Men who molest their sexually immature daughters: Is a special explanation required?

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Men Who Molest Their Sexually Immature Daughters: Is a Special Explanation Required?

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Child molesters who target their own children have been described as low risk and not pedophilic. Men who had molested a daughter or stepdaughter ($n = 82$) were compared to 102 molesters whose only female victims were extrafamilial. Men who offended against their own daughters had less deviant sexual age preferences and were less likely to commit new violent and sexual offenses. However, the father–daughter molesters exhibited an average absolute phallometric preference for prepubertal children and had a violent recidivism rate of 22% in a follow-up of less than 5 years. Actuarial risk assessment instruments (the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide and the Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide; V. L. Quinsey, G. T. Harris, M. E. Rice, and C. A. Cormier, 1998) worked as well for intrafamilial child molesters as for other sex offenders.

The literature on incestuous sex offenders has confirmed that, like other apprehended sex offenders in general, these offenders are almost always men (Gibbens, Soothill, & Way, 1978). The largest group by far consists of men who molest their daughters or stepdaughters (Gibbens et al., 1978). Because sexually assaulting one's own children seems so clearly against one's own interests, such behavior is usually regarded as evidence of a disorder or abnormality (Shepher, 1983). Why would men initiate sexual contact with their own genetic daughters? Even more difficult to explain is why fathers would engage in such conduct with their sexually immature daughters. Below, we outline four possible explanations or partial explanations for such behavior.

One possible explanation is pedophilia, preference for sexually immature children. Considerable research has demonstrated (Quinsey, 1986; Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 1998; Quinsey & Lalumière, 1996) that men who have sex with children exhibit clear, reliable differences in their psychosexual adjustment compared to men who confine their sexual attentions to adults. Compared to other men, those who have sex with children exhibit much more sexual interest in children when assessed psychophysiologically. That is, laboratory measures of sexual arousal consistently reveal child molesters' large relative preference for sexual activity with children (Chaplin, Rice, & Harris, 1995; Harris & Rice, 1996; Harris, Rice, Quinsey, & Chaplin, 1996; Harris, Rice, Quinsey, Chaplin, & Earls, 1992; Quinsey & Lalumière, 1996).

It has been commonly considered among professionals that intrafamilial child molesters are usually not paraphilic, but rather

offend for other reasons (Groth, 1982; Hoorwitz, 1983; Julian, Mohr, & Lapp, 1980; Quinsey, 1986). The empirical literature on men who sexually abuse children in their own families supports the view that exclusively intrafamilial offenders generally have sexual preferences that, although possibly different from those of nonoffenders, are less deviant than those of men who molest extrafamilial children (Frenzel & Lang, 1989; Freund, Watson, & Dickey, 1991; Lang, Black, Frenzel, & Checkley, 1988; Marshall, Barbaree, & Christophe, 1986; Quinsey, Chaplin, & Carrigan, 1979; Seto, Lalumière, & Kuban, 1999). On the other hand, many researchers have reported no sexual preference differences between intrafamilial and other child molesters (Abel, Becker, Murphy, & Flanagan, 1981; Barsetti, Earls, Lalumière, & Belanger, 1998; Chaplin et al., 1995; Hunter, Goodwin, & Becker, 1994; Langevin & Watson, 1991; Malcolm, Andrews, & Quinsey, 1993; Murphy, Haynes, Stalgaitis, & Flanagan, 1986). The biological fitness cost of a sexual preference for reproductively nonviable targets (such as children) is so obviously high that pedophilia itself demands an explanation (e.g., Lalumière, Harris, Quinsey, & Rice, 1998) but, given the existence of pedophilia, perhaps father–daughter incest can be explained as only one manifestation of it.

Another possible explanation, derived from a selectionist perspective, is the failure of an incest avoidance mechanism. Inclusive fitness theory (Daly & Wilson, 1988) implies the existence of mechanisms to inhibit inbreeding because inbreeding increases the expression of deleterious recessive genes. That is, individuals who do not avoid sexual intercourse with their close relatives have descendants who are less reproductively successful (Thornhill, 1991; Van den Berghe, 1983). The members of an incestuous pair usually do not experience equal fitness costs (Haig, 1999), however. For conditions that characterized most of human ancestry, females would have incurred greater costs for incestuous behavior than males (Haig, 1999). A proximal explanation for the avoidance of inbreeding has become known as the *Westermarck hypothesis*, according to which persons raised together from early childhood have an aversion to sexual intercourse with one another (Shepher, 1983; Williams & Finkelhor, 1995). Although originally suggested more than a century ago to explain incest avoidance among sib-

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lings, there is some suggestion that early caretaking of a young daughter also inhibits paternal incest (Williams & Finkelhor, 1995). As a test of this hypothesis, Seto et al. (1999) compared the phallometric deviance scores of genetic fathers and stepfathers. They hypothesized that, in order to overcome the aversion to sexual acts with their own genetic children, genetic fathers (who had presumably spent more time with their daughters during early childhood than stepfathers) would exhibit stronger phallometric preferences for children than stepfather offenders. They found, however, that genetic fathers had sexual preferences that were no more deviant than those of stepfathers.

A third possible explanatory construct is mate deprivation, the idea that men who are deprived of sex with partners of their preferred age–gender category target individuals from the next most preferred available category. Intrafamilial child molesters frequently report disturbed family relationships in which the daughter becomes a surrogate sexual partner. Until recently at least, deprivation has been the most commonly accepted explanation for father–daughter incest (Quinsey, 1977, 1986), and this explanation fits with the finding that intrafamilial child molesters have often been found to have less deviant sexual preferences than other child molesters. This suggestion predicts that incestuous fathers are men who have been relatively deprived of sexual opportunities with preferred partners. Additional explanations, however, such as social inadequacy, may be needed to explain why such men would incur the reproductive costs associated with sexual contact with sexually immature first-degree relatives, rather than, say, seeking sexual contact in the form of other extrapair copulations. Somewhat related to mate deprivation is simple opportunism. The idea here is that normal men exhibit some sexual interest in sexually immature girls (a finding frequently reported; e.g., Hall, Hirschman, & Oliver, 1995; Harris et al., 1996; Quinsey, Steinman, Bergersen, & Holmes, 1975) and that, sexual deprivation notwithstanding, occasionally men engage in sexual activity with a nonpreferred person if such a person is available, is at least somewhat sexually attractive, and is unlikely to resist. Consistent with this suggestion is the observation that sons are extremely unlikely to be molested by fathers even though extrafamilial child molesters often target boys. Explaining father–daughter child molestation by pure opportunism clearly implies that such offenders exhibit neither specific incest avoidance nor much general paternal solicitude.

A fourth possible explanatory construct is psychopathy. There have been several recent studies on measures of psychopathy in sex offender populations (Porter et al., 2000; Quinsey, Rice, & Harris, 1995). By definition, psychopaths are callous, selfish, manipulative, irresponsible, impulsive, sexually promiscuous, and generally antisocial (Hare, 1991; Hart & Hare, 1997). Psychopaths appear to be a qualitatively distinct group of especially dangerous offenders. Among sex offenders in general, those who are also psychopaths represent much greater risk of recidivism (Gretton, McBride, Hare, O'Shaughnessy, & Kumka, 2001; Rice & Harris, 1997; Rice, Harris, & Quinsey, 1990). Sex offenders appear to score higher on measures of psychopathy compared to violent offenders in general (Quinsey et al., 1998). Deviant sexual interests appear to be correlated with measures of psychopathy (Serin, Malcolm, Khanna, & Barbaree, 1994). What role does psychopathy play in an explanation of father–daughter child molestation?

Data that directly address this question are scarce. The available empirical literature on father–daughter child molesters leads to equivocal expectations. On the one hand, psychopaths have long been observed to be negligent and abusive parents (Cleckley, 1941; Hare & Schalling, 1978). Perhaps, in addition, psychopathic fathers might be especially likely to act callously and irresponsibly against the interests of their own daughters by, among other things, sexually assaulting them. On the other hand, child molesters whose only victims are their own daughters have consistently exhibited lower rates of sexual or violent recidivism than other child molesters (Firestone et al., 1999; Hanson & Bussière, 1998), arguing against the suggestion that psychopathy could be an explanation for exclusive father–daughter child molestation. However, there is no theoretical or empirical reason to expect psychopathic child molesters to confine their sexual offenses to their own daughters. Perhaps child molesters who offend against their own daughters plus other children are especially likely to be psychopathic.

Perhaps all four ideas are required for a complete explanation. That is, a man is likely to sexually assault his sexually immature daughter (plus other children) if he has pedophilia, if he spent little time with her during her early childhood, if she is available, and if he is psychopathic. Perhaps availability and pedophilia alone account for a man sexually assaulting his own immature daughter and no one else.

Part of the reason for the lack of consistent findings about father–daughter child molesters may have to do with definitions. In law, the definition of incest is usually confined to sexual intercourse between blood relatives (Bluglass, 1979). In the current Criminal Code of Canada (Greenspan & Rosenberg, 2000), for example, only sexual intercourse between blood relatives of first and second degree counts as incest (although adopted children are also included). In most of the clinical and empirical literature, however, incest has, for the most part, referred to any "hands-on" sexual behavior between a child and a family member, whether that family member is genetically related or not (e.g., Porter et al., 2000). Of all the studies cited above, only the Langevin and Watson (1991) and Seto et al. (1999) studies have examined phallometric preferences as a function of genetic relatedness. Yet even these two studies yielded conflicting results.

On the basis of the explanatory hypotheses discussed earlier, we compared men who had sexually molested their own genetic daughters with men who had sexually offended against nongenetic (step or adopted) daughters. We also included as a separate group men who sexually offended against their daughters in addition to other children. Finally, we included a comparison group of child molesters who had offended against unrelated children only. As far as we are aware, this is the first empirical examination of father–daughter child molesters to include such carefully defined comparison groups and to include measures of both psychopathy and phallometric sexual deviance.

Intrafamilial child molesters have generally been considered to be a separate class of child molesters who have low priority for specialized sex offender treatment and to be at low risk for recidivism (Quinsey, 1977, 1986). Although the recidivism rates of intrafamilial child molesters have been found to be lower than those of heterosexual extrafamilial offenders (Hanson & Bussière, 1998), there are other differences between these two groups that might account for the difference in risk aside from intrafamilial versus extrafamilial status per se. For example, fathers who molest their daughters, almost by definition, have to be married or living common law, and marital status has universally been found to be a strong predictor of recidivism, no matter how defined (e.g.,

Bonta, Law, & Hanson, 1998; Hanson & Bussière, 1998). Similarly, intrafamilial offenders are generally older and have fewer previous sexual and other criminal convictions or victims than other child molesters (Quinsey, 1986). These factors have also been found to be related to lower risk of recidivism (Bonta et al., 1998; Hanson & Bussière, 1998).

Recently, there has been much progress in the assessment of risk among sex offenders (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1998; Rice & Harris, 1997). Instruments that have shown predictive validity are the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG) and the Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide (SORAG; see Quinsey et al., 1998). The VRAG and SORAG have been shown to exhibit large effect sizes in the prediction of violent and sexual recidivism among sex offenders (Barbaree, Seto, Langton, & Peacock, 2001; Hanson & Harris, 2000; Rice & Harris, 1997) and violent offenders in general (Glover, Nicholson, Hemmati, Bernfeld, & Quinsey, in press; Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1993; Rice & Harris, 1995). To date, there have been no evaluations of how well these actuarial instruments, or any other prediction instruments, work for father–daughter child molesters specifically. A finding that actuarial risk prediction instruments work as well for intrafamilial child molesters as for other sex offenders would be consistent with the idea that intrafamilial offenders are not fundamentally different from other men who molest children, even though they might be lower risk. If the subsequent violent and sexual offenses of intrafamilial child molesters are predicted by the same variables combined in the same way and with the same level of accuracy as for extrafamilial child molesters, it suggests that the sexual offending in both groups may be similarly caused.[1]

In the present study, we examined the characteristics of child molesters who had offended against their genetic daughters, stepdaughters, or unrelated girls. We compared the groups on phallometric age and activity preferences and other characteristics that have been related to risk of violent and sexual recidivism, especially psychopathy. We also compared violent and sexual recidivism rates after a mean follow-up time of 53.6 months. Among the intrafamilial offenders, we also compared those who had offended only within the family (to the best of our knowledge) with those who had offended both inside and outside the family, and we examined the role of genetic versus nongenetic relatedness. Finally, we examined how well the VRAG and the SORAG predicted violent and sexual recidivism among father–daughter child molesters, as well as all participants together.

Method

Participants

The 184 men who participated in this study had had physical sexual contact with a girl under the age of 15 (at the time of the first sexual contact) while they were at least 5 years older than the victim, and they had been referred to our Sexual Behaviour Laboratory for phallometric testing between January 1977 and December 1994. The men in the father–daughter group (*n* = 82) had at least one victim who was a genetic daughter, a legally adopted daughter, or a stepdaughter (the genetic daughter of the wife). Of these, there were 28 intrafamilial offenders whose victims were genetic daughters, and 17 intrafamilial child molesters whose victims were adopted or stepdaughters. In addition, there were 37 "mixed" child molesters who had offended against both intrafamilial and extrafamilial girls (and possibly other victims).[2] Almost half (45%) of the 82 father–daughter offenders were outpatients who had been referred from

probation and parole services or other sources (physicians, Children's Aid, defense attorneys) from the local community; 37% were outpatients referred from correctional institutions, and 18% were inpatients referred from the secure psychiatric wards of our facility where they had been sent for pretrial psychiatric assessment.

The comparison sample were 102 extrafamilial child molesters referred to our laboratory (from a larger sample; Harris et al., 2001) who had at least one female victim but whose victims did not include a genetic daughter, adopted daughter, stepdaughter, or daughter of a cohabiting girlfriend. The pattern of referral sources was essentially the same as that for the incest offenders (53% referred from the courts or correctional system, 32% referred from community-based probation or clinical services, and 16% from the local psychiatric facility). For both samples, psychiatric medications and psychotic diagnoses were rare (< 10%). In all cases, the offenders had been charged or convicted of the offenses, admitted them, or had overwhelming evidence on file that they were culpable. None had had a previous phallometric assessment in our laboratory, and none had been included in any of our previously published research.

Measures

The phallometric assessment (including stimuli and scoring) procedure and data establishing their discriminative validity have been described in detail elsewhere (Chaplin et al., 1995; Harris et al., 1996; Harris et al., 1992). Briefly, child molesters received visual stimuli to assess age and gender preference and audio stimuli to assess interest in coercive sexual activities with children. The visual stimuli used in the first assessment (Harris et al., 1996) were nude photographs of persons varying in age and sex with two exemplars for each age–gender category. The age categories were as follows: less than 5 years old, between 5 and 8 years old, between 9 and 11 years old, pubescent (the person was in the early to middle stages of puberty), and adult (more than 18 years old). The aural stimuli were recorded stories (Chaplin et al., 1995; Quinsey & Chaplin, 1988a) describing sexually neutral activities, consenting heterosexual acts between adults, sexual assaults by a man against a male or female child (in which the child is described as a passive recipient, subdued with moderate force, or subdued with much brutality), and a nonsexual beating of a child by a man. For all assessments, stimuli were presented in random order, and timing and recording were controlled electronically. In all cases, the penile response was recorded with a Parks 270 plethysmograph and a mercury-in-silastic strain gauge around the shaft of the offender's penis. Baseline was measured during the first 2 s of each trial and recording continued for 30 s after stimulus offset. Procedures to inhibit the ability of assessees to dissimulate their responses were also used during testing (Harris, Rice, Chaplin, & Quinsey, 1999; Quinsey & Chaplin, 1988b). The scoring of sexual preferences is described below.

Other study variables were coded from very comprehensive hospital records, which have formed a reliable basis for several previous studies (e.g., Lalumière et al., 1998; Rice, Quinsey, & Harris, 1991). A complete list of the study variables for the incest offenders is shown in Table 1. Scoring for most of the variables in the table is self-explanatory except for the following. *Elementary maladjustment* referred to a rating on a 4-point (*no problems* to *severe problems*) scale about attendance and discipline problems during the first eight grades of school. The criminal history score

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[1] For example, equivalent correlations between IQ and vocational performance in different racial groups are very likely to be taken as evidence that the same aspects of intelligence (whatever they might be) make a causal contribution to job success in all groups. We concede that this is not a logical necessity, however.

[2] In the present sample, there were no cases where there was documented uncertainty about the paternity of putatively genetic daughters. Men whose most closely related victims were daughters of their girlfriends (even if they cohabited) were not considered.

Table 1

Characteristics of Intrafamilial Father–Daughter Child Molesters (Genetic and Stepfather), Those Who Offended Against Daughters Plus Other Children (Mixed), and Those Whose Victims Were All Extrafamilial

Characteristic	Genetic	Step	Mixed	Extrafamilial
N	28	17	37	102
Age (years)	41 (9.1) ± 4	36 (7.1) ± 5	42 (10.1) ± 4	31 (15.4) ± 3
Childhood context				
Maternal separation (%)[a]	11 ± 10	29 ± 24	27 ± 15	44 ± 10
Paternal separation (%)[a]	14 ± 10	41 ± 25	30 ± 15	56 ± 10
Child sexual abuse (%)	43 ± 20	35 ± 26	30 ± 15	21 ± 9
Incest in family (%)	29 ± 18	12 ± 17	10 ± 10	Unknown
Grades K–8 maladjustment	2.0 (1.4) ± 2.7	2.3 (1.2) ± 2.8	2.4 (1.3) ± 0.9	2.5 (1.3) ± 0.4
Arrested under age 16 (%)	0 ± 0	0 ± 0	11 ± 10	28 ± 19
Education (years)	10.1 (2.3) ± 0.9	9.6 (3.4) ± 1.3	9.3 (2.5) ± 0.8	9.3 (2.9) ± 0.6
Adult adjustment				
Unemployed (%)	0 ± 0	6 ± 12	3 ± 5	68 ± 10
Ever married (%)	71 ± 18	71 ± 24	73 ± 15	34 ± 10
Drug/alcohol problem (%)	32 ± 18	29 ± 25	35 ± 15	34 ± 10
Criminal history score	5.1 (11) ± 6	2.8 (5.9) ± 3	12.5 (16) ± 6	28 (42) ± 10
Prior sex offenses	0 ± 0	0 ± 0	.67 (1.0) ± 4	1.2 (2.2) ± 6
Social isolate (%)	7 ± 10	12 ± 17	5 ± 8	60 ± 10
Sexual dissatisfaction (%)	21 ± 15	12 ± 17	19 ± 13	47 ± 10
Offense characteristics[b]				
Drugs–alcohol involved (%)	39 ± 20	35 ± 24	58 ± 16	38 ± 10
No. of victims	1.3 (.6) ± 0.2	1.5 (.7) ± 0.4	2.0 (1.5) ± 0.5	2.3 (3.0) ± 0.6
Victim age (years)	8.6 (4.3) ± 1.8	8.7 (3.9) ± 2.2	8.6 (4.0) ± 1.4	9.7 (4.3) ± 1.1
Victim injury score	1.0 (0) ± 0	2.0 (0) ± 0	2.5 (2.0)	2.1 (1.7) ± 0.4
Lived with victim(s) (%)	68 ± 18	59 ± 25	64 ± 14	0 ± 0
Any male victim (%)	4 ± 9	2 ± 16	18 ± 13	12 ± 8
Oral–genital contact (%)	61 ± 19	12 ± 17	22 ± 13	28 ± 9
Offender fondled victim (%)	100 ± 0	59 ± 25	78 ± 13	60 ± 10
Victim fondled offender (%)	25 ± 18	18 ± 18	16 ± 13	13 ± 8
Penile penetration (%)	36 ± 18	29 ± 23	44 ± 14	47 ± 10
Assessment and outcome				
Deviance differential	.49 (1.5) ± 0.60	.34 (1.3) ± .69	1.36 (1.9) ± 0.63	.84 (1.1) ± 0.2
PCL–R score	10.2 (7.7) ± 5.1	17.7 (12) ± 5.9	20 (9.0) ± 5.1	20.6 (8.8) ± 2.1
VRAG score	−3.46 (14.3) ± 5.1	−1.35 (6.0) ± 3.1	.59 (7.2) ± 2.3	5.5 (12) ± 2.4
SORAG score	−3.32 (5.0) ± 1.9	−.29 (4.8) ± 3.1	1.6 (7.7) ± 1.5	6.9 (14) ± 2.8
Violent recidivism (%)	10	14	30	42
Sexual recidivism (%)	10	0	10	26

Note. Continuous variables' means are accompanied by standard deviations (in parentheses). For dichotomous variables (indicated by %), table entries are percentages. All results are also followed by 95% confidence intervals.

[a] Before age 16. [b] Refers to the offenses that led to the referral to our Sexual Behaviour Laboratory. One offender in the genetic group also offended against a genetic son. Two offenders in the step group also offended against boys from their own families. PCL–R = Psychopathy Checklist—Revised; VRAG = Violence Risk Appraisal Guide; SORAG = Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide.

was based on the Cormier–Lang criminal history scoring system (Quinsey et al., 1998) that yielded a total score for all arrests for violent and nonviolent criminal offenses prior to the referral offense.[3] The victim injury score was rated on a 7-point scale (*no injury* to *death plus mutilation*) for the most seriously injured victim. The score for the Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL–R; Hare, 1991; total score = 40) was based entirely on documentary information and clinical records available at the time of the first referral offense assessment, and the scoring was done by trained research assistants blind as to the study hypotheses.

We also coded any additional variables necessary to score our previously reported actuarial instruments (Quinsey et al., 1998) for the assessment of

risk of violent (including sexual) recidivism among serious offenders (VRAG) and among sex offenders specifically (SORAG). Among these additional variables were the following: whether the offender met the criteria of the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) for schizophrenia or for any personality disorder, as well as the age and sex of victims of current and prior sex offenses. Offenders were considered to be

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[3] Complete scoring information can be obtained by writing to the authors.

"at risk" when they were released to the community or to such open settings as halfway houses or open psychiatric wards. Outpatients and those offenders referred from community agencies were considered to be at risk from the date of the assessment. An offender was declared to have recidivated violently if he was recorded as having been subsequently arrested for any offense against a person (homicide, attempted homicide, wounding, assault causing bodily harm, assault, sexual assault, kidnapping, forcible confinement, or armed robbery). Violent recidivism was declared to be sexual recidivism if there was any documented information indicating a sexual component to the offense. To code recidivism, we used data from the Finger Print Service national database of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Treatment of the Sexual Preference Data

Because the use of standard scores has been shown to enhance discriminative validity (Earls, Quinsey, & Castonguay, 1987; Harris et al., 1992), penile responses for each offender and for each stimulus set were standardized to a mean of 10 and a standard deviation of 1. The responses were averaged for each stimulus category (e.g., stories of consenting sex with female adults, pictures of prepubertal girls) within stimulus sets. Two average responses were coded for this study: The first was the largest average response to any deviant category from any stimulus set (e.g., scenarios describing a sexual assault against a passive child; pictures of pubescent girls); the second was the largest average response to any nondeviant category from any stimulus set (e.g., scenarios describing mutually consenting sex with a female adult; pictures of adult women). A deviance differential was calculated by subtracting the largest average response to a nondeviant category from the largest average response to a deviant category. A positive score thus reflected an absolute preference for deviant sexual targets or activities, and the magnitude of the differential reflected the difference in standard deviation units. Consistent with procedures established in our earlier research cited above, no offenders were excluded because of low responding (Harris et al., 1992).

Psychometric Properties of Study Variables

Readers unfamiliar with the types of data collected in the present study might wonder about the psychometric properties of the study variables. First, we note that the data are not standard psychological paper-and-pencil or interview-based test results. The phallometric laboratory data, as described above, have no self-report component. All other variables were coded from clinical files, and most of the variables shown in Table 1 are based, not on offenders' reports, but on official criminal justice records (e.g., arrested under age 16, education, criminal history score, number of prior offenses, lived with victim, and so on). A few variables (e.g., childhood sexual abuse, incest in family of origin) were partly based on self-report inasmuch as such things might have been the subject of clinical interviews recorded in the files. In most cases, however, corroborating information from school records, juvenile records, or family questionnaires would also have been used.

The reliability with which such variables are coded by experienced and well-trained raters from clinical records has been established in many studies (Harris, Hilton, & Rice, 1993; Rice & Harris, 1990; Rice, Harris, & Cormier, 1992; Rice, Harris, Lang, & Bell, 1990; Rice, Quinsey, & Houghton, 1990). Interrater reliability for the present study was assessed by randomly selecting 10 sex offenders for independent coding and computing Pearson correlation coefficients between raters. The mean correlation was .93, and no correlation was less than .75. Finally, we note that the predictive and discriminative validities of almost all of the individual variables reported in the present study have been established in previous research with extrafamilial child molesters (Quinsey et al., 1995; Rice et

al., 1991) and are comparable to the average predictive validities reported meta-analytically (Hanson & Bussière, 1998).

Reliabilities for the VRAG and SORAG scores were .96 and .98 (Pearson correlations), respectively. Means, standard errors, and normative data for the VRAG and SORAG instruments are reported in Quinsey et al. (1998). To evaluate the predictive accuracy of the VRAG and SORAG, we use statistics derived from Relative Operating Characteristics (ROCs). ROCs permit the evaluation of the sensitivity-specificity (i.e., true positive vs. false positive) tradeoff at all possible cutoff scores independent of base rate variation and have thus been recommended as the preferred method for evaluating predictive accuracy (Mossman, 1994; Rice & Harris, 1995; Swets, Dawes, & Monahan, 2000). The area subtended by the ROC is equivalent, in this context, to the probability that a randomly selected recidivist has a higher score on the prediction instrument than a randomly chosen nonrecidivist.

Interrater reliability was not assessed for the phallometric deviance score in this study, but the scores obtained by the phallometrician in the present study have been repeatedly shown to yield high discriminant and predictive validities in previous studies (Chaplin et al., 1995; Harris et al., 1996; Harris et al., 1992; Quinsey & Chaplin, 1988a, 1988b).

Results

The background variables, offense characteristics, and assessment and outcome results for four groups of child molesters are shown in Table 1: those intrafamilial child molesters who victimized their genetic daughters only; those who offended against stepdaughters or adopted daughters, those father–daughter offenders who also had extrafamilial victims (labeled *mixed* in Table 1), and those child molesters who had only extrafamilial victims. Also shown are the 95% confidence intervals for each result.

In general, the results showed few differences between the two groups of intrafamilial offenders, but both groups differed on most variables from the extrafamilial offenders. Most important for the present study, when compared with the extrafamilial offenders, the intrafamilial offenders were less sexually deviant, had lower scores on the PCL–R, were less likely to have had sexual intercourse with their victims, inflicted less victim injury, had lower VRAG and SORAG scores, and had lower rates of violent and sexual recidivism. The few differences between the genetic and stepfathers suggested that the genetic fathers were of lower risk: for example, they were older, inflicted less victim injury, and had lower scores on the PCL–R. The mixed offenders generally showed scores intermediate between those of the intrafamilial and extrafamilial offenders, although, interestingly, they were more sexually deviant.

Phallometric Test Results

Table 1 lists the phallometric test results, which are consistent with many other studies. Father–daughter child molesters (as long as they did not have extrafamilial victims) exhibited less deviant preferences than did other child molesters. On the other hand, and also consistent with several other studies, the father–daughter child molesters were, on average, sexually deviant. They yielded a positive (i.e., greater than zero) mean deviance differential indicating an overall preference for stimuli depicting children (mean

for intrafamilial offenders = .43 (SD = 1.46, 95% CI = ±.44).[4] It is interesting that phallometric deviance scores were correlated with the severity of victims' (n = 179) injuries (r = .54, p < .001), a relationship previously observed among rapists (Quinsey & Chaplin, 1982).

Table 2 shows the comparison of men from the two intrafamilial groups (n = 34) and men from the extrafamilial group (n = 32) who had had, as far as could be determined, only a single victim. (Offenders from the mixed group were, therefore, not included.) Although there were many fewer differences between the intrafamilial and extrafamilial groups than in Table 1, the differences suggested that the intrafamilial father–daughter child molesters were older, had less serious and disturbed backgrounds, had less criminal and antisocial conduct as adults, and had exhibited better social adjustment. Again, on average, both groups exhibited absolute sexual preferences for child stimuli. In addition, intrafamilial

Table 2

Father–Daughter Child Molesters Compared Where Each Had Only One Known Victim

Characteristic	Intrafamilial	Extrafamilial
Age (years)	38 (9.5) ± 4	29 (17) ± 7
Childhood context		
Maternal separation (%)	13 ± 13	31 ± 18
Paternal separation (%)	23 ± 16	40 ± 18
Childhood sexual abuse (%)	33 ± 18	14 ± 13
Incest in family (%)	20 ± 15	Unknown
Education (years)	10.1 (2.3) ± 0.8	10.1 (2.9) ± 1.3
Elementary school maladjustment	2.0 (1.1) ± 0.4	1.9 (1.2) ± 0.7
Arrested under age 16 (%)	0 ± 0	17 ± 14
Adult adjustment		
Unemployed (%)	0 ± 0	60 ± 18
Ever married (%)	73 ± 17	31 ± 18
Drug/alcohol problem (%)	27 ± 16	52 ± 19
Criminal history score	5.8 (11) ± 5.3	3.2 (5.9) ± 2.5
Social isolate (%)	13 ± 13	48 ± 19
Sexual dissatisfaction (%)	23 ± 16	36 ± 18
Offense characteristics		
Drugs–alcohol involved (%)	30 ± 17	46 ± 19
Victim age (years)	8.8 (4.3) ± 1.7	9.8 (4.8) ± 2.1
Victim injury	1.1 (.3) ± 0.20	1.6 (1.3) ± 0.57
Lived with victim (%)	67 ± 18	0 ± 0
Oral–genital contact (%)	25 ± 16	25 ± 16
Offender fondled victim (%)	96 ± 10	75 ± 17
Victim fondled offender (%)	50 ± 18	10 ± 10
Penile penetration (%)	35 ± 18	36 ± 18
Assessment and outcome		
Deviance differential	.37 (1.6) ± 0.60	.51 (1.2) ± 0.93
Violence Risk Appraisal Guide	−2.2 (5.4) ± 2.1	.19 (9.1) ± 4.4
Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide	−2.2 (5.4) ± 2.0	2.4 (8.7) ± 4.6
Violent recidivism (%)	11 ± 9	33 ± 20
Sexual recidivism (%)	0 ± 0	25 ± 20

Note. Continuous variables' means are accompanied by standard deviations (in parentheses). For dichotomous variables (indicated by % symbol), table entries are percentages. All results are also followed by 95% confidence intervals. Too many offenders were missing scores on the Psychopathy Checklist—Revised for it to be included in this table.

child molesters showed a significantly better postrelease outcome than extrafamilial offenders. It is noteworthy, however, that the two groups had essentially identical mean phallometric deviance differentials.

Predicting Recidivism

As described in the introduction, our subsidiary goal in this study was to evaluate the accuracy of actuarial tools for the prediction of violent recidivism among intrafamilial child molesters. Considering only the 37 father–daughter child molesters (intrafamilial and mixed) whose recidivism was known,[5] the base rate of violent recidivism was 22%; the mean SORAG score for the violent recidivists was 5.5 compared with –1.83 for the nonrecidivists, corresponding to an ROC area (see Rice & Harris, 1995) of .79 (SE = .08, 95% CI = ±.16). For all offenders who were known to have had an opportunity to recidivate (n = 114, M = 53.6 months, SD = 51.8), the base rate of violent recidivism was 35%. The mean SORAG score of the violent recidivists was 5.13 compared to –1.90 for the nonrecidivists, which corresponded to an ROC area of .78 (SE = .04, 95% CI = ±.13).[6]

The performance of the VRAG was similar: Means were 7.83 versus .54, respectively, ROC area = .78 (SE = .04, 95% CI = ±.09) for all offenders; and 5.12 versus –1.14, ROC area = .78 (SE = .08, 95% CI = ±.16) for the father–daughter child molesters. Predicting specifically sexual recidivism among the father–daughter offenders (base rate = .08) yielded ROC areas of .67 and .65 for the VRAG and SORAG, respectively. However, when all offenders were considered together, sexual recidivism (base rate = .20) was much better predicted: ROC areas = .81 (SE = .05, 95% CI = ±.09 for both the VRAG and SORAG).[7]

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[4] This compares, for example, to a mean deviance differential observed among non-sex offenders of –.26 (SD = .13, 95% CI = ±.07; Chaplin et al., 1995). Overall, all the child molester groups in the present study were sexually deviant (i.e., differed significantly from nonoffenders).

[5] Some father–daughter child molesters were still incarcerated at the time we conducted our follow-up. Similarly, we could obtain recidivism data for 77 of the original 102 extrafamilial offenders.

[6] Overall, the mean of the SORAG was 1.81 (SD = 7.70), and the mean of the VRAG was 2.61 (SD = 7.69). ROC areas are the preferred index of accuracy because empirical studies differ greatly in base rates (proportion of offenders recorded as recidivists), usually as a result of variations in opportunity to reoffend. For example, the offenders in our study had a fairly low base rate and a short follow-up compared with our other research on the recidivism of sex offenders (Rice & Harris, 1997) where there was a .58 base rate over a 10-year follow-up. Such differences preclude comparisons of the accuracy of VRAG and SORAG that depend on the overall base rate (or base rates for ranges of VRAG and SORAG scores). ROC statistics are the indices of choice for present purposes because they have been shown to be insensitive to base rates (Mossman, 1994; Rice & Harris, 1995).

[7] Some investigators adopt a minimum follow-up period (e.g., Epperson, 1999). Such a practice generally has the effect of increasing predictive accuracy (Harris et al., 2001). For example, in the present data, adopting a minimum follow-up of 2 years increased the accuracy of the SORAG's prediction of violent recidivism among the father–daughter child molesters (n = 34) to an ROC area of .82 (SE = .08, 95% CI = ±.16) and the VRAG's to .81 (SE = .08, 95% CI = ±.16). Similarly, for all offenders (n = 96), the ROC areas increased to .83 (SE = .04, 95% CI = ±.08) and .82 (SE = .05, 95% CI = ±.09) for SORAG and VRAG, respectively.

Of perhaps even more interest for present purposes, however, was the unique contribution of incest to the prediction of violent recidivism. Whether the offender was a father–daughter child molester was a significant predictor of violent recidivism, $r = -.20$, $p < .05$, and that effect was due entirely to the effect of the offenders against only their own daughters (intrafamilial or not), $r = -.21$, $p < .05$. Because many of the variables that discriminated father–daughter from extrafamilial child molesters were well established static predictors of recidivism, our primary question was whether intrafamilial as a predictor added anything to the prediction of recidivism after the actuarial SORAG was included. For violent recidivism, the SORAG yielded a correlation of .43, $p < .001$, but the addition of the variable *intrafamilial or not* did not significantly improve on that (multiple $R = .44$, $\beta = -.10$, $p = .27$). Incidentally, the same results were obtained when the outcome was sexual recidivism alone (SORAG $r = .42$, $p < .001$) and after the addition of the intrafamilial variable (multiple $R = .42$, $\beta = -.05$, $p = .62$). Equivalent results were obtained when VRAG scores were entered first. After consideration of the best available actuarially based static predictors of recidivism, then, knowledge of a child molester's history of intrafamilial child molesting added nothing to the assessment of risk.[8]

Discussion

Explaining Father–Daughter Child Molesting

What are the implications of the present results for the four possible explanations of father–daughter child molesting? The results provide some support for three of the four possible explanations. The pedophilia explanation received the most support. The present data support the findings of others who have stressed the importance of sexual deviance (Abel et al., 1981; Frude, 1982; Menard & Johnson, 1992; Stermac & Hucker, 1988). Although not as sexually deviant as extrafamilial offenders, the intrafamilial offenders were clearly sexually deviant as a group. Like other child molesters, father–daughter child molesters in this study exhibited deviant sexual preferences inasmuch as all groups had positive mean deviance differentials. Such a preference is extremely rare among men without a history of child molestation (Quinsey & Lalumière, 1996), and nonmolesters showed strong preferences for the adult stimuli in the studies establishing the validity of the phallometric tests used in the present study (Chaplin et al., 1995; Harris et al., 1996; Quinsey & Chaplin, 1988a). Surprisingly, a mean preference for sex with children was evident even for those father–daughter child molesters who had, so far as we could tell, only ever had one victim. Indeed, when compared to extrafamilial child molesters who also had only one victim, the father–daughter child molesters were equivalent in sexual deviance scores. Although others have reported that intrafamilial offenders were more sexually deviant than nonoffenders, this is the first study we know that reports that father–daughter child molesters have exhibited an overall preference for children. We suspect that the present results were partly due to the use of methods known to enhance the discriminative validity of phallometric procedures (Harris et al., 1992).

The finding of deviant sexual preferences among the child molesters in this study does not prove that the deviant preferences caused the child molesting. Perhaps the molesting caused the

deviant preferences. However, we believe such an interpretation is extremely unlikely. For one thing, it is clear that nonoffenders are sexually aroused by postpubertal females before their first heterosexual experience. Second, it has proven to be extremely difficult to get men's phallometrically measured sexual preferences to change (Lalumière & Quinsey, 1998). It seems unlikely that such changes occur in the natural world as a result of experience. Third, despite our contact with hundreds of child molesters, we cannot recall a single case in which an offender who acknowledged his pedophilic preferences said he had normal sexual interests before his first experience with children. Fourth, phallometric test results predict subsequent sexual offending behavior (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Rice, Quinsey, & Harris, 1991).

The opportunism explanation received some support inasmuch as the men who offended against their own daughters only, whether they were genetically related or not (the intrafamilial group), showed preferences that, although on average clearly deviant, were significantly less deviant than those of men who had sexually offended against children outside the family, whether or not they had also offended against a daughter (extrafamilial and mixed groups).

The results provided some illumination of the role of psychopathy in explaining father–daughter child molesting. On average, the psychopathy scores of the men who had offended only against their genetic daughters were fairly low, and none scored above the conventional cutoff of 30 on the PCL–R (Hare, 1991). In addition, both groups of intrafamilial offenders scored significantly lower than extrafamilial offenders. Intrafamilial offenders caused minimal physical injury to their victims, perhaps exhibiting evidence of some degree of paternal solicitude, a characteristic not consistent with psychopathy. However, the mixed offenders scored no lower in psychopathy and were no less likely to physically injure their victims than the extrafamilial offenders. Stepfathers scored significantly higher than the genetic fathers but significantly lower than the extrafamilial offenders. All of the three latter groups obtained moderate PCL–R scores and had some men who scored over 30.

Thus, the results suggest that although psychopathy may play a relatively minor role in the case of genetic fathers who molest only their own daughters, it plays a more important role in the case of other intrafamilial offenders. An important caveat regarding the role of psychopathy pertains to the independence of psychopathy and criminal history. Because information about the child molestation that led to their inclusion in this study, as well as the criminal history of offenders, were available to the research assistants who scored the PCL–R, it is possible that the results regarding the lower psychopathy scores of the men who offended only against their daughters simply reflect their lesser criminal history. Arguing against this interpretation is the evidence from other studies that psychopathy, unlike criminality, is a discrete entity (Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1994; Skilling, Quinsey, & Craig, 2001) and that criminality, although correlated with psychopathy, is not one of its core features (Cooke & Michie, 2001). Nevertheless, because of the lack of independence of psychopathy ratings and

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[8] In addition, the VRAG and SORAG always provided incremental validity beyond that achieved by using only the PCL–R ($M = .56$, $p < .01$) or the phallometric deviance differential ($M = .40$, $p < .05$) in predicting violent recidivism.

criminal history in the present study, the role of psychopathy specifically, separate from that of antisociality in general, cannot be determined.

The results presented here, like the results of an earlier study by Seto et al. (1999), provide no support for the idea that men who sexually molest their biological daughters must have extremely deviant sexual preferences to overcome a natural aversion to incest. The men who molested their genetic daughters had less deviant preferences than the men who molested children outside the family, and their preferences were not different from those of men who molested their adopted daughters or stepdaughters. Because in general, father–daughter sexual activity represents clear and substantial reproductive costs, especially to the daughter (Shepher, 1983), why, from an evolutionary perspective, does it happen? What could be the nature of the human incest avoidance mechanism?

We suggest that human incest avoidance in males might consist of two components: Most men sexually prefer adult females, and most men score low on the component characteristics of psychopathy (mating effort, aggression, interpersonal predation, callousness, parental indifference; Skilling & Quinsey, 1999). The present data suggest that a preference for prepubertal or early pubescent children in a father places his young daughters at risk of being sexually molested; sexual preferences for children plus psychopathy places other children at risk as well. This idea predicts that the presence of psychopathy alone places postpubertal daughters (as well as all other women) at risk.

Because father–daughter sexual behavior confers much greater reproductive costs to the daughter than to the father (Haig, 1999; Shepher, 1983), perhaps a more specific incest avoidance mechanism resides only in females (as is the case in several other species; Batten, 1994). This idea is consistent with findings that mother–son sexual intercourse is extremely rare and that many postpubertal female victims leave home as early as possible to escape from an incestuous father (Finkelhor, 1986). Among our primate relatives, adolescent female gorillas first leave the harems of their birth to avoid inbreeding with fathers and brothers (Ghiglieri, 1999). In humans as in other primates, the weakest of the intrafamilial sexual barriers is that between fathers and daughters (Frances & Frances, 1976), perhaps because daughters are much smaller and weaker than fathers, as compared to brother–sister and mother–son incest, where females would, presumably, be more able to resist male advances. Further support for the idea that specific incest avoidance resides only in female sexuality comes from the finding that when brother–sister incest occurs, the brother is usually older (Bevc & Silverman, 1993). Finally, if there were a specific incest avoidance mechanism in men, one would expect biological fathers who molest their daughters to be even more sexually deviant than other men (including stepfathers) who molest, a prediction, as discussed earlier, clearly not substantiated by the present research.

Prediction

As is the case with other sex offenders, actuarial instruments such as the VRAG and the SORAG did a good job of predicting violent and sexual recidivism among father–daughter child molesters. The father–daughter child molesters scored lower on the SORAG and the VRAG and exhibited lower rates of committing new violent (including sexual) offenses than other heterosexual child molesters, but the instruments worked with equal or better accuracy for intrafamilial child molesters, as we have reported for other sex offenders (Rice & Harris, 1997). It is also important to note that the risk of violent or sexual recidivism of even the lowest risk group in the present study (i.e., the fathers who offended only against their genetic daughters) was not especially low, with their VRAG and SORAG scores predicting likelihoods of 31% and 39% respectively of new violent or sexual recidivism within 10 years at risk (Quinsey et al., 1998). The present results constitute another validation in a new sample of the ability of the VRAG and SORAG to predict violent and sexual recidivism among serious offenders. In fact, the effect size obtained for the prediction of sexual recidivism in this study (ROC area = .80) is one of the highest yet reported in the literature, perhaps because the present sample was especially diverse in risk scores. Indeed, although further cross-validation of this finding would be desirable, whether a child molester had offended exclusively against his daughter, although related to recidivism, contributed little or nothing to the prediction of recidivism after established historical static predictors were included.

The present results have several implications for the assessment and treatment of father–daughter child molesters. Traditionally, the assessment of such offenders has focused on family dynamics, and treatment has commonly focused on individual therapy for the father, mother, and daughter followed by family therapy (e.g., Alexander, 1985; Hoorwitz, 1983; Vander Mey & Neff, 1982; Zaphiris, 1980). The present results suggest that, just as with other child molesters, assessment and treatment of deviant sexual preferences are important components. Assessment should also include a careful history-taking to determine whether there have ever been extrafamilial victims, because a significant proportion of so-called "incest" offenders have also offended outside the family (see also Studer, Clelland, Aylwin, Redden, & Monro, 2000). Risk assessment for father–daughter child molesters should include the use of actuarial prediction tools developed and validated for other sex offenders and other violent offenders.

There is one important caveat here: All of the present offenders were child molesters. That is, all made the first sexual contact with the victims of the referral offenses when they were 14 or younger and the median age of the victims was 8 years. Some father–daughter incest involves postpubertal victims, however. In a much larger sample of sex offenders (Rice & Harris, 1999), 111 had offended against a daughter and 20% of these made the first sexual contact when the daughter was older than 14. Given that the average age for the onset of menses for girls in the United States is 12.5 years (Udry, Talbert, & Morris, 1986), even some of the victims of the offenders in the present study may have been postpubertal. For example, in the "genetic" group, one father made the first sexual contact when the daughter was 12 and the offenses continued for 8 years. In each of the "step" and "mixed" groups, one offender made the first sexual contact when the victim was 14 and the offending continued for at least 4 years. In all three cases, the offenses included sexual intercourse. Pedophilic sexual interests would not seem to be important causes of offenses against sexually mature victims; in these three cases, the offenders exhibited preference for our early pubescent stimuli, and in the latter two cases, pubescent boys. On the other hand, although there are general fitness costs in the form of sexual maladjustment suffered by the prepubertal victims of father–daughter incest, the costs to

the daughter of father–daughter incest are presumably even greater when conception can occur. Indeed, in an analysis of purely genetic costs, Haig (1999) showed that incestuous fathers incur no average fitness disadvantage (compared to outbreeding) as long as there is even a moderate degree of paternity uncertainty (with respect to the heritage of daughter victims). Nevertheless, research on the combination of sexual deviance and psychopathy (Quinsey et al., 1998; Rice, 1997; Rice & Harris, 1997) appears to be an especially promising route to understanding sexual aggression and sex offenders, including those who assault their own relatives.

In summary, our findings suggest that, although it is true that father–daughter child molesters have less deviant preferences than other heterosexual child molesters and also have lower recidivism rates, those differences can be attributed to static risk factors measured in actuarial risk instruments developed for use with other violent or sexual offenders. Furthermore, their recidivism risk is not particularly low in absolute terms. On the other hand, exclusively intrafamilial father–daughter child molesters in the present study were not as generally antisocial and predatory as were the offenders who had extrafamilial victims, and they also committed offenses that were less physically injurious than the other sex offenders. Our results support the idea that father–daughter sexual abuse occurs when a man has a sexual interest in female children. If he is otherwise not antisocial, his daughters are likely to be his only victims. Our findings suggest that the important factors to consider for father–daughter child molesters are the same as for other sex offenders, especially history of sexual and other offenses, psychopathy, and deviant sexual preferences.

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