most men. One man stated, “All my life’s been violent. My dad used to pay me and my brother to fight for him and his friends, and I didn’t wanna,

but my brother was bigger than me and I was small.” Another man recalled, “When he came home drunk I would go out and hide out on the steps but I couldn’t stay there because I would hear him arguing and fighting with my mom.” All of the men described that, prior to therapy, they were unable to express their feelings. One man spoke of how his family background contributed to his views about women and his consequent inability to express feelings:

It wasn’t manly [to express feelings], you know. My dad was kind of a military man ... a very independent entrepreneur who expected men to be men and women to be women ... and uh, women had their role in life and men had their role in life and that’s all there was to it.

Fantasies and Pornography

Some men admitted to using pornography as a sexual stimulus to offend. Fantasizing was often a part of the grooming process that led them to be sexual with their victims. One father admitted, “Absolutely there were fantasies.... When I was in the fantasy stage it was too late. My mind was set and it was going to happen ... and that was all there was to it.” More than half of the men denied or did not recall fantasizing about their victim. Nine of the thirteen men had participated in activities that objectified women—watching strippers or looking at pornographic magazines or movies. One father frequented a sports bar, that had strippers, on a weekly basis. He struggled to connect this practice of seeing nude bodies to sexually assaulting his daughters.

Another father said that his offending behaviour provided him with closeness and affection and “it just seemed like that was the only return of affection that I could get.” Later he said that he also received affection through viewing pornography: “It gave me affection back in a sense ... what I was missing with my wife.” One father placed his offence within the larger scope of the problem of sexual violence when he said, “It doesn’t just happen overnight. Pornography, hookers, [pause] the cycle just ... from one to another, to another to another, drugs and pretty soon you find yourself in this great big vacuum and there’s nothing you can do.”

Issues of Power and Control

Themes of power and control in the family, in the workplace and in manipulating child victims and spouses were prevalent. Many men spoke of the importance of being in complete control over their lives and over the people around them. One father denied that he used any grooming because his daughter (and family) were afraid of him and would do what he said. Another man spoke about his wife, “I was so

jealous of her, so if I get her knocked up, then she's stuck with me, you see? There was no love there. I think I wanted to own her."

A biological father, separated from his wife at the time of the assaults, struggled with whether his motivation to assault his daughters was for sex or for affection. His statement clearly suggested other factors—control, revenge towards his ex-wife and anger.

I love my daughters, I had affection for them but it wasn't a sexual attraction. Then, there must have been a sexual attraction towards them to kiss their vaginas. It still comes down to that. And I'm still at grips with that and going, "Was it really a sexual attraction or was it simply a sign of affection?" ... When I look at it now thinking back, to do it, to be closer to them than their mother ... nobody else would do this.... They were my possessions.... And because of that you can lose tremendous amounts [sigh].

Views of Masculinity and Fatherhood

The majority of the men subscribed to traditional notions of a male's role in society and in the family. This included strongly emphasizing work and financial success, having difficulty expressing their feelings, supporting rigid sex roles in the family and discomfort with the father role. Nearly every participant called himself a workaholic. Others described patterns that reflected an unhealthy balance among work, leisure and family. Many men saw their supportive role in the family primarily as bread earners and providers. One man stated, "I was totally aware that I was useless. Just a paycheck." This comment by another man is also strikingly common among many non-offenders today:

I was going to get ahead. I was going to retire a millionaire at thirty-eight and that's all there was to it, and I knew what I had to do to do it. I was gonna follow dad's footsteps and I was gonna make it there and I had big expectations of myself.

Many men recognized that they could not easily trust others or open up emotionally to their wives or partners. One man described his lack of emotional expression in his relationships, "I guess I was afraid to ... not you know, appear masculine and, 'boys don't cry' and 'boys don't hurt and men don't cry and men don't hurt.'" Another man admitted, "Even my loneliness or my hurt or my anger or anything ... like, that was all kept inside of me. I didn't let anybody know about it. I put a front mask.... I camouflaged all of it. That was hard."

Several men held rigid views on the roles of women and men in the family. One man said:

She did anything that I wanted. Like, she was there to basically to please me. She never worked. She never had to because I worked and I worked long hours. I made lots of money... I thought a wife should have been there. It was her duty, you know, to have sex with me and stuff.

While some men felt extremely competent in their workplaces, other men felt much less competent as husbands or parents: "I was very ... confident in terms of business ... where I could be in control, the authority figure ... but, in an intimate relationship, not a chance. I had no idea how to do it. None whatsoever."

Several step-fathers' comments revealed the uncertainty of their role as a parent to their step-children. This apparent role confusion was evident in comments such as, "I'll have no authority" and "I have no control and I know the thought was there of, 'Will I ever be accepted?' I know I wanted to be called 'Dad.'" Two step-fathers explicitly suggested to the mother that they should have a sexual relationship with the daughter. One step-father, whose wife had several miscarriages, had concerns about her ability to carry a child to term. He never had any sons, yet wanted one. His comment highlights his distortion of the legal and biological aspects of the father-daughter relationship: "I remember telling my wife one time ... I said you know, L. is only my step-daughter, if I got her pregnant and she had a son, my son ... that wouldn't be that bad, 'cause she's only my step-daughter."

Implications

Grooming Behaviours

What these men have said regarding the process used by incest offenders in preparing to sexually abuse their victims raises a number of prevention and treatment issues for offenders and their families. While the majority of men minimized and denied using grooming behaviours, perhaps due to their desire to appear in a positive light in the interview, they did identify a variety of grooming behaviours. Although many of the behaviours they described may be present in families where there is no incest, grooming behaviours are distinguished from normal parenting behaviours because they are premeditated, deliberate steps taken with the intention to offend.

It is critical to examine the subtle manipulative and controlling behaviours of sex offenders towards all family members, not just the incest victim. This occurs when the perpetrator purposely undermines the mother's role with her children, often through physically abusing and intimidating her. It may be startling that the majority of grooming behaviours and incest offences took place inside the family home; this is not surprising, however, considering the extent to which offenders

normalized sexually abusive activities and manipulated the child victims and the mothers. Mothers whose children have been sexually abused often experience feelings of guilt, blame and responsibility for their child's abuse. Some mothers may also worry about their ability to select safe partners. Connecting numerous offender patterns with specific grooming behaviours and control strategies may help non-offending mothers who are in therapy decrease self-blame.

Identification of grooming behaviours can assist family members and help professionals outside the family to identify potentially risky situations and inappropriate interactions that may lead to the occurrence or continuation of sexual abuse. It is worth noting, however, that many perpetrators use subtlety and sophistication to disguise their grooming behaviours as normal caregiving activities: this may make it difficult for adults, let alone child victims themselves, to identify these situations.

A commonly used treatment model with sex offenders is the relapse prevention model. This model assumes that sexual offences are consciously planned and teaches offenders to recognize the precursors to their offending behaviour by defining their own offence cycle. Identifying the variety of offender grooming behaviours is important in helping offenders break through the denial involved in asserting that the molestation "just happened." This process can also enable offenders to recognize that they have the ability to control and change their behavior before committing the offence. One participant brought to the interview his own offence cycle which he had previously mapped out with his counsellor. He said that it was only through his work in therapy that he was able to identify the grooming behaviours he used with his daughter.

Contextual Factors

Larger contextual factors play a significant role in incest offences, even though few men connected their offending behaviour to these larger factors. Most men minimized the effects of their own past abuse, job stress and exposure to pornography in assaulting their daughters. Many attributed their offending to the use of alcohol and/or drugs. Some men, however, were more insightful, and, with the help of treatment, recognized these other causal factors.

The men generally had poor marital relationships and held negative views about women. Addressing the view of women and children as sex objects is imperative in the prevention of incestuous victimization and in the treatment of offenders. In changing offender behaviour, it is often necessary for offenders to re-examine and modify their core beliefs and attitudes about men and women. As a society we need to identify the dominant messages which sexualize women and children

and reconsider ways in which people are socialized into gender roles. Men need to be encouraged to depart from the dominant ideologies of gender: as long as boys and men are socialized to exercise power and control over their environment and others, to separate themselves emotionally from others, to suppress emotions that are culturally defined as non-masculine, to minimize the importance of their role as nurturing parents and to succumb to gendered notions of what men are "supposed to be," our society will always have the problem of incest.

For most of the men, incest revolved around cognitive distortions and the inability to handle life stresses in healthy ways (e.g., communicating with their partner, decreasing their workload). Instead of dealing with their feelings, these men submerged themselves in work, isolated themselves emotionally or relied on alcohol or drugs. They compensated for feelings of inadequacy through controlling their victims and the non-offending spouse. Men need to be provided with alternative, non-sexual and non-violent ways of dealing directly with stress and painful emotions.

Successful relapse prevention requires that offenders learn victim empathy, get in touch with their feelings and overcome denial and rationalizations. Many of the men became sexual with their daughters in order to feel emotionally closer to them, confusing affection with sex. Instead of verbalizing their emotions, the men acted out their feelings in a sexually violent fashion. Incest offenders need to understand and address in therapy the feelings that trigger them to act out sexually with their child.

There appear to be several contextual factors within the family that may make children more vulnerable to being incestuously abused. Since parents often perceive their younger children to be most vulnerable to victimization, they tend to be more protective of them. However, most offenders in this study stated that they began to perceive their daughters as more sexually appealing and available when their daughters or step-daughters began developing sexually physically and engaging in typical adolescent behaviours such as dating and drinking. One step-father claimed that his step-daughter was "into sex" and that "female children become sexual beings once they show sexual behaviour." This finding suggests that older preadolescent and adolescent female children may be at an increased risk for abuse by paternal incest offenders.

Increased vulnerability to committing abuse appears to be partly due to offenders' rationalizations about child sexuality. Thus, for example, children's prior history of sexual victimization may also make them more vulnerable to further victimization. Recall the step-father who revealed that knowing his step-daughter had been sexually abused made her a more attractive target to him and, in his words, gave him a

"green light" to be sexual with her. Immediate intervention with child victims of sexual abuse is imperative to avoid further victimization and to minimize child victim blaming in cases where the child displays inappropriate provocative behaviour due to past sexual victimization.

The majority of the men had little involvement in their children's caregiving. Step-fathers especially may face a difficult task. Several step-fathers in this study spoke of being uncertain about their parental role. Blurred generational boundaries and role confusion are more pronounced for step-fathers and mothers' boyfriends; this may increase the risk of, and the father's vulnerability towards, offending behaviour (Faller 1990). Unfortunately, due to the small number of stepfathers interviewed, we must be cautious in drawing such conclusions. Further research needs to examine incest offenders' perceived role as fathers, specifically focusing on their emotional attachment to their children. It may also be useful to distinguish among biological, legal and non-legal relationships between fathers and their children.

Conclusion

This exploratory study identified specific grooming behaviours of incest offenders. It showed how father-daughter incest is a deliberately planned process that often involves contact and non-contact behaviours. The offenders in this study explicitly described how they selected and prepared their victims and set up the offence. This research also provides insight into the societal influences that shape the attitudes and perceptions of offenders; it shows that one must look beyond the specific grooming behaviours to the various family and societal contexts.

We cannot remove sexually violent acts from their social context. There remains a pressing need in current research to consider how social factors influence offender thinking and grooming behaviours. Both women and men must continue to tell their stories about their experiences of violence (either as victims or perpetrators) in order to more fully understand how violence is an ingrained key component of our culture.