A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS DURING AND AFTER FATHER-DAUGHTER INCESTUOUS ABUSE OF THE DAUGHTER

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Counselling Psychology)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

December, 1990

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the relationship between mothers and their incestuously abused daughters. The research sample consisted of five adult daughters who in their childhood and/or adolescence, were abused by their biological fathers. The volunteer participants were in therapy at the time of the research interviews. The study employed a phenomenological method in order to allow the daughters to describe their experiences and perceptions of their mothers. By engaging in a dialogue with the daughters, the researcher attempted to explore the dynamics and impact of the mother-daughter relationships on the daughters.

Results confirmed that these mother-daughter relationships were damaged. However, the daughters also expressed strong desires to heal their relationships with their mothers. In addition, the daughters identified important connections between their relationships with their mothers and the continued influence of this relationship on their experience of themselves in their current lives.

The findings of this study have important research and therapeutic implications. The research findings strongly suggest that the relationship between daughters and their mothers in families where father-daughter incest occurs needs to be examined beyond individual family member's roles which have been the exclusive focus of existing research. Furthermore, the strong
connections made by the participants of the present study between their relationships with their mothers and their sense of self, may be an important consideration in therapeutic work with this client population.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the problem

The sacrosanctness of the parent-child relationship is a truism that has universal appeal and meaning. For victims of incest, the violation of this universal truth is a cruel legacy. Until the last decade, incest was suppressed and largely denied a public forum (Courtois, 1988). Historically, the price extracted from the victims of incest has often been too high for them to subject themselves to the scrutiny and punishment which often accompany disclosure. The taboo against nuclear family incest is universal (Courtois; Haugaard & Reppucci, 1988; Kosof, 1985; Meiselman, 1978). However, the occurrence of incest is also universal (Courtois; Herman, 1981; Russell, 1986). The duplicitous nature of incest has often been an impediment to determining the prevalence of incestuous abuse in our society. Incest has been covertly condoned in many cultures, while at the same time being overtly condemned and denied.

Since incest "...encompasses sexual behaviour with a multitude of patterns, variations, causes, types, relationships and aftereffects" (Courtois, 1988, p.12), it has been defined in a number of different ways (Courtois; Herman, 1981; Russell 1986; Vander Mey & Neff, 1986). For the purposes of this study, this researcher will use a definition of incest which incorporates several common components of definitions applied in incest
research (e.g., Herman; Russell). Incest is sexual abuse that is imposed on a child by an adult with whom the child has a kinship relationship. The abuse is said to be imposed since the child is not free to either consent to or refuse the advances of the offender. The child's ability to give informed consent is compromised by his or her lack of knowledge about sex and sexuality. The child is not free to refuse the advances because the kinship ties between the victim and the offender render the child emotionally and/or physically dependent upon the adult offender. The child also lacks maturational development regarding the ramifications of a sexual relationship.

Several researchers acknowledge the absence of any consensus regarding criteria for defining sexual abuse (e.g., Wyatt & Peters). The commonly used existing definitions incorporate the following components: child sexual abuse is any physical contact or solicitation for sex initiated or offered by an adult toward a child which is for the gratification of the adult (Faller, 1988). This broad definition includes intra- as well as extra-familial abuse. However, the lack of a uniform definition may account for the vastly divergent prevalence findings that have been reported (Finkelhor, 1986; Russell, 1986; Wyatt & Peters, 1986). In his review of several North American studies on the prevalence of child sexual abuse, Finkelhor (1986) found significant variation in their reported rates. These prevalence rates ranged from 6 to 62% for females and from 3 to 31% for males (Finkelhor, p. 19). The same difficulties regarding definition of incest affect the
prevalence rates for incestuous abuse. However, despite varied definitions of incest in the literature, researchers have found incestuous abuse to be the most commonly occurring form of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1979; Russell, 1986). However, reported rates of incest vary depending on how the incestuously abusive relationship is defined in any given prevalence study. In some studies (e.g., Russell) incest may include sexual interaction between any persons who are legally related to one another. In other studies (e.g., Finkelhor, 1984; Wyatt, 1985) the abuse includes contact as well as non-contact abuse. Sampling procedures and other methodological factors may also contribute to differential findings.

Among the various types of incestuous relationships studied, father-daughter incest has been reported as the most commonly occurring form of incest (Courtois, 1988; Finkelhor, 1979; Russell, 1986; Wyatt, cited in Russell). In Russell’s sample of 930 adult women of the San Francisco area, father-daughter abuse was reported by four and one-half percent of respondents, and therefore was the most commonly reported form of incest. Other researchers (e.g., Courtois, 1988; Finkelhor, 1986) concur that Russell’s sample was representative of women incest victims and that the study was methodologically rigorous. In Wyatt’s (cited in Russell) sample of 248 adult women of the Los Angeles area, father-daughter incest was reported by eight percent of respondents. This figure includes reports of incest with mothers’ live-in boyfriends and other father figures. These two studies
were similar in their definitions of incest and methodologies. Despite the high quality of the research by Wyatt (cited in Russell, 1986) and Russell, several researchers (e.g., Courtois, 1988; Russell; Finkelhor, 1984) maintain that the actual prevalence rates of incest are likely considerably higher than those reported in published studies.

Most researchers in the field also agree that because father-daughter incest contravenes cultural and societal taboos against sex between parent and child (Courtois; Haugaard & Reppucci, 1988), incest has the potential to inflict great damage upon the nuclear family and the life of the abused daughter in particular (Finkelhor, 1984; Giarretto, 1976; Herman, 1981; Russell). There remain many unanswered questions regarding actual prevalence rates for incest, family conditions within which incest occurs, and the impact of incest on the daughter and on familial relationships. The phenomenon of father-daughter incest therefore merits continued investigation, especially since the incidence rate of this form of abuse is high. This study will attempt to further explore the family structure within which incestuous relationships frequently occur. Specifically, the dynamics and nature of the mother-daughter relationship will be explored.

During the past decade, incest has received unprecedented societal and research attention. Research efforts to learn more about the characteristics and patterns of father-daughter incest have focused on the following themes (a) frequency of abuse, (b)
victims age at onset of abuse, (c) use of force in the father-daughter relationship, (d) impact of the incest on the daughter and on the family structure, and (e) the role of the mother within the incestuous family.

Russell (1986) found that the episodic frequency of father-daughter incest can range anywhere from once to over twenty times. Other clinicians suggest that it is extremely rare for father-daughter incest to occur only once (e.g., Carnes, 1983). The latter viewpoint suggests that when there is a report of a single incident of abuse, it is highly likely that the survivor is repressing other instances of abuse. The incestuous abuse can span a number of years. The more frequent the occurrence and the longer the duration of the incest, the greater the trauma to the victim (Courtois, 1988; Russell). This conclusion clearly suggests a linear relationship between the duration of the abuse and the severity of the impact upon the victim.

Russell's (1986) survey results indicated that the average age of onset for victims of father-daughter incest was 11.4 years. According to this study, the duration of incestuous abuse was typically between one and five years. There is disagreement among researchers concerning the relationship between the victim's age at onset and the impact of the abuse (Courtois, 1988; Meiselman, 1978; Peters, cited in Courtois, 1988). Some researchers believe that the younger the victim, the more traumatic the experience (e.g., Courtois; Meiselman). Other researchers (Herman & Schatzow, 1987) have suggested that the
younger age may provide child victims of sexual abuse with some measure of insulation from the societal stigma of sexual abuse. Furthermore, this insulation is believed to help reduce the impact of the damage from being experienced by the victims (Peters, cited in Courtois). Research findings do not report a specific age at which incestuous abuse ends. Termination of the abuse is dependent on several variables including the victim's capacity to disclose to an adult who will be supportive and effective in helping to stop the abuse from continuing (Finkelhor, 1984; Herman, 1981; Russell, 1986; Summit, 1983).

Typically, the father-daughter incestuous relationship is not marked by the use of physical force and violence (Russell, 1986). Usually the 'threat' of force, coupled with the victim's dependence on the offender are sufficient to guarantee her acquiescence. If violence is used, then the severity of the trauma is often proportionate to the amount of force or violence used (Courtois, 1988).

The damaging impact of father-daughter incest on the victims has been asserted and corroborated by many researchers and clinicians (Courtois, 1988; Finkelhor, 1986; Herman, 1981; Meiselman, 1978; Russell, 1986; Vander Mey & Neff, 1986). There is theoretical and clinical evidence to suggest that the closer and stronger the kinship between the victim and the offender, the more damaging the impact of the abuse on the victim (Courtois; Finkelhor, 1984; Herman; Meiselman; Russell; Summit; 1983). Researchers assert that father-daughter incest is the most
traumatic form of incest (Herman; Russell), due primarily to the
special significance of the father-daughter relationship. Father-
daughter incest affects both the daughter’s welfare and the
family structure within which the incest takes place (Giarretto,
1976; Herman; Russell). Russell found that the most severe damage
and trauma were reported by the victims of this form of abuse.
Fifty-four percent of the women in this study who were abused by
their fathers reported that they continued to be extremely upset
by the abuse. In comparison, 30% of women victimized by their
grandfathers reported being extremely upset. Regarding the long-
term effects of their abuse, 44% of the daughters reported being
greatly affected, compared to 10% of the granddaughters surveyed.

Herman (1981) states that the unequal power dynamics
inherent in the father-daughter dyad are grossly exceeded in an
incestuous relationship. This distortion of the father’s power
over the daughter is believed to be most damaging to the
victimized daughter. In Herman’s view, the frequent occurrence of
father-daughter incestuous abuse is the extreme expression of
culturally sanctioned gender-bound victimization of females by
males. From this perspective, the inevitability of the
destructive effect on the daughter is due primarily to the fact
that the father-daughter relationship is the most power-
imbalanced relationship possible in a gender-biased society. Thus
it is hypothesized that in such a society, power is allocated to
the adult males while females are considered to be subservient to
the males (Herman, 1981). In a father-daughter incestuous
relationship, the daughter is not at liberty to refuse her father’s sexual advances. As the daughter’s caretaker, the father’s sexual advances put the daughter in a position in which she is forced to pay with her body for his care and affection. Herman (1981) proposes that the most damaging impact of incest does not reside in the sexual act but in the "...exploitation of children and corruption of paternal love" (p. 4). This theoretical perspective is corroborated by several other researchers of child sexual abuse (Butler, 1978; Courtois, 1988; Finkelhor, 1984; Russell, 1986; Walker, 1988).

Giarretto (1976) describes the damaging impact of father-daughter incest in terms of the blurring and possible dissolution of family member roles. From this perspective, the occurrence of the incestuous relationship generates sufficient stress which leads to conflict and confusion among all members of the family unit. Giarretto also sees the abused daughter as being the most affected and confused member of the family. The daughter’s experience of the behaviour of both of her parents toward her, is believed to be contrary to her expectations and beyond her comprehension. The father, whose role it is to support and provide guidance to his daughter, has taken her as his lover. Her experience of her mother frequently vacillates between the caring parent and a "...suspicious...rival" (Giarretto, 1976, p.2). The siblings may also be aware of and resent the daughter’s special relationship with the father. Therefore, according to Giarretto, father-daughter incest affects the entire family structure and
underscores the interaction between family members with hostility, suspicion, and secrecy. The abused daughter in effect becomes the "eye of the hurricane" for the simmering chaos in the family.

Other reported potential long-term effects on the victims of father-daughter incest include disturbed sexuality (Briere & Runtz, 1985; Sedney & Brooks, 1984), depression (Cormier, Kennedy, & Sangowicz, 1962), somatic disturbances such as anxiety attacks and sleeping difficulties (Briere, 1984; Sedney & Brooks) and disassociation (Briere & Runtz). Furthermore, survivors of incestuous abuse have been found to experience negative self-images (Briere & Runtz) and to have difficulties with interpersonal relationships with both males and females (Briere & Runtz; Courtois, 1979; Herman, 1981; Meiselman, 1978; Russell, 1986; Wyatt & Peters, 1986).

Many researchers of father-daughter incest have paid particular attention to the role and function of the mother in incestuous families (Herman, 1981; Finkelhor, 1984; Lustig, Dresser, Spellman & Murray, 1966; Machotka, Pittman & Flomenhaft, 1967; Mrazek & Bentovim, 1987; Sgroi & Dana, 1982). The roles that researchers have most often ascribed to the mother are notable in their assignment of blame and culpability (Machotka et al.; Sgroi & Dana).

The four main categories of common hypotheses regarding the role of the mother in incestuous families are (a) the mother as the "...central member of a dysfunctional family system,"
(Machotka et al., 1967, p. 100), (b) the mother as manifesting particular personality disturbances (Kaufman, Peck & Taiguri, 1954), (c) the mother as incapable of fulfilling her spousal and maternal roles (Mrazek & Bentovim, 1982), and (d) the mother as being collusive with the abusive father and providing opportunities for the incest to occur (Cammaert cited in Walker, 1988; McIntyre, 1981). These categories are not necessarily distinct from and mutually exclusive of each other.

Researchers have portrayed the mother as the "...cornerstone of a pathological family system" (Machotka et al., 1967, p. 100). The researchers advocating this framework view incest as a symptomatic expression of a dysfunctional family system (Lustig et al., 1966; Maisch, 1973). Lustig et al., state that in some pathological families, incest acts to reduce tension and thus maintain the homeostasis within the family structure.

Other researchers have described the mother in the incestuous family as using masochistic and desperate methods to meet her own needs for affection and to deny her feelings of worthlessness (Kaufman et al., 1954). The implication of such a description is that these mothers possess certain personality characteristics which somehow provoke their spouses to sexually abuse their daughters (McIntyre, 1981). Other proponents of this perspective hold the mother responsible for modeling the impaired communication patterns which researchers suggest characterize incestuous families (Sgroi & Dana, 1982).

Several authors clearly suggest that the mother fails to
stop or prevent the onset and continuation of the incestuous relationship in spite of being consciously or unconsciously aware of its existence (Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1967; Meiselman, 1978; Sgroi & Dana, 1982). Within this framework the mother is believed to be an orchestrator in the incestuous affair between the father and daughter.

It is evident that researchers and clinicians view the mother as an integral player in the incestuous relationship between the father and the daughter. However, research on incest has focused on mothers only in terms of the roles described in the preceding discussion. The nature of and the dynamics inherent in the mother-daughter relationship have not been explored in incest studies. As a result, little is known about the mother-daughter relationship as it is experienced by both parties, during the occurrence of the incest or following the termination of the incest. Some researchers posit limited descriptions of the damaged mother-daughter relationship in the genesis and maintenance of the father-daughter incest (Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al.; Meiselman, 1978; Mrazek & Bentovim, 1987; Sgroi & Dana, 1982). For example, these researchers suggest that the already damaged mother-daughter relationship plays a precursive role in the development of the father-daughter incestuous relationship. In contrast, other researchers suggest that the damaged mother-daughter relationship may be both a concurrent factor and a resultant factor of the incestuous father-daughter relationship (Finkelhor, 1984; Herman, 1981; Russell, 1986).
According to Russell, "...however the relationship between the mother and daughter was before, father-daughter incest is likely to completely and permanently ruin it" (p. 385).

The consideration that the damaged mother-daughter relationship is not necessarily the result of the incestuous abuse is often minimized or neglected by researchers. Numerous researchers (e.g., Giarretto, 1976; Herman, 1981; Russell, 1986; Summit, 1983) believe that the impaired mother-daughter relationship is the result of a variety of characteristics common to the family structure within which incest takes place. For example, several researchers have described the incestuous family structure as father-dominated family systems that do not foster open communication between family members (Faller, 1988, Finkelhor, 1984; Herman; Russell; Vander Mey & Neff, 1986). Another commonly cited family factor is the physical illness of the mother which can lead to the children being assigned inappropriate, adult roles (Courtois, 1988; Herman). Furthermore, incestuous fathers may either take advantage of the absence of a strong mother-daughter relationship or are themselves instrumental in creating a distant relationship between their wives and the daughters they sexually abuse (Herman; Summit). Russell points out that incestuous fathers are adept at fostering a rift in the mother-daughter bond to such a degree that the survivors of incest often place a greater degree of blame on the mother than on the abusive father. These divergent viewpoints stress the complex interactions within incestuous family
structures. They also serve to reflect the fact that research studies have not yet systematically explored the relationships within these family structures in an effort to understand how the members experience themselves and each other in these families.

Purpose of the study

Research into father-daughter incest has focused on prevalence rates, the impact of the incest on the daughter and the family structure, and the role of the mother in incestuous families (Courtois, 1988; Finkelhor, 1986; Herman, 1981; Russell, 1986). The existing literature does not go beyond drawing conclusions about the nature of the mother-daughter relationship from the hypotheses which exist regarding the roles the mother may play in the incestuous family (e.g., Giarretto, 1976; Herman). In addition, descriptions of the mother-daughter relationship are limited to the time when the incest was ongoing. The pre- and post-incest mother-daughter relationship remains almost completely unexplored. There is however, general agreement that the mother-daughter relationship in incestuous families is severely damaged (e.g., Herman; Russell). Healing of this relationship is recommended as a primary goal in the therapeutic treatment of incest survivors (Caplan, 1989; Courtois, 1988; Herman). However, little information is available on how the damaged mother-daughter relationship can be healed.

The purpose of the present study is to retrospectively explore five daughters' perceptions of the nature of their
relationships with their mothers, during the occurrence of and subsequent to the termination of father-daughter incest. Results from this study may provide some preliminary insights into both the pre- and post-incest periods of the mother-daughter relationship. Furthermore, some daughters may describe particular "mechanisms" (i.e., perceptions, experiences) which have contributed to or facilitated the healing process in their damaged mother-daughter relationships. The exploration of this particular familial relationship has significant clinical and research implications. There is an abundance of literature on the importance of one's early maternal relationship and the impact of this relationship on later development (Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976; Miller, 1976; Rubin, 1983). As Rubin (1983) asserts, "...mothering is an all embracing word. To be mothered is to be nurtured in the most elemental sense" (p. 42). Although the incest literature has examined the role of the mothers in these families, there has not been an exploration of the incest victim's experience or lack of experience of being mothered and the implications of that experience. Little is known about the dynamics of the abused daughter's relationship with her mother and how each one of them experiences this relationship and identifies the effects thereof.

Significance of the study

The themes identified by the daughters in the present study may be similar to the experiences of other incestuously
victimized women. The results may therefore prove helpful in
directing research to explore relationships between mothers and
daughters. The participants' stories may also serve as points of
departure for the development of therapeutic paradigms for other
adult women who were incestuously abused in their childhood or
adolescence. Furthermore, the findings may be of relevance in
working with mothers of incest survivors.

Given that the study is exploratory in nature and that there
has been no research focusing specifically on the post-abuse
dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship in incestuous
families, this study does not offer any hypotheses for its
findings.
Studies indicate that incest between biological fathers and their daughters is the most prevalent form of incestuous abuse (Finkelhor, 1984; Meiselman, 1978; Russell, 1986). There is also agreement among current researchers and clinicians that this form of incest is the most traumatic form of incestuous abuse for the victims because it corrupts the special bond between parent and child (Courtois 1988; Finkelhor; Herman, 1981; Meiselman; Russell). In addition to its high rate of prevalence and the violation of the special significance of the parent-child bond, researchers believe that father-daughter incestuous abuse has important influences on familial structure and organization. Therefore, researchers have usually attempted to explain the phenomenon of father-daughter incest within the context of the whole family's structure, dynamics and history (Cormier, Kennedy & Sangowicz, 1962; Herman & Hirschman, 1981; Kaufman, Peck & Taiguri, 1954; Lustig, Dresser, Spellman & Murray, 1966; Machotka, Pittman & Flomenhaft, 1967; Meiselman, 1978; Mrazek & Bentovim, 1987; Sgroi & Dana, 1982). These family-focused studies have paid considerable research attention to the mother. Results suggest that the mother is to be blamed for the genesis and maintenance of father-daughter incest (Cammaert, cited in Walker, 1988, Herman, 1981; Myer, 1985). Specifically, she is perceived to have driven the father to the abuse (Lustig et al., 1966). She is also considered partly responsible for the incest because she
ostensibly failed to perform her marital and maternal duties and forced her daughter to take on the maternal roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, some researchers maintain that the mothers knew about, tolerated or in some cases, actively enjoyed the incest (e.g., Machotka et al., 1967). In sum, the professional literature on father-daughter incest has largely designated the non-offending mother "...as the most culpable individual either through default or through direct involvement" (McIntyre, 1981, p. 462).

There are four studies which have reported on the mother-daughter relationships said to be typical of incestuous families (Cormier et al., 1962; Kaufman et al., 1954; Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1967). A brief description of each study's purpose, sample and method will be discussed first. The findings of these studies will be discussed in the body of this chapter. The findings offered by the studies have gone beyond the initial purpose of each study. Each has proposed profiles of the non-offending mother even though that might not have been the expressed intent of the study. These studies do not follow any rigorous methodological criterion and cannot be considered research studies as such. However, the findings reported and conclusions presented by these four studies have significantly influenced research for several decades. Therefore, their contributions to incest literature cannot be minimized.

Cormier et al. (1962) studied 27 fathers who had been convicted of sexually abusing their daughters. 21 of the subjects
were in prison and six were involved in court ordered therapy at the time of the study. The researchers made a distinction between sexual interest and carresses by these men toward their daughters and the commission of incest, which in the case of this study, involved sexual penetration. The purpose of the study was to "...deal with the psychopathology of the father" (p. 205) by exploring personal, social, or marital maladjustment that led to the incest. The researchers hypothesized that "...an abnormal relationship may develop between a father and a daughter as husband and wife meet inevitable changes in the children and in themselves" (Cormier et al., 1962, p. 205). The researchers do not offer details on how information was obtained from the subjects.

Kaufman et al. (1954) studied the "...family relations and character formation in cases where girls have been involved in incestuous relationships with father, stepfather, grandfather, foster father or brother" (p. 266). The sample consisted of 11 girls who ranged in age from 10 to 17 years old. The study was conducted at a treatment centre in Boston and the girls were referred to the researchers for court-ordered treatment. The reasons for the girls' referral are not explicated. The period of contact between the researchers and the subjects ranged from five interviews to two years of continuous treatment. The focus of the interviews or the treatment are not outlined by the authors. The researchers allude to studying the parents and then qualify this by stating that "...we had no contact with the fathers" (p. 268).
Most of their "information" is based on the researchers' impressions of the mothers of the girls.

Lustig et al. (1966) studied the constellation of six incestuous families. They hypothesized that "...incest is a well-organized transactional pattern of functional significance ....[which is] one of many socially deviant behaviour patterns ....employed by a dysfunctional family in the maintenance of its own integrity and existence (p. 32). The study does not appear to have been conducted with any rigorous research standards. Instead, it consists of the authors' "...clinical observations and a series of staff discussions" (p. 31).

Machotka et al. (1967) present three case studies of incestuous families at a family treatment centre for acute psychiatric patients. The researchers were involved in a therapeutic relationship with the three families studied. The goal of therapy was to reunite the family to it's " ...precrisis functioning by exploring the obstacles and....where possible, [negotiaing and removing] them" (p.99).

Mostly on the basis of the findings offered by the above four studies, the literature on incest offers four profiles of the mother that serve to explain her actions and inactions in the incestuous family. In terms of the first profile, the incestuous family is believed to be pathological and the "...mother is the cornerstone of a pathological family system (Machotka et al. 1967, p. 100). Lustig et al. (1966) view incest within a transactional framework and suggest that the incest between the
father and the daughter is a symptomatic manifestation of family disturbance. The function of this relationship between the father and the daughter is to reduce the tensions within this disturbed family system.

The second profile of the mother views her as a disturbed personality with a pronounced lack of skills to resolve personal difficulties. She has been described as "...hard, careless in dress, infantile, extremely dependent, intellectually dull, poor housekeeper, panicky in the face of responsibility, and satisfied to live in disorder and poverty (Kaufman et al., 1954, p.269). Researchers subscribing to this view of the mother propose that the mother experienced maternal neglect and abandonment in her childhood. Her resultant dependency and strong need to be mothered remain unresolved. In her desperate attempts to satisfy her need for affection, the mother "...manipulates [her] daughter into changing places with [her]...and assigns her the maternal role" (Kaufman et al., p. 278). The mother is believed to place the daughter in this role in order to assuage her own unresolved conflicts. This leads the father to experience pathological "love" toward his daughter which ultimately results in the father-daughter incestuous relationship.

Further maternal culpability involves a differently motivated mother-daughter role-reversal. Here the role-reversal may be the result of the mother's illness or her employment outside of the home. Her absence may necessitate that the daughter take over some household responsibilities. Several
researchers believe that the daughter eventually becomes the "mother" in the home including functioning as her sexual surrogate (Kaufman et al., 1954; Sgroi & Dana, 1982). In such cases, the mother is believed to have abdicated her rightful roles of both wife to her husband and mother to her child (Kaufman et al.; Mayer, 1983; Sgroi & Dana). Thus, the mother, by her absence from the home, is held responsible for having left her daughter unprotected from the advances of her unfulfilled husband.

Thirdly, by neglecting to fulfill her spousal and maternal roles, the mother is believed to drive her husband and daughter to the incestuous relationship (Cormier, et al., 1962; Kaufman et al., 1954; Sgroi & Dana, 1982). These researchers found many of the wives of the incestuous husbands to be "...not only frigid, but hostile and unloving women....Some never denied their husbands and were described by them as good wives, but the [marital] relationship was ungratifying because of the inability of the wives to respond" (Cormier et al., p. 207). The implication is that even when the wife fulfills her sexual role, her inability to sufficiently satisfy her husband forces him to look for sexual satisfaction elsewhere, namely with the daughter.

The fourth profile presents the mothers in incestuous families as being collusive with the father, or otherwise aware of the incest but failing to terminate it (Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1967, Meiselman, 1978, Sgroi & Dana, 1982). The incest is believed to have originated and continued over time
because the mother denied its existence. Her denial operates to protect herself because "...sometimes she herself has had a hand in unconsciously setting up the incest situation and wishes it to continue" (Meiselman, p. 169). Furthermore, these researchers consider that the mother, though not overtly involved in the incest, is responsible for the genesis and maintenance of the father-daughter incest by "...her unconscious participation and/or sanction" (Lustig et al., p. 32). Even though she does not play any demonstrable or active role in the incest, she is held responsible for her perceived failure to prevent or terminate the special relationship that develops between her husband and her daughter. As such, she is considered to have "set up" the father-daughter incest. The researchers suggest that through a reversal of roles and ego fusion between mother and daughter, the mother tacitly "offers" the daughter to the father. Thus, the mother, with her unconscious approval, employs the father-daughter incestuous relationship to prevent the complete disintegration of the already disturbed family system.

These four profiles of the mother are notable in their representation of her as a "...primary cause and/or facilitator of [father-daughter] incest" (Cammaert, cited in Walker, 1988, p. 311). Researchers reporting the mother as the responsible family member subscribe to the traditional views of mothers who as the primary caregivers to their children, are expected to be nurturing, loving, supportive and protective at all times (Myer, 1985). With such a narrow definition of the mother's roles and
responsibilities, research on incestuous families to date has failed to fully explore the dynamics and the ramifications of the mother-daughter relationship.

Along with the mother, the victimized daughter has often been portrayed in the literature as the second culprit in the incest (Herman, 1981). Researchers have described her in the role of the "seductive...nymphet" (Herman, p.39). Like her mother, the daughter is believed to be driven by her need for attention and affection. In her desperate efforts to meet these needs, she entangles the father in a sexual relationship:

The daughters collude in the incestuous liasion and play an active role and even initiating role in establishing the pattern. The girls may be frightened or lonely and welcome their fathers' advances as expression of parental love. The incestuous activity often continues until it is discovered, and the girls do not act as though they were injured....Like her mother, the incestuous daughter is unlikely to report the liasion or to protest about it. If she eventually does, it is as much precipitated by anger at her father for something else or jealousy of his relationship with another woman, as a real objection to his incestuous behaviour (Henderson, cited in Herman, 1981, p. 40).

In their study of 27 incest offenders and their families, Cormier et al. (1962) accept the offenders' descriptions of their daughters as "...provocative, or in any event willing" (p. 206). These researchers also suggest that the daughters assented to the
incest out of a sense of rivalry with the mothers. Other researchers have described the abused daughters as mentally inferior, depressed, guilty and anxious (Kaufman et al., 1954; Lustig et al., 1966). Lustig et al. state that the daughter's guilt is related to the threat of the impending family disintegration following disclosure rather than the incestuous relationship itself. As with the description of the mother, the daughter is said to engage in the incestuous relationship with her father as a way to avoid dissolution of the already stressed family unit.

Thus, the majority of published studies of incest portray the mothers and the daughters as the disturbed family members who are active agents in the father-daughter incestuous relationships. It is important to note that the studies which three or four decades ago were possibly pioneering and groundbreaking (Cormier et al., 1962; Kaufman et al., 1954; Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1967) continue to be accepted as hypotheses or foundations for more recent research and interpretation of father-daughter incest (e.g., Henderson, 1975, cited in Herman, 1981; Meiselman, 1978; Mrazek & Bentovim, 1987; Sgroi & Dana, 1982). As a result, there is a paucity of information on the dynamics of familial relationships in incestuous families. Studies also retain a dated and stereotyped focus on the roles of individual family members. This focus on family roles has led researchers to continue studying the incestuous family in isolation of its larger cultural and social
contexts. The implications of this research approach are significant because the mother and the abused daughter are still considered responsible for the dysfunctionality of the abusive husband and father. In sum, current research on incestuous families continues to scapegoat the mother and the abused daughter who in reality are the victimized family members.

The assignment of culpability to both the mother and the daughter significantly diminishes the real responsibility of the abusive father (Cotroneo, cited in Braverman, 1988; Finkelhor, 1984; Herman, 1981; Russell, 1986). The dominant view of the non-offending mother as the most culpable family member has been employed by researchers to minimize the responsibility of the abusive father. Machotka et al. (1967) emphatically state that the "...non-participating [mother’s] denial should be viewed as serving to keep from [the abuser’s] awareness his role in the matter" (p. 100). Furthermore, the accusations compound the shame and guilt already experienced by both the mother and the daughter. Ultimately, both women’s guilt contributes to maintenance of the secrecy around the incest and compounds the damage on the individual members as well as the structure of these families.

In an effort to overcome the weaknesses of the above studies, Herman and Hirschman (1977) attempted to examine and explain father-daughter incest as a phenomenon in a patriarchal society. They included a clinical case study of 15 adult daughters who experienced childhood incest by their fathers.
Seven of the women were clients of the researchers and the remaining eight were clients in treatment with other therapists. "...No systematic case-finding effort was made; the authors simply questioned those practitioners who were best known to us through an informal network of female professionals" (p. 742). This is the only published study that reports on a number of specific dynamics that affect the nature of mother-daughter relationships in incestuous families. These researchers report several significant findings about incestuously abused daughters' relationships with their mothers. In exploring the incestuous family constellation of the study's sample, these researchers concurred with previous findings which report that the mother-daughter relationships within these families were invariably estranged (Kaufman et al., 1954; Lustig et al., 1966). However, this estrangement "...preceded the occurrence of the overt incest" (p. 745). Herman and Hirschman (1977) do not elaborate on or identify what attributed to the damaged relationships. Nor do they discuss if and how the tone of the relationships changed once the incest was a reality in the lives of the daughters.

A large percentage of the daughters reported that their mothers were physically incapacitated or mentally unstable. Alcoholism was also a common problem for many of these mothers. As a result of the physical disabilities experienced by many of these mothers, the household responsibilities traditionally taken care of by these women were often transferred to the oldest daughters in these families. This finding is also in agreement
with several other studies (Kaufman et al., 1954; Sgroi & Dana, 1982). However, unlike the conclusions proposed by the previous researchers, the daughters in this study did not report experiencing their mothers to have abdicated their sexual roles and "offered" the daughters to their husbands. Instead, these daughters experienced their mothers as "...frail, downtrodden victims who were unable to take care of themselves, much less protect their children" (p. 745). Several of these mothers habitually shared confidences with their daughters. For their parts, the daughters did not feel that they could similarly confide in their mothers and reported themselves especially unable to turn to their mothers for support once their fathers became sexual with them.

Many of the daughters reported that their mothers themselves were victims of abuse. The researchers do not elaborate on whether the daughters experienced their mothers to be victims of spousal abuse or if they had knowledge of their mothers' childhood sexual abuse. At any rate, the victim stance of these mothers were experienced by their daughters as a strong indication of the mothers' inability to effectively protect their daughters from their incestuous fathers. The daughters also reported that they believed their mothers would sacrifice the well-being of the daughters in order to protect their husbands.

Since the exploration of the mother-daughter relationship was not the expressed focus of the study (Herman & Hirschman, 1977), the findings about the mother-daughter relationship are
limited and are not extensively elaborated upon by the researchers. However, these researchers identify the theme of maternal abandonment as a common experience in the lives of the incestuously abused daughters. They also recognize that the mother's role in the genesis and maintenance of father-daughter incest is an important issue. However, in contrast to most studies of the mother's role, this study reports the oppression of the mother as another important component of incestuous families and states that "...maternal collusion in incest, when it occurs, is a measure of maternal powerlessness (Herman, p. 49).

An examination of the existing literature on incest clearly demonstrates the surprising lack of any systematic and objective exploration of the incestuous family structure. As a result, the relationships that are developed and maintained within these family structures have not yet been meaningfully explored understood. However, there have been strong and biased opinions about the mother and the abused daughter which have guided research and practice for the past several decades. As such, these studies have likely helped to maintain the victim's stigma around incestuous abuse. Ultimately, the findings of such studies have served to perpetuate and justify the societal attitude of "blaming the victim" (Herman, 1981; Herman & Hirschman, 1977; Finkelhor, 1986; Russell, 1986; Walker, 1988).
Chapter III
Methodology

Qualitative Method

The phenomenon under exploration in this study was five daughters' experiences of their relationships with their mothers during the occurrence of, and following the termination of, each daughter's incestuous abuse by her biological father. To date, there are no data that focus specifically on the dynamics of mother-daughter relationships. Since there is such little knowledge about the phenomenon under exploration, the methodology selected needed to allow the exploration of the mother-daughter relationship so as to provide descriptions which will sensitize other researchers and clinicians to the nature and meaning of the experiences articulated by the participants. The findings may function to serve as foundation toward the construction of future theory and instrumentation (Giorgi, 1985). A qualitative paradigm such as phenomenology was particularly suitable and valuable as a method of inquiry since expressed purpose of this method is to do justice to the "...lived aspects of human phenomena and to do so, one first has to know how someone actually experienced what has been lived" (Giorgi, p. 1). The goal of this naturalistic inquiry is to attempt to discover and account for the presence of meanings in the descriptions of the lived experiences. Therefore, a qualitative paradigm is especially appropriate when there exists scant knowledge about a phenomenon or when the literature is replete with biases or omissions about what is known (Giorgi,
1985). At present, such is the case with the relationship between non-offending mothers and their incestuously victimized daughters. A logical starting point was therefore a dialogue with the daughters regarding their relationships with their mothers in light of the incestuous abuse by their fathers. In order to report daughters' perceptions of their relationships with their mothers, this dialogue needed to be exploratory and descriptive. The focus of the dialogue was on discovering the essence of the mother-daughter relationship as it was experienced during the incest and after the termination of the incest. Specifically, the dialogue explored the daughter's perceptions and experiences of the dynamics of her relationship with her mother. The guiding theme of this form of inquiry is to discover and systematize meanings by going "...back to the things themselves" (Husserl, quoted in Giorgi, 1985, p. 9). The synthesisization of the "meaning units" (Giorgi, p. 10), provided a consistent statement about the subjects' experiences and made up the structure of experience that was being explored and described. The structure or the essential meaning of phenomenon, is a basic foundational concept in phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985; Valle & King, 1978). The themes explored in this study were not confined to the pre-reflective or "pure phenomenological" themes and experiences. Rather, the focus was on the commonalities of themes as these emerged in the participants' reflections of situations and perceptions. Sample
The research sample of this study consisted of five adult females, over 18 years of age, who were incestuously abused by their biological fathers in their childhood and/or adolescence. The sample size was confined to five women in order to facilitate transcription and in-depth analysis of entire interviews provided by each participant. The ages of the five women were 27, 28, 29, 32 and 34. The incestuous abuse was not ongoing in these women’s lives at the time of the interviews. This was an important consideration because one of the objectives of the study was to solicit the women’s descriptions of their relationships with their mothers after the incest stopped. In addition, incestuous abuse had not occurred as a single episode in the lives of these women but had varied in duration from approximately 5 to 25 years. The existing literature suggests that it is extremely rare for father-daughter incest to occur as a single episode (e.g., Carnes, 1983). Therefore, examining single episodes of incestuous contact between fathers and daughters would not be representative of the experiences of the vast majority of incest victims.

All five participants were currently engaged in therapy. This was included as a criterion so that there would be consistency among the participants. Furthermore, the subject matter and the interview format might have contributed to the participants’ perceptions of the researcher as a therapist. In order to safeguard against that possibility while still attending to the possible needs of the subjects, the study recruited women who were clients in therapy.
Procedure

The researcher contacted local therapists who work with adult women who had been incestuously abused by their fathers. A written request (Appendix A) was made of these therapists to contact clients who met the subject selection criteria. The therapists were asked to make the initial contact with the clients and to outline the essential aspects of the research project to prospective participants using a prepared written summary of the purpose and procedures of the research (Appendix B). When a client indicated interest in the study, the therapists invited the client to contact the researcher by telephone. Upon being contacted by the participant, the researcher reviewed the objectives of the study and the participation requirements and determined if the subjects met the selection criteria. Arrangements were then made with each participant to meet with the researcher for an in-depth interview, at a mutually agreed upon private location. The interviews took place in the researcher’s home. Each participant was asked to complete a consent form (Appendix C) at the beginning of the in-depth interview. One copy of the signed consent form was given to the participant and one was retained by the researcher.

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with each participant. The number and length of the interviews were dependent upon the time related needs and comfort of the participants. Single sessions of 3 hours each were conducted with three of the participants. For those participants who needed more
than one interview, a second session was made available to them within one week of the first one. This time interval was chosen so that participants could tell their stories without major breaks between interviews. Two of the participants needed two sessions of one and a half hours each to complete their interviews. They found the subject matter too painful to recount in a single session. The researcher employed open questions to facilitate elaboration and discussion and probes to allow the participants to elaborate and clarify their experiences and perceptions.

The open-ended questions (Appendix D) focused on the women's experiences, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of their relationships with their mothers during the course of the incestuous abuse and subsequent to the termination of the abuse. During the interview(s), the researcher initially focused on developing a rapport with the participant. This rapport helped to facilitate disclosure of the sensitive issues which emerged in response to the researcher's interview questions. A portion of transcript from one of the interviews is provided in order to demonstrate the types of questions asked by the researcher to facilitate the participant to elaborate and clarify her experiences (Appendix E).

The researcher planned to send each participant a copy of the transcribed interview so that she could review the transcript prior to scheduling a subsequent meeting. The purpose of this meeting would have been to obtain the participant's feedback
regarding validation and/or refutation of the researcher's analysis of the data. However, after conducting the interviews and observing the participants' difficulties recalling many painful memories, the researcher asked each participant whether she wished to review her transcript. Two of the participants declined. As a result, the researcher decided not to conduct the proposed verification interviews. Had the researcher conducted only the remaining three of the five verification interviews, procedural consistency of the study would have been compromised. Omissions of these secondary interviews further ensured the participants' psychological comfort.

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed by the researcher. In order to ensure client confidentiality and anonymity, the data were accessible only to the researcher and the researcher's supervisor. All client names and identifying information were omitted from transcripts. Participants were assigned pseudonyms in reporting the results.

**Data analysis**

The transcribed interviews were examined for evidence or suggestions of inter- and intra-personal themes, patterns, or perceptions which appeared to characterize each participant's experience of her relationship with her mother. Particular attention was paid to how the mother-daughter relationships may or may not have changed since the cessation of the abuse.

Colaizzi's (cited in Valle & King, 1978) procedure for phenomenological analysis was utilized to analyse the data. The
descriptions or protocols provided by the women were read with the goal of obtaining an overall feel for the experiences as they were lived, and the mother-daughter relationships as they were perceived by the daughters. The significant statements which spoke to themes or patterns in the mother-daughter relationships were identified and extracted from each protocol. The meanings of each statement were formulated by the researcher. This particular step involved an inferential leap on the part of the researcher since it necessitated the assignment of meaning to the subjects' statements. It was imperative that the meanings formulated by the researcher were embedded within the descriptive context of the original protocol and the participants' language was not changed in any way. The objective of this step was to take the thematic statements one step beyond the concrete descriptions and to discover and illuminate their meanings which may have been hidden in, or rested slightly beyond the descriptions. All of the above steps were repeated with each protocol in order to identify and examine possible clusters of themes that emerged across the participants' protocols. Where clusters of themes emerged, the researcher referred back to each participant's original protocol to confirm the presence of the themes therein. This step was taken to ensure that identified clusters of themes did not "...propose anything that [wasn't] implied in the original protocols" (Colaizzi, cited in Valle & King, 1978, p. 59). All identified themes were studied, regardless of whether they appeared to corroborate or contradict one another. However, only
the common themes of experiences were reported since that was the purpose of this phenomenological inquiry.

The data obtained were integrated into an exhaustive description of the mother-daughter relationships as they were experienced by the daughters. The exhaustive description was formulated in an effort to identify the structure or meaning of these mother-daughter relationships.
Chapter IV
Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present the common themes or similarities of experiences reported by the five subjects interviewed. Although the women’s experiences of their incest and of their mother-daughter relationships differed in many aspects, there were a number of notable similarities in how they have experienced and continue to experience their relationships with their mothers. The common themes identified by the women go beyond those in their relationships with their mothers. In exploring their relationships with their mothers, the five women also elaborated on their experiences of past and present relationships that they apparently consider to be significant to themselves. These other relationships serve to provide a wider context of familial relationships within which the women’s experiences and perceptions of their mothers have been shaped and continue to be played out. Thus, in addition to the themes in the women’s relationships with their mothers, there are commonly reported themes which characterize the women’s experiences of their relationships with their fathers, siblings and intimate male partners.

The discussion of the common relationship themes as they are experienced by these five women is the focus of this chapter. The words of the women themselves have been used to paint the pictures of their experiences of these significant relationships.
Prior to the discussion of the common themes, a brief biography of each woman has been presented. This will help to familiarize the reader with the salient aspects of experiences that are unique to each woman. Each biography focuses on the woman’s family composition, the history of her incestuous abuse, information relating to disclosure of the abuse, current status of their relationships with the abusers, and with their mothers, as well as information regarding their therapeutic history.

**Biographies**

**Linda**

Linda was 32 years old at the time of the interview. Her family consists of her parents, an older brother, two older sisters and one younger sister. At present, Linda resides a great distant away from her family.

Linda says that she has always experienced her parents’ relationship to be destructive and hostile. She reports that in spite of her father’s many extra-marital affairs, her parents have remained together.

The sexual abuse by Linda’s father began in her infancy. She cannot report at what age the abuse stopped but does say that it continued into her early adolescence. She can remember being genitaly fondled by her father and then being brought to orgasm. She says that there were never any threats to keep the incest secret.

Linda also reports being sexually abused by her brother. At
the time of this interview, she could recall two specific instances, one occurring at age four or five and the latter when she was between the ages of seven and nine. The pattern of abuse was very similar to that of her father’s.

In 1986, Linda disclosed about the abuse by her brother to her parents. The disclosure took place via a number of long-distance telephone calls. Linda feels that her family is not prepared to be of any support to her and she is unsure that they believe her disclosure about her brother. As a result, she is extremely reluctant to disclose about the abuse by her father. She identifies the abuse by her father to have had the most damaging impact on her and therefore, believes that she needs to feel much stronger within herself to deal with the lack of support and empathy she expects from the family members in the event of disclosure.

Five months prior to this interview, Linda decided to cease all contact with her parents. At present, she is not sure if and when she might be ready to resume any relationship with her mother and father. She has no contact with her brother. Linda was married for two years and has been divorced for four years. She does not report having a current intimate relationship.

Linda says that she has spent many years searching for effective therapeutic help for herself and has experienced much disappointment and many setbacks in her attempts to obtain this help. Instead of being helped, Linda believes that she has been harmed by some of the interventions she has experienced.
Kelly

When the research interview was conducted, Kelly was 28 years old. Her family of origin consists of her parents, one younger brother and two younger sisters. Kelly's parents separated in 1986, one year prior to any disclosure about the incest taking place. Kelly reports that in her experience, her parents' relationship with each other was conflict-ridden and distant.

The incestuous abuse began in Kelly's infancy and continued until she was in first or second year of university. Until Kelly was 11 years old, the abuse consisted of being fondled and kissed by her father. When she turned 11, her father began having intercourse with her. Kelly says that she was not threatened or, in any way coerced into keeping the incest secret. She adds that there really was no need for threats as she would have done anything her father wanted her to do.

Although the incest continued well into Kelly's adulthood, she does not remember wanting to or, having attempted to, disclose to anyone until three years ago when one of her sisters began talking about being abused by the father as well. As a result of her sister's disclosure, Kelly reports having her own childhood memories triggered and brought into her awareness. At about the same time that Kelly's sister was beginning to talk openly about her abuse by her father, Kelly's brother discovered that their father had also been engaging in random homosexual affairs. It was this discovery and the accompanying sense of
betrayal that led Kelly to finally disclose her own abuse. Thus, during Christmas 1987, all four children disclosed to their mother about having been abused by their father.

Six months after Kelly finally disclosed her sexual abuse by her father, she recalled memories of having been sexually abused by her brother as well. Kelly has since confronted her brother and has chosen to have very limited contact with him.

Following her disclosure about the abuse by her father, Kelly has severed all contact with him. She reports that she continues to miss him and has to work hard to ignore his continued efforts to get in touch with her. Kelly reports that she has felt duty-bound to maintain regular contact with her mother since the incest has come to light.

Kelly reports that she has a history of difficult intimate relationships with men in which the men treat her with disrespect. She also reports having problems maintaining a single relationship and is often intimately involved with two or three men at once. At present, she is involved in a relationship which she labels as "unhealthy" and wants to end but is having difficulties doing so.

Kelly does not report having had any form of therapy prior to her involvement with her present therapist. This therapist was recommended to Kelly by her younger sister and Kelly reports that she finds the therapeutic process extremely helpful.
Dorothy

At the time of the research, Dorothy was 28 years old. Her family is made up of her parents, one older sister, three younger sisters and three younger brothers. She describes experiencing a great deal of physical abuse in her childhood and adolescence, inflicted upon her by both her parents.

Dorothy states that the relationship between her parents is fraught with a great deal of arguing and physical fighting. In spite of the difficulties described by Dorothy, her parents remain together.

Dorothy's incest began in her infancy. She is unable to report exactly how old she might have been at the time. She is aware that by the time she was in grade 2, the incest had been going on for "...a long time." She recalls being vaginally penetrated by her father when she was six years old. The abuse by her father stopped when she was 15 years old. Dorothy believes that he stopped because he was afraid she would become pregnant.

In addition to being abused by her father, Dorothy was sexually abused by her maternal grandfather. She does not report her ages at which her grandfather began and stopped abusing her. However, she emphasizes that by the time she entered grade 2, she was being abused by both her father and her grandfather.

At age seven, Dorothy told her mother about the sexual abuse by her grandfather. Dorothy remembers hoping that "...maybe they'd [both abusers] get the message and leave me alone." She also hoped that her mother would protect her from further abuse.
However, the hoped for supportive response from her mother and the cessation of the abuse were not the results of her disclosure. Several years later, Dorothy disclosed to a social worker about the abuse by her father. The social worker spoke to her father who, according to Dorothy, responded with appropriate remorse and concern in front of the worker. However, Dorothy points out that he continued to sexually abuse her.

Although there were no direct threats to keep the incest secret, Dorothy reports that she was reluctant to disclose about her father's sexual abuse of her. She says that this is because she hoped that if she continued to be his victim, he would spare the other children in the family. She therefore, was willing to sacrifice herself in order to hopefully spare her siblings the same fate.

Dorothy reports having occasional contact with both her parents and adds that she initiates all such contact. She has recently become aware of how unkind she feels her parents are to her and is making efforts to distance herself more and more from them.

Until early this year, Dorothy was living with her common-law husband whom she describes as a violent alcoholic. This relationship lasted for 12 years and produced four children. Dorothy is presently involved with another man. She says that this is the first time a man has treated her well and she finds herself waiting for him to become abusive. She expresses cautious optimism for her present involvement.
Dorothy says that she has made a number of efforts to obtain therapeutic help for herself. She believes that with the exception of her present therapist, she has generally been betrayed and demeaned by people in the helping profession.

Lydia

Lydia was 27 years old at the time of the interview. The members of her family of origin include her parents and two younger sisters. Lydia’s parents divorced when she was 13 years old. Since his separation from Lydia’s mother, her father has lived with his common-law wife. Lydia has an eight year old half-sister. Lydia’s mother has remained single since her divorce.

In her interview, Lydia presents contradictory information about her ages at the onset and cessation of the sexual abuse. Her abuse began when she was either seven or nine years old and ended when Lydia was either ten or 13 years old. Lydia reports that through the occurrence of the abuse, the sexual behaviours consisted of genital fondling and kissing and that her father "...never crossed the final boundary" and had sexual intercourse with her. In addition to the actual physical contact between her father and herself, Lydia has childhood recollections of discovering her father’s collection of pornographic magazines and watching her father view sexually explicit movies. She reports that there were no threats to keep the incest secret.

Lydia first disclosed about the incest to her mother when she was either ten or 13 years old. Lydia has always steadfastly denied that her father has had sexual intercourse with her. Her
mother does not believe this part of Lydia’s account. As a result, this continues to be a disputed issue since her mother believes that Lydia has disclosed only a portion of all that went on with her father. Lydia disclosed for a second time in 1985 to her father’s common-law wife because she was concerned for the safety of her half-sister. As a result of this disclosure and the ensuing police investigation, her father lost his job as a high-school teacher. He continues to live with his common-law wife and young daughter.

Lydia has regular contact with both her parents. Lydia states that her natural parents’ direct contact with each other is minimal. However, her mother and her father’s current partner have regular telephone contact with each other. The focus of these two women’s conversation is Lydia’s father.

Lydia says that she has difficulties trusting the men she has intimate relationships with. In her experience, the men have always been unfaithful to her. At present, she lives with her boyfriend and says that this relationship is fraught with the same difficulties as her other ones. She is unhappy but hopeful that this time, she and her boyfriend can work through their own issues and help the relationship to survive.

Lydia has seen a number of psychologists since she was about 13 years old. She says that until she began working with her present therapist, she was seen by professionals at her mother’s insistence. As a result, she believes she has neither been very motivated to work nor found therapy to be particularly helpful
Janice

Janice was 34 years old when the research interview was conducted. Her natural family is comprised of her parents, older twin brothers, another older brother and one younger sister. Janice reports that even as a child she was aware that her parents had a poor relationship with one another. She and the other members of the family have also always been aware of the many extra-marital affairs of her father. She reports that her parents are still together.

Janice says that her father began sexually abusing her when she was an infant. The incestuous behaviours did not include sexual intercourse. The abuse continued until Janice was either six or seven years old and ended when she began to actively avoid being alone with her father.

In her interview, Janice initially stated being abused by one of her twin brothers. However, as the interview progressed, she described separate abusive episodes by each of her twin brothers. With both of these brothers, the abuse consisted mainly of fondling. With one of the twins, the sexual behaviour included mutual oral sex. Janice is unable to remember when the abuses by her brothers began but does recall that one of the twins continued abusing her until she was about 12 years old.

Janice has never disclosed any of the incestuous abuses to any member of her family. As a teenager, she recalls telling a few girlfriends so that she could "...get rid of it." Since then,
the only people with whom she has discussed her childhood sexual abuse have been her mother-in-law, two therapists and this researcher. She does not believe that she will receive any support from the members of her family, should she decide to disclose. Given her strong beliefs about not being understood and supported, she has no plans to tell her family.

Janice has very limited contact with her parents and believes that she needs to maintain both physical and emotional distance from them. She has thus chosen to live two provinces away from them. She has no contact with her twin brothers.

Janice has been married for the last 16 years and has two young children. She says she loves her husband and needs his support but finds herself flirting with other men almost constantly. She has had a number of affairs during her marriage. She says that she has some suspicions that her husband's manipulative and controlling nature has something to do with her unfaithfulness but she is reluctant to work on that issue at present. She says she has difficulties acknowledging her husband's shortcomings and convinces herself that her marriage is fine.

Janice reports that she has been trying to obtain therapeutic help for a number of years and has had several negative experiences with therapists. She does feel very positive about her present therapist.
Common Themes

As mentioned earlier, the five women interviewed for this research, report notable similarities when discussing the significant relationships in their lives. In discussing the impact of the negative tones of relationships in their formative years, all five respondents report experiencing themselves as being fractured and incomplete adults. All the respondents describe their existence as being riddled with almost continuous struggles to learn how to live outside the dysfunctional families they believe they have grown up in. They each portray their experiences of themselves in the world and in relationship to others in the world as "alien." This is because the women perceive themselves to have grown up without appropriate and healthy role models. Furthermore, they report that the interactional styles of their families are no longer acceptable to themselves, nor are they acceptable in the world outside of their families. These women believe that their ability to trust themselves and others is impaired and they suggest that this mistrust contributes to the continuation of unhealthy patterns in their present relationships. Each woman characterizes her present struggles as finding out what is healthy for herself, both affectively and behaviourally, and how she might be able to achieve some semblance of that health.

The themes identified by each respondent are related to their relationships with their: mother, father, siblings and intimate male partners. In keeping with the focus of this research study,
the common themes experienced by the women in their mother-daughter relationships will be the primary focus of this chapter. This will be followed by discussion of identified common themes in the respondents' relationships with their fathers, siblings and finally, with their intimate male partners.

**Themes in the respondents' experiences of their mother-daughter relationships:**

All five women describe their overall experiences of their mothers in negative terms and consider their mother-daughter relationships to be damaged. In their discussions of these relationships, the following five common themes emerge:

1. The daughters' perceptions of their mothers as women who cannot be trusted
2. The daughters' experiences of their mothers' pronounced needs to be taken care of
3. The daughters' strong beliefs about the mothers' awareness of the incest when it was occurring
4. The daughters' strong desires to not be like their mothers
5. The daughters' regret and sorrow about their unhappy relationships with their mothers.

**Mothers as women who cannot be trusted**

In terms of the theme of 'lack of trust', Linda shares one of many memories which illustrates her belief that her mother is not a woman to be trusted. The childhood incident Linda describes involves her mother ignoring Linda's protestations and throwing away a beloved toy. "And I'm standing next to her and she just
grabs [the teddy bear] out of my arms and throws him in the fire. It was another one of those pivotal moments, where it’s, 'you killed Bear, you’d kill me, wouldn’t you?...You don’t care about me, I don’t trust you and you’re dangerous.'"

Kelly’s example reflects her inability to trust her mother to allow Kelly to make her own choices in life. "She [is] very invasive and I [feel] like she is trying to control my life. And I couldn’t [sic] trust her."

Dorothy provides several examples to demonstrate the deceit and cruelty she experienced in her interactions with her mother. Dorothy states that she does not understand why her mother treated her badly and simply says, "There’s always always [italics added] been something bad, really bad, between my mom and me....[She] lied to me a lot."

Lydia’s experience of her mother is as a woman who does not trust anyone else and who has always shared with Lydia her suspicions and expectations of imminent wrong-doings by the world at large. Lydia grew up feeling that she could not trust her mother to be available to her to hear any difficulties she might have been experiencing. As a result, the general experience of her relationship with her mother is described by Lydia in the following manner:

[My mother] was always spying on my dad. And I always felt like I was sort of a spy for her. Like, like, more of a wall to turn to. An ear to bend. She’d [italics added] come to me with her secrets. And her fantasies and her, her things.
The message to Lydia was that her mother was incapable of trusting others and Lydia could not trust her mother to be helpful to her.

Janice is unable to report specific reasons for or instances which illustrate her lack of trust in her mother. She simply states, "[Trusting my mother] was never an issue. I think I grew up ignoring my mother....I don't think I would have believed anything she told me....She was just like a blimp in the house." All five women agree that their inability to trust their mothers has created distance between the two women.

Mothers' needs to be taken care of by daughters

Another theme reported by the women suggest that the tone of their relationships with their mothers often led them to believe that their mothers' needs to be cared for were stronger than their mothers' abilities to effectively look after themselves and their families. These perceived short-comings in their mothers helped all five women to believe that they could not count on their mothers to be available and supportive to their daughters. Linda expresses this theme by saying,

Instead of being a little kid who would say [in a little girl's voice] "mommy, I got a problem, what do you think I should do, help me." I would take it all the way past that into here's a solution, before I would ever tell her about a problem....And that would even be too much.

Ever since she was a young girl, Kelly has believed that she has tried to take care of her mother's needs because she has
witnessed her mother’s frequent mood swings. She reports that this has certainly impacted on the style of interactions between the two women and she expresses her feelings about having to be the stronger member of the dyad.

I, I’ve seen her really depressed, many, many [italics added] times. [It] really terrifies me....I’ve always been really sensitive to her moods. And uh, obligation, duty-driven to take care of her. And yet, part of me just pulls me in the other direction. Like, “how dare you? Ask me to take care of you? When I’m the one who needs to be taken care of?

For Lydia, her experiences of her mother’s habitual emotional dependence on her, long ago eroded Lydia’s hopes of relating to her mother as the dependable adult in the mother-daughter relationship.

My mother used to come to me and confide in me [about difficulties in my parents’ marriage]....I was her confidante about lots [italics added] of things. It was very difficult. I didn’t want that responsibility....When she’d crash, I’d have to comfort her. I didn’t want to. I felt I had to. Somebody had to be her friend. I felt that it was my job [italics added] to comfort my mother....I was her stronger half.

Dorothy’s lack of expectations of emotional or material nurturance from her mother stem from a profound and fundamental puzzlement that invades her relationship with her mother. "I have
no [italics added] idea, no idea what makes her tick... [As a mother] she wasn’t there. She’s not there. Like, even now, she’s not there."

Janice cannot recall experiencing any involvement by her mother in her childhood. She identifies her childhood feelings that arose out of having an uninvolved mother, "I don’t remember my mother at all... She never came to anything at school. Or [did] anything like that. I remember feeling very [italics added] abandoned." The five daughters uniformly experience their mothers as women who are incapable of looking after their own needs and, as a result, the daughters have not and do not see their mothers as capable of being supportive and protective parents.

**Daughters’ beliefs about their mothers’ awareness of incest**

The third common theme is that all five women believe that their mothers were aware of the daughters’ incestuous abuse. Linda does not hesitate to express the blame she places on her mother by saying, "... *She set us up* [italics added]... I mean, the more I’ve looked back on it, the more I’ve realized my mother would set us up to be abused." Although Kelly cannot explain why she feels her mother was aware of the incest, she does say, "... *She knew that there was something wrong... She must have... She knew what was going on.*" Dorothy cannot understand how her mother could have remained ignorant of the incestuous abuse that was going on in the household. "... *I, I can’t imagine* [italics added] how, how [sic] I can’t imagine my mom not knowing. Like, she was in the house so many times when it happened."
Janice reports that, while in therapy a number of years ago, she realized that "...I really hold my mother to blame for the whole thing...I do blame my mother. For no reason, [I] feel that it was her fault."

Lydia is less vehement than the other women in her conviction about her mother's awareness of the incest. However, she too expresses her long-held and persistent feeling that her mother must have been aware of the incest while it was occurring by saying, "...[She] must have known something...must have suspected. She turned a blind eye to a lot of obvious things."

All five women concur that their mother-daughter relationships have been further damaged by their suspicions about their mothers' awareness of the incest.

Daughters' desire to be different from their mothers

Another common experience reported by these women is their desire and struggle to be very different from their mothers. For some of the women, there is a fear that they will become like their mothers and a sense that this transformation may beyond their comprehension and out of their control. Linda articulates this theme in the following manner: "...I feel a lot of anger around my relationship with my mother and I'm just beginning to allow myself to be angry. And, part of it's just my own fear of becoming my mother." For both Lydia and Janice, the fear of becoming like their mothers focuses on the "meaninglessness" of their mothers' lives. Lydia states, "...I don't want to end up like her...She does nothing with her life. She doesn't care about
herself. My mother's reality is...prying into my life and my sisters' lives and worrying about us." Janice is very clear about what being like her mother means. "...I don't want to be like my mother...Being like my mother is being lazy, overweight, sick, complaining, miserable, the expert. All those things."

Not all five of the women are able to clearly articulate what being like their mother means and why they do not want that for themselves. However, they are able to identify their mothers as weak, victimized women who have not been able to take control of their lives. In their present struggles to take charge of their own lives in the absence of familial role models, the daughters simply know that they do not want to become replicas of their mothers.

Daughter's sorrow about present state of relationship with mother

The final common theme that emerges in the five respondents' experiences of their mothers is their regret for the negative tone of their relationships with their mothers. Each woman expresses sorrow at never having experienced a mutually satisfying mother-daughter relationship and consider this to be a profound loss in their own lives. Each woman also holds out a wish, though not always a hope, that she could somehow repair her relationship with her mother.

Lydia expresses her frustration and sadness at the superficial quality of her relationship with her mother, with the following words: "...We can have the weather conversation [meaning a relationship based on insignificant issues] for the
rest of our lives. If [she] wants. It doesn’t matter to me. Well, yes, it does. [Begins to cry]. It does [italics added]. Matter.

Dorothy describes her strong maternal feelings toward her own children and realizes how much she misses having her mother care for her in the same way that Dorothy cares for her children. "...That’s what I miss. I mean, why can’t I [italics added] have that bond with my mother?...It would be nice [to heal my relationship my mother]."

Kelly articulates her struggles for a healthier self and her perception of that self being tied to her relationship with her mother. "...I want a lot for her to be healthier and happier and freer because then I would be too [italics added]. For me to be free, I need her to be...there is that life-line."

Janice also speaks of her need for her mother after describing a recent dream she had about a little girl crying for her mother. "...That’s [to be nurtured by her mother] what I want. A lot, a lot [italics added]...I think, I need [italics added] her because I’m a mother now." Each of the women identify the damaged tone of their mother-daughter relationship as a sadness in their lives. As adult daughters, each woman expresses cautious hope that this relationship can one day be repaired.

As the above five themes demonstrate, the mother-daughter relationships experienced by the five respondents are characterized by unmet needs and negative interactions. In spite of their life-long negative experiences with their mothers, all the women report that the absence of a positive relationship with
their mothers is experienced as a profound loss in their lives. All five women wish to, feel that they need to, but are at a loss as to how to rectify their relationships with their mothers. 

**Themes in the respondents’ experiences of their father-daughter relationships:**

As reported by all the respondents, their relationships with their fathers are underlined by the women’s perceived and experienced inability to believe they are important to their fathers. In particular, the following three common themes emerge in these women’s experiences of their fathers:

1. The perceptions of the fathers as the central members of the families
2. The fathers’ lack of involvement in the daily lives of their families.
3. The daughters’ efforts to obtain their fathers’ attention and approval.

**Fathers as central members of families**

The first theme is experienced by three of the interviewed women in terms of their family lives revolving around their fathers. In their experiences, the pre-occupation of their daily lives was with their fathers’ return home from work. This was one of the few times the mother and the children came together in a single effort was in preparation for the fathers’ return home. For example, In Linda’s words, "...Waiting for dad to come home [was the] big event of the day. He's the focus and everything's around him." In a similar vein, Janice, whose father was away
from the family during the week, says, "...On the weekends, just before my dad would come home, we'd have this big frenzy cleaning the house...and my dad would sort of walk into this frenzy, he would sort of turn around and walk away."

Kelly also recalls her dad being away from the family a great deal. She believes his many departures and returns contributed to her experiencing life as being Just a roller coaster. Mom would say, "dad's coming home," and we'd get built up for dad to come home. And, dad would come home for a couple of days. Then, he'd go away again and we'd all go down again.

Although Lydia and Dorothy do not mention similar examples provided by the other three women, they both speak of having experienced their fathers to be powerful centers of the family. In addition, their experiences are consistent with the theme of their fathers' control. As Lydia remembers, "...When we were young, whatever my father says goes [sic]. Uh, it's where there would be my sisters and my mother...shuddering in the corner kind of thing. And, my father would walk in and do whatever." In various ways, all five women experienced their fathers as the central familial member who dictated or exercised subtle yet definite control over the life of the family.

Father's lack of involvement with family

All five women report their fathers' lack of involvement in the family's day to day lives. Their recollections of their fathers are striking in their inability to remember these men
doing anything with their families. Janice and Dorothy do not recall having experienced any kind of daily involvement with their fathers, outside of their sexual involvement with them.

When asked where her father was on a daily basis, Linda responds by pondering, "...Where was [italics added] my dad? He was busy. He was busy fucking around, going to work, pretending to go to work and not going to work." Lydia reports that all of the children's physical and recreational needs were taken care of by her mother and her father's contribution to the children's care was only monetary. "...My mother put us in all sorts [italics added] of classes, courses and things. Yeah, we had everything. My father, you know, would fund this stuff. And, my mother would ferry us off to these things."

Kelly believes that her father's gift-bearing returns to his children after long absences from home served to further damage her already precarious relationship with her mother.

[My dad] would go away and come back and bring us things. And when he came back....life was just a party. And then he'd go away and my mom was a bitch, you know? Because, she had to handle all the daily problems....of a normal life.

Even though the women's childhood experiences of their fathers were as the core member of their families, the daughters cannot report their fathers' presence or involvement in their everyday lives.

The daughter's efforts to obtain her father's attention

Each woman illustrates the efforts she made to obtain the
attention and approval from her father. Although the means vary from woman to woman, the desperate hope for his validation and acceptance, is a theme that runs across each woman’s recollections of her experiences with her father. Linda tried to get recognition from her father by excelling in her academic endeavours. She can vividly remember getting 99% in a test and running home to show her father who responded with, "...If you can get 99, why can’t you get 100%?" She reports that this exemplifies her experiences of the hurtful and rejecting tones of her relationship with her father. With slight variations, similar experiences are recalled by the other four women.

Dorothy’s attempts to get her father’s attention by developing interests that were similar to his were met with ridicule and rejection. Dorothy tried to show interest in her father’s obsession with the game of ice hockey by asking him questions about the game. His response to her was "...Oh, get out of here." She too reiterates the hurt and rejection expressed by Linda. "...I wanted so much [italics added] for my dad’s approval that, I don’t know [sic]. Like, that meant a lot to me...All [italics added] I wanted was just a hug saying, hey, you did good, you know?"

Janice relates her singular childhood experience of receiving praise from her father. "...Had to been [sic] grade 7. I cooked [a meal] for my dad. He was so [italics added] proud of me. Just this perfect little mother, he said. That was the only time I remember my dad ever [italics added] being proud of me."
For the other two women, the experiences of their relationships with their fathers are highlighted by not being able to believe that he needed them as much as they needed him. Both Kelly’s and Lydia’s perceptions of their childhood relationships with their fathers are reported in less negative terms than the other three women. However, these two women’s experiences with their fathers also focus on almost continuous striving to attain his approval. Lydia feels that in spite of her own lack of desire and interest, she continued her post-secondary studies in order to please her father. Eventually unable to sustain her interest, she "dropped out." Since then, she has spent years chastising herself for having disappointed her father by not completing her college education. "...I thought I had to do something to make him proud. I thought, that’s what I was supposed [italics added] to do...And, I guess I thought that’s what dad wanted, you know?" She believes that for the greater part of her life, she has guessed at and followed the paths of her father’s expectations of her in hopes of making him proud of her.

Kelly grew up feeling a distinct lack of confidence in her own abilities to do anything well. She recalls that whatever efforts she made were with the intent to please her dad. In spite of all her efforts, she is unable to remember receiving any tangible rewards from him. "...I valued my father’s opinions. And I, I really was doing things for my father’s approval. Oh, in whatever I was doing." When asked if she ever felt she received
the approval she was seeking, Kelly replies, "...Sort of. Not, not in any big tangible way."

As the above examples describe, the father-daughter relationships in these women's lives are fraught with unfulfilled longings for emotional closeness and attention from their fathers. In spite of these experiences of unmet needs and perceived rejection, all five women report that they continue to want or hope for their father's approval and acceptance. This holds true even for those women who have severed or significantly reduced their contacts with their fathers. The daughters continue to feel the strength of their fathers' power and control over their lives.

**Themes in the respondents' experiences of their sibling relationships:**

In the five respondents' descriptions of their sibling relationships, three main themes emerge:

1. The women's experiences of generally negative relationships with the other children in their families
2. One particularly close and supportive sibling relationship
3. The women’s experiences of their parents as being instrumental in creating and fostering the poor relationships between siblings.

**Generally negative sibling relationships**

All five women interviewed come from families with three or more children. Each woman reports having poor sibling relationships in general. However, the poor quality of their
sibling experiences are not elaborated upon in any behavioural
terms in the women's discussions.

Close relationship with one sibling

All five participants report a particularly close relationship with one of their siblings. For Linda, this experience is with her youngest sister. This relationship is not elaborated upon in any behavioural terms in Linda's discussions. Instead, she reports experiencing a sense of closeness with this sister that was different from or in contrast to what she felt for her other siblings. Kelly has poor relationships with all but her second youngest sister. She describes this relationship as being mutually supportive. Although she does not provide specific reasons or examples, she designates this particular relationship as being her only role-model for positive female relationships.

Lydia experiences her closest sibling relationship with her youngest sister who has recently gotten married and moved away. According to Lydia, these changes in her sister's life have meant that the two of them are drifting apart and Lydia feels sadness about the distanced relationship.

Janice reports that she experiences a "mind connection" with her brother who is six years older than herself. This is the one close relationship she experiences with a member of her natural family and perceives that they share similar intellects and interests. "...My brother, who I'm very, very [italics added] close with. It's almost like, my brother and I share a lot in common. As a teenager, growing up, I remember now, spending all
nights [italics added] together. Talking and having very philosophical discussions."

Dorothy reports having experienced much mutual nurturing and caring with her brothers. She feels that while her brothers were growing up, she was primarily responsible for looking after them. As a result, she has developed close, maternal relationships with them but is particularly close to her youngest brother. This sibling resides with Dorothy.

Experiencing parents as creating rifts between siblings

Each of the women report experiencing their parents as being instrumental in creating and fostering the poor sibling relationships within their families. Linda reports childhood feelings of competions between herself and her older sisters and says that the hostility between the two sisters was often fueled by their mother. She cites her sad realization at age 14 that her older sister had chosen to fit into the family by adopting manipulative and dishonest ways to relate with the family members. For Linda, this awareness meant the dissolution of any hopes she had held out for a closer relationship with her older sibling. Linda describes her experiences in the following manner:

"It was a big grief. It was a big letting go. I'd spent a lot of effort on her. I wanted her to be somebody who could be my friend....She hates me. And, my mother would pit us against one another [by saying things like] "look at this report card. Why can't you have a report card like hers?" Which further damaged the relationship."
Kelly is the eldest child in her family. She has one brother and two sisters. In looking back, Kelly now attributes the poor quality of her sibling relationships to her father's special treatment of her and his sexual involvement with all of the children. She reports experiencing other family members as competitors for her father's affections. As an adult who is no longer in contact with her father, she believes that he set up the competitive and negative sibling relationships to achieve his own selfish ends. Kelly describes her present relationships with her siblings as: "...With one of my sisters, I'm very close. With S. [other sister], I think we're both very tentative with each other. I think she's had contempt for me. As my brother has."

Lydia is the oldest of three sisters. She reports similar experiences of sibling relationships; that of distance and waryness. She too feels that part of this waryness has resulted from her mother's interference in the relationships between the three sisters. "...I have to be careful what I say to [my sister]. 'Cause, [sic] in the past, it has always gone straight back to my mom. Yeah, straight back...and she gets her finger in my pie and my sisters' pies."

Of the five women interviewed, Dorothy comes from the largest family. She has one older sister, three younger sisters and three younger brothers. She describes an extremely hostile relationship with her older sister. In a vein similar to the other women, she perceives her parents to have created and fostered the poor relationship between the two of them.
Like, when we baby-sat. 11 kids one time, for eight hours. And, I got $4.00. Nothing major....Then, my mom and dad said, "you have to give us half your money." I cleaned and [italics added] looked after the kids. And then, they turned around and asked to borrow the other half!....And my sister [italics added] kept it.

Janice’s siblings include older twin brothers, another older brother and a younger sister. All the children are six years apart in age. She experienced her sister to be very different from herself and says that she has mostly been indifferent to her sister’s life. She also feels that this sister has a close relationship with her parents and this contributes to her disdain for her sister, as exemplified by the following excerpt:

I remember my mother saying something [once]. Oh yeah, I worked as a waitress in high school and my mother said, not meaning to say it loud but verbalized it by accident, "well, that was one thing your sister never had to do." She was actually tallying the accomplishments between me and my younger sister.

The above descriptions reflect that the general tones of the sibling relationships experienced by the five respondents are negative. The intensity of sadness and hope that surround their descriptions about their parental relationships are not expressly articulated by any of the women in their discussions of their damaged sibling relationships. However, each of the women believe their generally poor tone of sibling interactions reflect yet
another experience of dysfunctional familial relationship.

**Themes in the respondents' experiences of their intimate relationships:**

All five women report experiencing difficulties in their intimate relationships. The common difficulties described by the women are the following:

1. Choosing partners who do not value them
2. Struggling to change the destructive patterns of their intimate relationships.

**Choice of partner**

In discussing the first theme, Linda describes her former husband's response to her needs. Linda was married for two years when she began having flashbacks of her childhood sexual abuse. She had hoped that her husband would be a source of support for her while she was going through this difficult period in her life. Instead, the marriage disintegrated. "...My husband...wanted me to forget it [the incest]. So, there was no support at all." In addition to being unsupportive to Linda, he forbade his family to have contact with Linda, following the couple's separation. For Linda, this has been a great loss. "...I had taken on his family as my own. In search of family, you know, married somebody for their family...I wasn't prepared for the fact that his family wouldn't speak to me after [the separation]."

Dorothy speaks of her realizations about her 12 year common-law relationship with a violent alcoholic man. That
relationship had ended four months prior to this interview taking place.

I’m starting to realize why I was with L. And I put up with all the crap. I was so used to it. You’re used to being fucked, you usually tend to be [italics added] with what you’re comfortable with....[There was] physical abuse. There was always insults and stuff like that....Now I find that I miss him and it’s just that....abusiveness [italics added] that I miss. Because, it’s not something I’m used to.

Kelly reports her befuddlement at her pattern of intimate relationships and her lack of knowledge about what is healthy in a relationship.

I go for the relationships [with] the guy who is not [italics added] there. I set relationships up the same way. It never works. Because the people I love to be special [to me] are specially [italics added] distant....If a healthy relationship jumped into my life, would I even recognize it? What’s healthy to me? I don’t know it.

Lydia speaks of her inability to trust the men in her life and the pattern of choosing men whom she experiences as being emotionally unavailable to her.

Struggles to change patterns

The women report that they are presently engaged in trying to change their usual ways of conducting their intimate relationships. All five women say that this is a difficult struggle for them and the paths to this desired for change is
riddled with uncertainty and confusion.

Lydia says that in her intimate relationships, she habitually experiences herself as being emotionally and sexually inadequate to satisfy the men. She wants to alter these experiences but is not certain she knows what needs to happen.

With my relationships right now, I'm trying not to make all men seem bad....I'm trying to but, it's hard. Because, there's things in my boyfriend] that I see in all [italics added] men. Like, he did screw around on me....I feel like [he] could just put a paper bag over my head, you know? I don't feel like I'm what he wants in a woman.

Janice has been married for 16 years and reports having a happy marriage. However, she goes on to describe her flirtatious behaviour with men in general and the impact of this behaviour on her relationship with her husband.

Our sexual relationship, to this day [italics added] is not a fully functioning relationship, whatsoever. I have a very flirtatious nature. And, I find that it affects us a lot....I am always aware of men....a lot of my life energy is focused on this....I don't want the men to respond. Yet, I do [italics added]. And that's what scares me....I just can't help [the constant attractions to men].

As with the parental and sibling relationships experienced by the respondents, the intimate relationships in their lives are also riddled with many difficulties. In terms of these relationships, all the women, except for Janice, feel that they
are not treated with respect or genuinely cared for by these men. When discussing their damaged familial relationships, the women do not identify, or at least articulate any aspect of the damage as being their responsibilities. However, in contrast to their experiences in these other relationships, the women appear to accept a great deal of responsibility for the treatment they receive from the men in their lives. This is evident in their efforts to locate qualities and/or behaviours within themselves that will explain their patterns of poor intimate relationships.

**Summary**

The five women's descriptions of their familial relationships are punctuated with hostile interactions and feelings of sadness and loss regarding the damaged tones of these important relationships. In terms of their mothers, the women are able to identify several dynamics which have resulted in the predominantly distant and damaged nature of this relationship. In expressing their wishes to repair their relationships with their mothers, the women identify this as a pivotal relationship in their lives.

Although even in their childhoods the women experienced their fathers as uncaring and uninvolved in their lives, they report desperately wanting his attention. At present, each of the women have arrived at a decision to establish definite boundaries in their relationships with their fathers. For some, this has necessitated severing contact with him while for others, this has meant contact that is dictated by them and not their fathers.
Each of the women identify a single positive relationship in their lives and for all the women this is with a sibling. The intimate relationships discussed by the women appear to be where they rest their hopes for a "healthy" connection that is outside the realm of the already dysfunctional family system. However, the descriptions of these relationships and the women's struggles to change existing patterns suggest that their quest for a "healthy" relationship in the world has not yet become a reality.
Chapter V

Discussion

A major focus of this chapter is the exploration of the common themes that emerged from the five respondents' accounts of their experiences of relationships with family members and their relationships with male partners. This is followed by a discussion of the special significance of the mother-daughter relationship as experienced by the five respondents. A profile is compiled of the women's experiences of themselves in, and as a result of these relationships, by summarizing the impact of the relationships. Other areas of focus within this chapter include the therapeutic, theoretical and research implications of the present study. The limitations of the study are also discussed.

The mother-daughter relationship and the daughter's experience of self

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between adult survivors of father-daughter incestuous abuse and their mothers. The respondents discussed several other relationships as they elaborated on the various aspects of their mother-daughter relationships. All five women independently identified and discussed their relationships with their fathers and with their siblings. All five also described aspects of relationships with male partners. However, the central focus of the interviews was the mother-daughter relationship. The most significant finding was that these women firmly believed
that their relationships with their mothers (both actual and desired) significantly determined how they experienced themselves and others in the world. As evidenced by the common themes, there were notable similarities in the five women's descriptions of their relationships. To facilitate convenient and concise presentation of the material in this chapter, the reported experiences of the women will be referred to as one.

As the themes of relationships outlined in the preceding chapter indicate, the participant describes a predominantly dysfunctional relationship with her mother, father, siblings and intimate partners. For example, she reports her relationship with her mother as being damaged from as far back as she can remember. Her awareness of the negative tone of her relationship with her father is a recent insight of only partial awareness for the daughter. She also believes that all the relationships she discussed have had detrimental effects on how she feels about herself, and/or the ways in which she experiences the world. However, she believes that the most detrimental relationship has been and continues to be her relationship with her mother. Apparently, she sees this relationship as having the greatest influence on her sense of self and her sense of self in relation to others.

Significance of the mother-daughter relationship

Several elements contribute to the daughter's identification of her relationship with her mother as her frame of reference for her relational experiences. This identification
appears to be a result of the daughter’s unfolding realization of the ramifications of her largely negative mother-daughter experiences. Much of this awareness/realization has surfaced in her therapy. Embedded within the themes of the mother-daughter relationship are the lessons of having experienced conditional acceptance, such as being accepted as mother’s confidante against the father or the world at large. Her perception of her mother "pitting" siblings against one another has convinced her that her mother is not able to accept and love all the children as equals. Instead, the daughter has come to believe that her mother can only love one child by rejecting another. In the process of describing the dysfunctional history of her relationship with her mother, she expresses feelings of shame or discomfort for placing blame on her mother for many things including awareness about the incest. She also expresses immense remorse at the tone of her relationship with her mother and reports that she experiences a sense of helplessness about her ability to heal this apparently pivotal relationship.

Furthermore, the daughter relates her apprehensions about her mother-daughter relationship to fears for herself. The first of these fears is that she might remain "stuck" in her own development, if somehow she does not accept her mother and in turn is not accepted by her mother. Secondly, the participant’s dialogue strongly suggests that she often experiences a lack of separation between herself and her mother. This profound inter-dependency between the daughter and her mother emerges as the
most significant aspect of this mother-daughter relationship. The daughter's perceived lack of separateness from her mother suggests the daughter's experience of "being empty of oneself." Described by Balint (1963),

Women who feel empty of themselves feel that they are not being accorded a separate reality nor the agency to interpret the world in their own way. This feeling has its origins in the early mother-daughter relationship (Balint cited in Chodorow, 1973, p.100).

In addition, the daughter also believes that her sense of self and personal strength can emerge only if her mother were somehow able to change. As one daughter articulates, "...For me [italics added] to be free, I need her [italics added] to be."

Although the daughter can identify several fears and dilemmas associated with her mother, she cannot always articulate why she perceives the relationship as having such a strong influence on her development of self. One plausible explanation can be found in Lerner's (1989) suggestion that "...before anything else, we are daughters" (p.183). The daughter in this study is struggling to articulate and comprehend the meaning of this complex relationship. She is in the process of "sorting through" the maze of her emotions and behaviours that she realizes are connected to or embedded in her relationship with her mother. In her adulthood, the daughter has become keenly aware that "...living is an interactive and dialectic process" (Rubin, 1983, p. 11) and finds herself re-experiencing her
incomplete early struggles around separation and unity -- namely, her struggles with her mother.

**Impact of relationships on daughter’s sense of self and self in relationship to others**

The participant also attempts to identify the harmful effects of her experience of her relationships with her father, siblings and intimate partners. Even though the woman cannot always articulate how these relationships have and continue to affect her, she is cognizant of being influenced by them. As with the mother-daughter relationship, the effects of these other relationships that she reports are particularly discernible when attending to the woman’s expressions about her experience of herself.

In relation to her father, the daughter was painfully aware that his incestuous abuse and emotional neglect of her have significant and lasting effects on her ability to trust and on her feelings of self-worth. She expresses the overwhelmingly strong belief that she has not felt valued by her father. Her continuous and unsuccessful attempts to obtain her father’s love and attention have served to strengthen her belief that no matter what she does, she is not worthy of a man’s love.

Two points merit discussion when comparing the reports of the daughter’s relationship with each parent. The first point concerns the harmful effects on the daughter of the incest itself. Although the woman elaborates more on the mother-daughter relationship, at no point in the interview does she compare the
impact of her troubled mother-daughter relationship to the impact of the incestuous abuse. Her identification of the mother-daughter relationship as being pivotal is not done with any minimization of the impact of the incest. The negative and inappropriate aspects of her father's behaviour toward her are concretely identified by the daughter. She reports that in the course of her therapeutic work, once she was able to understand that what he had done to her was wrong and contravened his fatherly role, she was able to make a decision about lessening or severing contact with him. She has some realization that her ongoing desire for his approval shows her that he continues to exert his power over her. However, for the most part, by limiting or severing her contact with him, she has come to feel less and less overwhelmed by his power.

The second point concerns the daughter's struggles to separate from her parents. Separation from her father is based on the daughter's perceived needs for future emotional safety and growth. Although the daughter states that she still harbours hopes of one day receiving genuine acceptance by her father, she is resolute in her decision to not have her father in her life. Separation from her mother appears to be a far riskier and frightening possibility than is separation from the abusive father. Although the daughter is able to recall and report incidences of maternal neglect and rejection, she is unable to clearly state that she can or that she wants to end the relationship with her mother. Even the anticipation of the loss
of her mother is more distressing than the reality of her father's absence in her life. The daughter's past attempts to distance herself from her mother helped only as short-term reprieves from the disturbing relationship. This has led to her realization that distancing or severing is not the appropriate resolution for her relationship with her mother. Lerner (1989) states that distancing as a resolution for the mother-daughter relationship fails because "...in [her] attempts to preserve a pseudoharmonious "we," the [daughter] sacrifices the "I" (p.189).

In addition, the daughter's efforts to salvage a "peaceful" relationship with her mother has required that she remain silent regarding her grievances about her experiences of neglect by her mother as well as her anger toward, and on-going needs for her mother in her life. The daughter is in the process of realizing that she needs to express her grievances to her mother and appears to be preparing herself to hear her mother's side of things, for perhaps the first time in their relationship with each other. The daughter's difficulties in separating from her mother are confounded by her feeling fused or attached to her mother. Thus, her experience of her attempts to distance or separate from her mother is different from her experience of the separation from her father. With the former, her energies are channeled toward her hope and search for ways by which the life-long course of the relationship can be changed and improved. The daughter's needs for reciprocity and connection are evidenced by the expression of a strong desire to have her mother involved in
the process of healing the relationship.

With regard to other familial relationships, the almost exclusively competitive nature of her sibling relationships has instilled in her the belief that one wins at the expense of someone else's loss. Since she was usually at the losing ends of the childhood battles with her siblings, she has come to believe that she does not deserve to win and finds difficulties in asserting her needs as she does not appear to see herself and her concerns worth fighting for.

The participant's experiences in her intimate relationships emerge as the relationships within which all of her negative beliefs about herself are being played out. This is the arena in which she has become aware of the negative impacts of her childhood familial experiences. Furthermore, in her struggles to change the dysfunctional nature of her intimate relationships, the woman senses that these difficulties are somehow connected to her earlier relationships. Her experiences here appear to be the embodiment of Rubin's (1983) claim that "...we must look to childhood if we are to understand certain central elements of adulthood" (p. 44).

In drawing a strong connection between her perceptions and experiences of the predominantly dysfunctional relationships in her life, the participant also explores the ways in which they have shaped her experience of herself in the world. She can describe her lack of self-worth as a result of having experienced repeated rejections and neglect in these relationships. In the
process of the research interview, the participant was able to describe the devaluation, minimization, condescension and invalidation she has experienced in all of her important relationships. In describing these largely negative relationships, she begins to realize that the quality of these experiences have resulted in her internalization of herself as unworthy of love and acceptance.

Summary

The participant experiences and reports her familial relationships as being damaged. The harmful impact of the various damaged relationships are experienced most severely in terms of the development of her sense of self and in turn, in her relationships with others. The dysfunctional relationships experienced by the woman have resulted in three central issues which she experiences as barriers to her personal growth: the daughter has come to realize that she has not experienced being accepted and loved for who she was and is. Loving has been absent or conditional in all the relationships she describes. As a result, ",...she was left hungry for love while not knowing how to trust it, accept it and feeling undeserving of it" (Norwood, 1985, p.15). The second barrier appears to be the daughter's experience/realization (present in greater or lesser degrees in all five women) that she has internalized her own lack of worth as a result of not having felt validated in her formative years. Her need to be needed and/or used by others have been her only measure of her own worth. As a result, she tends to form anxious
and tenuous attachments with others. The third barrier is the daughter’s identification of her experience of herself in the world as being alien, alone, unloved and unlovable. Since she feels so different from others, she also appears to experience the world as an untrusting place that will not understand her experiences or be sympathetic to her concerns.

The maternal relationship is identified by the daughter as the relationship which she believes to have had a very significant impact on her life. She believes that as a result of not having experienced a positive maternal presence in her life, she has had no arena in which to feel nurtured and learn how to nurture others. As an adult woman, she is keenly aware of not having a mutually satisfying mother-daughter relationship. Along with that awareness is the growing realization that her own issues of "...primary identification, love, dependence and separation are all tied into her relationship with her mother" (Chodorow, 1989, p.193).

Conclusions

The findings of the present study confirm the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship as it has been experienced by the adult daughter. The participant’s need to explore her other familial relationships in order to fully explore her experience of her relationship with her mother suggests that the mother-daughter relationship cannot be meaningfully examined or understood when it is isolated or extracted from its familial context. The same appears to hold true for exploring any of these
other relationships; the interactional dynamics of familial relationships must be attended to in any meaningful exploration of the incestuous family structure.

In addition to identifying her relationship with her mother as the most important relationship in her life, she also identifies its far-reaching impact in terms of the development of her sense of self and her experience of the world. One can hypothesize that the daughter attributes such significance to this relationship because her identity as an adult woman is derived from her experiences with her mother. "...The mother is ....the primary care-giver in infancy. And no fact of our life has greater consequences for how girls develop....into women, therefore for how we relate to each other in our adult years" (Rubin, 1983, pp. 42-43). The mother and father are not the same kind of parent and therefore, the nature and intensity of a child's relationship to them differ as does the relationship's degree of exclusiveness (Chodorow, 1989). The daughter in the present study does not report having been cared for by any other significant woman in her life and therefore her only frame of reference for identification as a woman is tied up in her dysfunctional relationship with her mother. Given their life-long negative interactions, and with a lack of direction for repairing this relationship, the pivotal significance she attributes to her relationship with her mother is understandable. Her fear of repeating her mother's life is also not surprising given the daughter's experience of a lack of separateness between
herself and her mother.

**Implications for counselling**

This study's findings have important implications for counselling adult survivors of incestuous abuse. The participants in the present study all reported having had poor therapeutic experiences. It is possible that therapists working with this population of clients are not always aware of the importance of their clients' past and current relational experiences and the impact of these relationships on the clients' present issues. Often, therapeutic work with incest survivors focuses exclusively on the incestuous relationship and the concomitant effects (Courtois, 1988). According to the experiences reported by the present sample, such a narrow focus is experienced as inadequate by the clients. It appears important that therapists who work with clients who have had incestuous experiences, are sensitive to the special therapeutic needs of these clients, and have the expertise to help their clients address all the relevant relational concerns.

The women in this study, not unlike many survivors of childhood sexual abuse, experienced multiple traumas including incestuous abuse by their fathers and siblings, the detrimental effects of dysfunctional familial relationships and, difficulties encountered in their current intimate relationships. The harmful effects of all these relationships experienced by these women appear to be barriers in attaining personal growth and self-development. Their ongoing struggles to process and understand
the dynamics of their relationships with their mother are especially difficult and may need to be worked through within a therapeutic context.

In counselling adult survivors of childhood incestuous abuse, it appears necessary to explore the mother-daughter relationship experienced by the clients. The counsellor may need to be aware of the critical dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship and of the daughter's perceptions of the influence the relationship has on her. The personal meaning of the daughter's relationship with her mother cannot be known until the daughter has an opportunity to express what she believes she has lost or not experienced in her relationship with her mother. The five women interviewed in this study emphasized the centrality of this relationship in their lives. This centrality appears to be tied in with the early mother-daughter relationship as well as with the women's current needs to "work through" unaddressed issues so that these daughters can understand and possibly assuage their fears of being "like their mothers." Unless these aspects of the mother-daughter relationship are expressed, understood, and addressed in therapy, the daughters' most potent feelings toward their mothers may be of overwhelming ambivalence. Given that the daughters draw strong connections between their mother-daughter relationships and their own sense of self, it is possible that they also experience strong ambivalence toward themselves.

The counsellor should recognize the impact of the
experiences of invalidation that these women may associate with their mothers. The extraordinary ambivalence that these women experience toward the mother must also be allowed to find expression. There is often a great deal of shame in expressing anger toward a parent and this may effectively stop many women from recognizing their real feelings (Caplan, 1989). These women have lived a great deal of their lives keeping their incest experience a secret. The discussions of the five participants in the present study indicate that they have not always felt free to explore and express the feelings of anger, rage and disappointment that were mixed with their feelings of love and need for both their parents. This denial or suppression of true feelings may well serve to add to the emotional burden that these women already bear. As Lerner (1977) states, anger and protest not only help the woman to experience her dignity and respect for herself, they help her to take a courageous and necessary risk to stand alone without the reliance on approval from others.

In the counselling process, the opportunity to reflect on the meaning the daughter attaches to her early and current relationship with her mother may provide an arena for her to receive validation for her feelings. This may provide the first step in the woman's struggle with her issues of self worth and affirmation and may help teach her to validate, accept, and trust her own feelings. What the daughter as a child expected and did not receive from her mother may need to be explored and distinguished from what is realistic for her to expect as an
adult within this difficult mother-daughter relationship. The counsellor may also need to focus on helping the woman explore what aspects of her relationship with her mother she believes she is moving away from and clarify what she needs and wants to move toward in terms of this relationship. Within a supportive and caring therapeutic relationship, the counsellor may help the client to explore and develop newer perspectives on her relationship with her mother. Since the daughter appears to draw connections between her mother-daughter relationship and her experience of self, the reframing and restructuring of the impact of the early relationship on her self-perception may help to develop a qualitatively different awareness and experience of herself in the world.

Grief is an integral part of these daughters' experiences. The caring and nurturing maternal "birthright" is perceived by these women as a void in their lives. From this emerges strong feelings of anger toward their mothers as well as sadness for themselves. Grief counselling focused on the experience of loss may be facilitative in allowing the women to acknowledge and/or mourn that loss. The women may require assistance in expressing the range of affect associated with the grief. The counsellor may need to validate the reality of the loss of the relationship and the normality of the grief these women experience.

Based on the data obtained from the five women in this study, it appears that separation from the mother is not the expected goal in counselling. Instead, the daughters express
strong desires to explore the possibilities of healing their mother-daughter relationships. This implies that they hope to find ways to have a relationship with their mothers that are qualitatively different from what they have experienced thus far. It is possible that the relationships between these daughters and their mothers cannot be molded into the popular, idealized conceptualization and expectations of relationships between mothers and daughters (Caplan, 1989; Chodorow, 1978; Rubin, 1983). The daughters express not having been nurtured and cared for by their mothers in ways that they have come to conceptualize maternal bonding and loving to be. Given that, it might be unrealistic to expect that they can now or later have the kind of mother-daughter relationships that make up the societally adhered to concepts of "good" mothering. Instead, one of the goals of therapy might be to help the daughters become aware of their acceptance of societal expectations of mothering which is in contrast to their actual experiences of being mothered. This awareness, if acceptable to the daughters, might facilitate a process of "letting go" of unrealistic and unattainable hopes and of replacing them with more plausible ones. It might also help to normalize some of these daughters' experiences with their mothers since many other daughters, from a variety of family backgrounds, have experienced that the perfect mother may only exist in theory.

Theoretical Implications

Although the role of the mother in father-daughter incest
has long been the subject of study and/or discussion (Cormier et al., 1962; Finkelhor, 1984; Herman, 1981; Herman & Hirschman, 1977; Kaufman et al., 1954; Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1967; Mrazek & Bentovim, 1987; Sgroi & Dana, 1982), research has not been conducted specifically on the mother-daughter relationship. The majority of the existing studies have focused on identifying the negative personal characteristics of the mothers (Cormier et al.; Kaufman et al.; Lustig et al.; Machotka et al.). One conclusion arrived at by these and other researchers who have explored the incestuous family is that mother-daughter relationships in incestuous families are damaged (Cormier et al.; Herman & Hirschman, 1977; Kaufman et al.; Lustig et al.; Machotka et al.). Results of the present study substantiate these findings. Herman and Hirschman (1977) reported that the mother-daughter relationships of their sample were damaged prior to the occurrence of the incest. For 4 of the 5 women in the present study, there was no pre-incest relationship to explore as their fathers began abusing them while the daughters were in their infancy. The 5th participant presents contradictory information about her age at the onset of the abuse. However, she does not report a time when there was a significant shift in the tone of her relationship with her mother.

Many of the studies have also generally attributed greater responsibility for the incest to the mother’s personal deficit, than to the abusive father for his behaviour (e.g., Cormier et al. 1962; Kaufman et al., 1954; Lustig et al., 1966). The
daughters in this study report experiencing their mothers as having been generally unprotective toward their children and each daughter has a strong sense that her mother was aware of the incest when it was occurring. However, the daughters do not report that they believe that the incestuous abuse/behaviour itself was the result of their mothers' actions, inactions, or personality deficits as has been concluded in previous studies (Cormier et al.; Kaufman et al.; Lustig et al.). The daughters clearly place such responsibility on the abusive fathers. It is notable that three of the participants are not sure why they feel that their mothers knew of the abuse, and even speculate that perhaps their own suspicions are unfounded.

Herman and Hirschman's (1977) findings about the physical and emotional incapacitations of the mothers are not completely borne out by the present study's sample. Only one daughter reports her mother's bouts with depression but even she does not describe her mother as being unable to carry out her household or child-rearing responsibilities. Nor do the women report their mothers as being alcohol addicted. The women do report experiencing their mothers as "...frail downtrodden victims who [are] unable to take care of themselves, much less protect their children" (Herman & Hirschman, p. 745). The present study also confirms their findings regarding the daughters' experience of being their mothers' confidantes.

The daughters in this study describe several other parallel experiences to those of the women in Herman and Hirschman's
(1977) sample. They report experiencing their mothers as being "victim-like" in their general demeanor. One daughter reports her father's physical abuse of her mother. Two of the daughters have information that their mothers were victims of childhood sexual abuse. All the daughters report their fathers as being the heads of the families and each emphasized the fathers' power. The daughters did not experience their mothers as having any power in their households.

The findings of the present study suggest that the almost exclusive focus of many of the previous studies' on the culpability of the mother as a result of her personality deficiencies is an inadequate framework for understanding the dynamic and interactional nature of incestuous families (Cormier et al., 1962; Kaufman et al., 1954). Furthermore, the preponderence of research focused on examining the mother's role does not provide an adequate or meaningful framework for understanding the nature of the mother-daughter relationship (Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1967; Maisch, 1973). These findings have failed to shed light on the intricacies and the mutualities of the mother-daughter relationship reported by the participants of the present study. Furthermore, existing studies have not examined this relationship in its familial context. Therefore, a theoretical framework does not exist within which this type of mother-daughter relationship can be examined.

The findings of the present study illuminate that the relationships between daughters and their mothers in families
where father-daughter incest occurs must be examined beyond the exploration of individual roles. Research frameworks which abstract the mother-daughter relationship from the familial context and simply blame the mother for failing to live up to her traditional and gender directed roles, fall short of any meaningful exploration by ignoring the significant impact of the societal and cultural norms upon the family. The focus and the methodology of the present study allow for the exploration of the familial relationships in incestuous family systems and therefore, can serve as a paradigm for developing a theoretical framework. The findings clearly suggest that the relationships between mothers and their incestuously abused daughters must be examined within a systemic framework which includes exploration of the familial norms. Furthermore, the participants' current difficulties suggest that future research must also take into consideration the societal and cultural contexts within which such abuse occurs. This is particularly important in order to understand how cultural and societal expectations serve to reinforce the dysfunctions of the daughter in her adult life. The goal of therapeutic work with survivors of incest must be to empower these women. This cannot be effectively and realistically accomplished if the women's relational experiences are extracted from the context of the world they live in. Given that the participants of the present study each identified the centrality of their relationship with their mothers, the dynamics of this relationship therefore needs to be explored and understood within
the familial as well as the societal and cultural contexts.  

**Research Implications**  

The findings of the present study confirm the general consensus in the existing literature that the relationships between mothers and their incestuously abused daughters are damaged (Herman, 1981; Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1967). However, the present findings extend the previous works by each participant's identified connection between her relationship with her mother and her sense of self. In addition, the findings clearly demonstrate that the adult daughters wish to heal their relationships with their mothers. However, since the exploration of the mother-daughter relationships in incestuous families is as yet an unexplored research area, the dynamic of this relationship and the mechanisms that may facilitate its restoration are not yet known. Therefore, future research possibilities are vast.  

Several repetitions of variations of this research study would be valuable in terms of expanding knowledge about the relationships between mothers and their abused daughters as well as the meaning of these relationships for the members involved. Replication of this study with a larger sample would facilitate verification of the findings and expand the information obtained in the present study. Replications with larger samples would help to either uncover variant portraits or to examine whether these five participants are reporting experiences that are uniform for women with similar family histories. Similar information may also be obtained by interviewing adult survivors of incest or adult
women in general, who have not been in therapy. In addition to a larger sample, this study could be conducted with both daughters and their mothers. This would elicit information from an as yet unexplored source, the mothers. Historically, abused daughters have been the almost exclusive subjects and focus of such studies. The clinical population from which researchers generally select study subjects consists mostly of the sexually abused victims. Studies that incorporate the non-abused children as well as other family members may also provide further valuable information about the ways that the family is experienced by its various members.

The choice of methodology is central to determining the meaning of the participants' relational experiences. The perceptions and experiences of these women need reflection and exploration and it is important that the methodology used facilitates these processes. The relational experiences of survivors of incest are too often laden with loss and shame and would likely be difficult to access as responses to specific questions.

Limitations of the study

Sample limitations The study reported on the experiences of five women. This is not a large enough sample to confidently generalize to a larger population of incestuously abused women's experiences of their mothers. However, given the in-depth exploration of experiences and the consensus that emerges in these five women's stories, the findings are likely to be
applicable to other women who have had similar experiences. The corroborations of the themes merit further research and may have implications for therapeutic interventions.

This study reflected the experiences of five adult women who were all volunteer participants in therapy at the time of the interviews. As a result of being in therapy, all the women reported having addressed a number of personal and interpersonal issues. For those women who have not experienced therapy, their articulations of past relationships and the effects of those relationships on present functionings might be very different.

Limitations of the instrumentation The compiled data were comprised of subjective self-reports and recollections of past experiences and perceptions. As a result, one cannot rule out the possibility of faulty or selective recollections. Finally, the researcher's multiple roles of the interviewer, analyst, and the data interpreter of the transcripts must also be kept in mind when considering the possible limitations of the study.

Summary

This study explored the nature of the mother-daughter relationship as it was experienced by five adult women who in their childhood and/or adolescence, were incestuously abused by their biological fathers. A review of the literature indicates that the mother-daughter relationships in incestuous families are typically fraught with difficulties. However, studies have tended to be unsystematically conducted and have generally focused on the specific roles thought to be played by the mother in the
genesis and maintainance of father-daughter incest (e.g., Cormier et al., 1962; Kaufman et al., 1954; Lustig et al., 1966; Machotka et al., 1967). Only one study has reported specifically on a number of dynamics of the mother-daughter relationships (Herman & Hirschman, 1977). By interviewing five adult daughters, the present study attempted to explore the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship and the impact of that relationship on the experienced by these daughters. Results confirmed that these mother-daughter relationships were indeed damaged. However, the daughters expressed strong desires to heal their relationships with their daughters. Furthermore, the daughters identified important connections between their issues of self and their relationships with their mothers.
References


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SUMMARY SHEET:

Title of Project: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Mother-Daughter Relationships Experienced by Daughters Who Were Incestuously Abused by Their Biological Fathers.


- Present research project is for M.A. thesis at U.B.C.

Purpose & Objectives:

- To explore the nature of the relationships between incestuously abused daughters and their mothers.
- The interviews will focus on the daughter’s experiences and perceptions of her relationship with her mother prior to the incest, during the incest and after the termination of the incest.
- To explore and determine the dynamics that affect the mother-daughter relationships for the incestously abused daughters.

Subject suitability criteria:

- Adult (18 and over) female survivors of biological father-daughter incest during their childhood and/or adolescence.
- The abuse will have gone on for at least a year in the life of the daughter.
- The incest will not be occurring at present.
- Participants will not presently be under psychiatric care or on mood-altering drugs.
Procedure:
- In-depth interview will be conducted with each participant focusing on her experiences, perceptions, thoughts about her relationships with her mother throughout her life.
- At a mutually agreed upon private location.
- Length and number of sessions will be dependent on participant’s needs for comfort. Researcher does not expect she will require more than 4 hours of total time with each participant.
- All interviews will be audio-taped.

Participation:
- All participation is voluntary.
- Withdrawal from the project or decision not to answer specific questions will not affect therapy.
- After being contacted by therapist, if client is interested in participating in study, she will contact the researcher as soon as possible by telephone.

- All participants will be asked to sign a consent form. A copy of consent form will be given to each participant.

Confidentiality:
- Contents of audio-tapes will be utilized only for the purposes of the present study.
- Data accessible only to researcher and her supervisor, Dr. Judith Daniluk.
- All identifying information will be omitted from transcripts. Participants will be identified by pseudonyms instead of their
names.

**Benefits:**
- Participants may gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of their relationships with their mothers and may be able to determine the impact of the incest on that relationship. As a result, a more enhanced or, at least, a more informed relationship may ensue between the women.
Appendix C
Consent form

Dear Participant:
I am conducting research to explore the relationships between mothers and their daughters who were incestuously abused by their biological fathers. The research is being conducted as a Master’s degree thesis for U.B.C. The focus of the research will be on your relationship with your mother.
Your participation will involve meeting with me to answer questions about your relationship with your mother. I do not anticipate needing any more than 4 hours of your time. If you should need more time to comfortably tell your story, I will make more time to meet with you. If more than one interview is necessary, it will be necessary to hold a second interview within one week. This is so that there will not be a time lapse which will distract from or interfere with the flow of your story. All efforts will be made to find a setting that you will find comfortable, convenient and private.
The interviews will be audio-taped. The audio-taped data will be transcribed onto a disk on my personal computer. Your name and any identifying information will be omitted from the transcriptions. You may choose to use a pseudonym instead of using your own name. The interview data will be accessible only to myself and my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Daniluk. She is a professor in the Department of Counselling Psychology at U.B.C., and can be reached at . The data will not be used for any purpose outside the present research project.
Your participation in my research study is purely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the project or decide not to answer specific questions, your therapy will not be affected in any way. If you agree to participate, you will please sign 2 copies of the attached consent form. You will keep one copy of the consent form and I will keep the other copy. If you have any questions or concerns about this procedure, please feel free to contact me at the number below.
If you agree to participate in my research project, please sign your name below.
Thank you for your time and attention.

I have read this form and consent to participate in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.

Date: _______________  Name: _______________
Phone: _______________  Signature: _______________
I acknowledge receipt of the signed participant consent form.

Researcher’s signature: _______________
Appendix D

Sample of Interview Questions

**Title of Project:** A Phenomenological Exploration of the Mother-Daughter Relationships During and After Father-Daughter Incestuous Abuse of the Daughter.

**Examples of Interview Questions:**

--Please describe how you experienced your relationship with your mother at the time that your father was sexually abusing you.

--Has your relationship with your mother changed since the incest has stopped?

--If so, describe ways in which the relationship has changed.
Appendix E

Sample of Transcribed Interview

Linda

Linda: I was living, we were in (an Atlantic province), and I went to a nearby city, to (name of city). And uh, it was just before school ended in grade 10, so I finished the year pretty well. We just had to finish up things to do. And, and, I got caught in bed with my boyfriend. And the next morning, I just wasn’t there. I left them a note (laughs) but, "I don’t like the way this is going to change things." So, I wasn’t there. And uh, I basically said I’m going to live in the city for the summer and then, I’d go to school again in the fall. And so, when fall came, no, "I’m not going to school there. I’m going to go here."

Researcher: And how was that taken?

L: Uh, it was a very interesting position of power for me to be in because. After I left, the next time my parents saw me, they came to the city and saw me there. And so, I wasn’t on their territory any more. And, in terms of financial responsibilities, they owed me $200.00 at that point.

R: So, it had completely done a turnabout?

L: Yeah. And there was, there was, there must have been a whole time of my taking power. Throughout that, to get to the place where I left and, it had just become very clear to me that in terms of who could take care of me, I was better at it than they were.

R: Do you remember, what is your earliest memories of ties to
your mom? When the abuse started at such a young age?
L: (Long pause) I remember uh, connected with the abuse, it was
(pause) I’d been abused by my brother that night. And, or that
morning, it’s hard to tell.
R: Do you remember at what age. Roughly?
L: Uh (pause) 4. That’s the thing about location.
R: Yeah.
L: Was it 4 or 5? My older brother, who is 13 years older than I
am; the only male child and, has at least a covert incestuous
relationship with my mother.
R: Is that right?
L: Umm. It is as well was the situation, um, of me being brought
to an orgasm and being left alone.
R: So, the same pattern [of abuse by father]. Didn’t change?
L: Yeah. And going into, leaving my bedroom, which is where it
happened and, (pause, about to cry) going into the kitchen and my
brother and my mother were sitting there, at the table, drinking
coffee and talking. And the way that they were looking at one
another?
R: Uh-huh.
L: Was so intense and was sort of hungry? (Long pause) And it
excluded me. They didn’t notice me being there at all. And I felt
uh, the abandonment and the no place to go for comfort. The
person who abused me was there, with the person I would seek
comfort, comfort from and she (pause) wanted him.
R: You could see that?
L: I could see that. Even then it was. And, I don’t know. I definitely didn’t speak. (Long pause) There is a whole time, there is a whole lot of this stuff, a place with no words. And um, and that. There’re times where I go to places that I can’t make words, like, words don’t relate to this.
R: Yes.
L: Uh, uh, so, there’s a whole feeling that she wants him. And a real elevation of maleness as being the desireable quality. And. My father’s name is George, and my name is Georgina Linda. And it’s only very recently that I dropped the Georgina part.
R: Had you used that as your first name?
L: As a small child, I wanted to be called George.
R: Is that right?
L: Oh yeah. Just like dad. A great deal of identification with my father, and with maleness as being empowered and desired and free and valuable and full of possibilities.
R: Is everything about being female undesireable?
L: YES. Yes. Pink and fluffy and, a victim. Dependent, using manipulation in order to achieve whatever you wanted. Not taking your own power at all. Uh, I saw my mother uh, just rage. But to no end. And then, although she’d be raging at maltreatment by my father uh, the real end to it all was to uh, to have him bow down to her. And they did this whole relationship of domination and submission. They’d do it back and forth and, she held a lot of power in that but through manipulation and through uh, uh, uh, anger and degradation.
R: So, she would empower herself but through uh, putting someone else down?
L: Yeah, down.