

• understanding  
*incest*

a booklet for women  
by women

## Pre-amble

This resource was originally published in 1996. Written by the workers of the Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (BRICC, the predecessor of BRISSC), the resource provided a feminist explanation for why rape happens, a political analysis of incest, and the way it was responded to in legal and social contexts such as the family and sexuality.

In relation to the term 'incest', BRISSC is more likely to use sexual violence as a child or child sexual assault/abuse to describe sexual violence perpetrated against a child by a family member. In the legal sense incest continues to be described as sexual acts between family members, however the law also states that where the sexual acts have been perpetrated against a child then this act should be treated as child sexual abuse/assault under the law.

In preparing this edition for publication on the web we have tried to maintain the original focus and text as much as possible however some changes have been made to ensure information is current. The first chapter now refers to Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre or BRISSC rather than Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre or BRICC to reflect the current service. Across all other chapters the original text has been maintained and refers to Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre or BRICC rather than the Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre or BRISSC.

The original booklet included information about services for women. This section has not been published here as information about service providers can be located through our links page.

Chapters six and seven "*Legal issues and the Politics of Incest*" were originally written to provide a context of the way incest is treated within the legal system. Since the original booklet was published there have been changes within the law in Queensland and Nationally, some have been beneficial to survivors and others not.

In Queensland law the definition of incest has not changed, however, all forms of sexual assault/abuse, including incest, are treated as child sexual abuse under current Queensland law. Current law also considers a child under the age of 16 unable to give consent and any form of sex with a child to be an indictable offence with maximum penalties ranging from 14 years to life depending on the age of the child.

Changes to the Family Law Act that were introduced by the Howard Government in 2005, and continue to be active today, have impacted negatively in relation to protecting children from abuse. These changes sought to increase access by fathers to children after marriage break up; however, the interpretation of the laws in the family court system has meant that abusive fathers have continued to have access to children. Increased requirements for proof of abuse and penalties for false accusation has silenced women and failed to protect children from abusive fathers.

Finally, as a service we have broadened our terminology of incest to sexual violence as a child to include those women who experienced sexual violence perpetrated by someone outside of the family. We also acknowledge the men who are adult survivors of childhood sexual violence. In doing so we continue to acknowledge the gendered nature of sexual violence as perpetrators are still predominantly male (over 90%).

## Understanding Incest

Understanding Incest was written by workers at the Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (BRICC), with special thanks to Ros Mills.

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## Preface

This is the first publication on incest as rape produced by the Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre. This booklet focuses on our philosophical and political understandings of incest/rape.

Many individuals are raped in our communities. Overwhelmingly, it is women and children who are sexually violated by men they know. Because rapists are overwhelmingly men, sexual violence is described as being gender based. To understand why the rape of women and children is so prolific, we need to analyse the interconnectedness of the individual incidences and the social constructions which reinforce power differences between women, children and men.

Power imbalances are endemic in society. By focusing on gender inequity, we in no way mean to dismiss other inequalities affecting individuals within our communities. As feminists, we acknowledge the complexity and diversity of our backgrounds and our commitments to other struggles. However, it is also important for us to focus on our commonalities, and challenge the specific inequality of gender roles, which limit the lives of all women.

Sexual violence/rape is about sexualised power, domination and control. By linking the abuse of power and control in sex crimes to the power imbalances within society, feminism can be used when exploring any issues of violence towards an individual by another individual or institution. The power afforded to an individual is complex. Feminism highlights gender as one cause of power difference which affects all individuals. When connecting individual experiences of sexual violence to the social order, gender construction overtly reinforces and legitimises the sexual violation of women and children.

The violence perpetrated on women and children takes many forms. These include the limiting of children's choices about their own lives, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, the rape of women and children in war, pregnancy as a result of father-daughter rape, little control over reproductive technology, economic and financial oppression, lack of representation in positions of power and doing the majority of unpaid work, to name a few.

We hope this booklet engages people in discussions and debates around the gendered nature of sexual violence and its connection with other inequalities. We believe this debate to be a vital contribution towards the elimination of sexual violence. We know we have not covered every issue surrounding the analysis of incest and welcome any feedback so that

women in the community and future workers at Women's House can continue to collaborate in developing future editions

**"Don't Agonise, Organise"** Florence Kennedy

## Understanding Incest

### Chapter 1: The Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre

The Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre (BRISSC) is a support service for women, run by women. It operates on public money which is allocated to BRISSC through government grants, therefore services offered at BRISSC are provided free of charge

BRISSC operates on a 'collective' basis. That is the women who work at BRISSC undertake to share work skills, work loads, information, decision making, resources and wages. The BRISSC collective operates within a larger collective, or association of members, called 'The Women's Community Aid Association' (WCAA). It is through this association that BRISSC is ethically accountable to the women's community.

The Women's Community Aid Association was incorporated in 1975, the same year the rape crisis service began operation. BRISSC is presently located in a house in the residential community of Woolloongabba. It is a 'women only' space known as 'Women's House'. This space also houses the offices for the domestic violence refuge service Women's House Shelter. Women's House was the space from which the first Queensland 24 hour women's help-line and refuge referral operated. It was also the original space for the operation of the now autonomous Women's Health and Women's Legal Services.

BRISSC is a non-government organisation. We do not have mandatory reporting. That is, we are not compelled by law to report cases of incest to the police or other authorities. Our policy of confidentiality assures all women that their stories will not be repeated to other services or to government organisations - unless it is with the express consent of the woman whose story has been entrusted to us at BRISSC.

BRISSC provides:

- A place where women who have been raped can talk with other women in a safe, supportive and confidential environment.
- Support groups for women survivors of sexual violence, including adult survivors of childhood sexual violence
- Information on police, medical and court procedures, including support and advocacy throughout the reporting & court processes
- Community education about violence against women and children, through the presentation of information, facilitated discussion, workshops and worker training
- A library specialising in violence against women resources and internet facilities
- Drop in centre and meeting space for women
- Information to friends, relatives and supporters of women and children who have been raped
- Interpreters and child care can be arranged when requested.

For information, support or appointments call or email:

(07) 3391 0004 (support line)

(07) 3391 2573 (administration)

[admin@brissc.org.au](mailto:admin@brissc.org.au)

### **BRISSC A Women Only Space**

In general, mixed spaces are dominated by men. In these spaces women's stories are either actively silenced, not heard, or distorted. In these spaces women's realities are defined by men.

At BRISSC we work with women because we value women's experiences, women's truths, women's lives, and women's skills. As women we can share our stories and have them

validated. As women we can share survival skills. As women we can cry and laugh at adversity. As women working together we can resist men's violence. This is what we mean by creating a safe and supportive 'women only' environment.

### **BRISSC Provides Support Not Therapy**

At BRISSC we speak of 'support' rather than therapy' or 'counselling' because the latter can imply personal or mental health problems. These implied "problems" put the onus of the responsibility on women, rather than on society or men. This is particularly the case in terms of familial and social expectations around the female roles of daughter, wife, lover or mother. (See below, The Family). At BRISSC we believe that women who come to Women's House are not 'sick'. Rather, they are likely to be suffering from, and resisting, the pressures of being female in a male defined society. Many women are seeking ways to positively survive and resist the often devastating effects of sexual violation, violence and abuse. BRISSC workers believe that women are the experts in their own lives and thus it is up to them to define what is and what is not a problem for them. It is for these reasons that we prefer to talk of support not counselling. It is for these reasons too that we prefer to work in a house in the community rather than in a unit attached to a hospital.

Many women who approach BRISSC, either by telephone or through 'face to face' appointments, are adult survivors of sexual violations which occurred during their childhood. Some women have never forgotten these violations; others remember only fragments of their abuse; others have only recently remembered. Some women have never spoken of these violations; others have not been heard; others have not been believed. Many women experience some form of sexual violation at some time of their lives. Often this occurs in the home and is perpetrated by those whom we are told we should trust. It is probable that almost all women's lives are limited to some extent by the knowledge of potential violence. Significantly, almost all perpetrators of sexual violence are men.

### **Women's truths and institutional truths**

Because our women's experiences, stories and truths often do not match up with the experiences and stories which we are told are the truths of our lives- we may believe that we are 'going mad'. Stories of love and happy families in novels, magazines, song lyrics, TV soapies, family anecdotes and snapshots or home movies, may sit at odds with the memories and realities of our lives. When this clash of truth, or reality, occurs we may not only believe that we are going mad, but may be encouraged to believe this. After all, definitions of madness depend upon agreements over what is real and what is not!

It is very convenient for perpetrators to claim that their victims are either mad and/or lying. This way their criminal behaviour is hidden. When the medical and legal professions concur with the belief that women 'make up stories' then men's criminal behaviour is denied (made invisible) and/or implicitly condoned by two very powerful institutions. The institutions of law and medicine have the power to determine what is 'the truth', or what is 'real'. This is often what feminists mean when they talk about 'structural violence'.

### **Structural or institutional violence**

#### ***Medical 'truths'***

Structural violence, or institutional violence, upholds or reinforces the violence of an individual abuser. The violence of a particular medical 'truth' may add to and reinforce the violence of the actual abuse. For example, we may believe, or be told, that it is our own 'paranoia' that is to blame for the constantly recurring fears of sexual and physical abuse: that there is something wrong with us if this fear surfaces years after the abuse has ceased. We may even be told that our fear is based on a fantasy, rather than on reality. Because paranoia and fantasy discount the truth or reality of our fears, these medical 'truths' are experienced as violations in themselves. Yet, it is very unlikely that paranoia, or fantasy, are to blame for recurring fears of sexual abuse. The fears related to childhood sexual abuse do not simply go away. These fears are based on experienced sexual abuse and work to maintain women's silences.

### **Legal 'Truths'**

There are many difficulties associated with recounting stories of sexual, physical and emotional violations that happened many years ago. Yet these difficulties are often misunderstood, or taken as evidence of lying, fantasising or psychosis.

When recounting stories of incest in law courts, where 'facts' must be recited in a rational, linear or logical fashion, women's truths are terribly disadvantaged. For example, if a woman was raped for many years of her childhood by her father, it is unlikely she would be able to recount specific times, dates and details of particular incidences. This is another instance where institutional violence (in this case the legal system) upholds and reinforces the violence of the abuser.

The dreadful fear of incest continuing may blur memories of the actual incidents of incest. A survivor reports:

There was always a fear of it happening ... The incidents become blurred because the fear of it happening became the overriding thing  
(adult survivor, quoted in Elizabeth Ward, *Father—Daughter Rape*)

This blurring of the actual incidents of incest may give men's allegations that women and girls are lying, the resemblance of truth. Fear of not being believed may lead to women's and girl's silences as much as fear of the perpetrator himself. Fear always works in the interests of the perpetrator. Perpetrators are aware of this.

Other institutions which uphold and/or reinforce individual abuse by men are the institutions of the family (see below sections 3&4) and the institution of heterosexuality (sections 4&5).

### **Breaking the silence**

The persistence of women's fears is clear in this statement made by a survivor who recalls;

*I felt as if he was behind me and I felt as though I was going to get banged in the neck for telling someone—and he'd been dead six years*  
(adult survivor quoted in Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*)

Nevertheless, women do tell their stories. Breaking the barriers of silence needs courage, but breaking them can often be liberating if you are believed. Creating your own supportive networks of friends, or joining a survivors' group, may be more important in the long term than talking with individual workers at BRISSC. Within these networks you are not only supported by other women, but can become a support person for others.

Support, unlike 'therapy', is something any woman can do for another woman. Support, unlike therapy, recognises that incest is not only an individual act of violence, but an act of violence which is reinforced by structural and institutional violence.

### **BRISSC is a feminist collective**

Almost all institutions are organised on a hierarchical (boss/worker) structure: business, government, religion, medicine, law, education, the family, and so on. Hierarchies are, by their very nature, oppressive structures since they rely on the structurally legitimated power of a few over others. This power has the potential to be exercised in exploitative or tyrannical ways over those with less legitimised power. In this sense hierarchies are always at least potentially, and at most, actually violent. Most women have experienced this violence in some form or another. Hence feminists identify hierarchical organisations as another form of 'structural', or institutional, violence. In almost all present hierarchies men have more access to power than women. Feminists refer to this form of social organisation as 'patriarchy'.

There is a myth that hierarchical organisations are more efficient than collective organisations. Yet any woman who has worked in a hierarchical institution may have noticed

that the further the work practice is from the decision making process the more delay there is and the more chaos ensues! The oppressive nature of hierarchies can work against creativity and innovative work processes. Yet hierarchical institutions are integral to western (and other) male centred societies.

Collective work processes need at least a basic working agreement if they are to function efficiently. In order to work as a feminist collective it is important that BRICC workers agree with the basic philosophies and goals of feminism. These are:

- the eradication of structural violence through ongoing resistance to women's physical, emotional, economic and socio/political subordination to men
- the eradication of structural violence through ongoing resistance to the dominant male view of reality
- the eradication of structural violence through ongoing resistance to patriarchal organisation (institutions/relations)
- the eradication of structural violence through the valuing of female differences (rather than the devaluing of 'others')
- the eradication of structural violence through an acceptance of new/different truths and realities, and new/different ways of organising and relating.

Hence BRISSC's belief in the necessity for organisational structures (institutions and relationships) to be based on consensus and reciprocity rather than on hierarchies of oppression and subordination.

Clearly then, it is not only efficiency, or even equality, that is at stake here. Women working at BRISSC believe that attention to feminist goals and ways of organising is a way of working towards stopping men's violence against women and children.

### **Some Women's Words**

*No one is born a woman*  
Simone de Beauvoir

*I can't imagine anything worse than being a good girl—this is my life and I really don't care what anyone think about the choices I make.*  
Cher

*I found real love in girlfriends... I've always found girls I've loved and who've made me laugh.*  
Tina Turner

*What men desire is a virgin who is a whore.*  
Shelagh Delaney

*Unless you've lost you're reputation you never realise what a burden it was or what freedom really is.*  
Margaret Mitchell

*Feminism is recognising our common ground as women and supporting other women to the maximum possible extent.*  
Melissa (Sisters Inside)

*No-one should have to dance backwards all of their lives.*  
Jill Rockelshaus

*If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament*  
Florence R. Kennedy

*"...we are the women that men warned us about."*  
Jill Rockelshaus

*I'm not frightened o' the darkness outside. It's the darkness inside houses I don't like.*  
Shelagh Delaney

## Understanding Incest

### Chapter 2: What is Incest?

The definition of incest used by the Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (BRICC):

*Incest includes any sexual violation or violence (ie unwanted touching or sexual behaviours) perpetrated on a child or young person by a person who is in a position of trust in relation to the child or younger person. In this definition, incest is rape.*

It is important to note that this definition of incest/rape is open ended in order to include any behaviours defined by the 'victim/survivor'\* as a violation of one's person. Although workers at the Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (BRICC) have supported women survivors of women's violence, overwhelmingly, it is men who are the perpetrators of sexual violence. The language used herein will reflect the gendered nature of sexual violence. The above is a feminist definition of incest not a legal or medical definition. It is this feminist definition that informs the way we work at the Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre.

The original word 'incest' (as a specifically western word) referred to sexual relationships within the family, where the practice of incest as an act of rape was ignored. Original concerns with incest focused on the maintenance of familial, societal, and religious 'order': those who broke the codes were said to have placed societal 'order' in jeopardy.

This 'order' was the order of patriarchy. Patriarchy is the domination of men in both the public and private spheres and thus this "order" was not in the interests of women. Rather than for the safety and benefit of women and children, early codes forbidding sex between family members were more likely concerned with regulating the exchange of women between men. The idea of a universal incest taboo to maintain societal order reflects quite recent western, and masculine, definitions of incest as the practice of sex occurring within the family. In this socio-historical scenario, those who committed incest were said to be breaking the moral, political and religious codes of their society. The harm to women or to children was not at issue. Consent, and thus rape, were irrelevant to these concerns with incest. Traditional meanings of incest as 'intra-familial sexual relations' continue to be used alongside incest as rape, causing a 'watering down' of the seriousness of incest as a violence against women and children, and in some instances causing confusion over the term 'incest'.

In recent years feminists have brought father-daughter incest—as a peculiarly insidious and widespread form of rape—into the legal and political limelight. The notion of father-daughter rape has been widened to include the rape of younger women by older men who are in the position of 'father', in the sense of having authority and power over the younger person. Feminists have insisted that incest/rape be seen as a crime against women and children, and that the perpetrators of these acts be recognised as criminals. This has been an uphill grind. The patriarchal notion that women and children are men's property continues to lurk around the edges of the law. Similarly, the belief that women and children are to blame for incest continues to give rise to moral condemnation against the victims/survivors of incest.

This condemnation is given legitimacy by medical explanations of incest based on patriarchal knowledge of 'sex' and 'the family'. A particularly insidious belief, which has been legitimated by the science of psychoanalysis, is that incest is the fabrication or invention of a woman's disordered mind. Psychoanalysis is a form of medicalised knowledge which continues to deny women's realities, and to inform much therapeutic practice. Despite feminist claims to the contrary, incest is still considered by many to be a pathological act caused by a sickness, or psychosis. This booklet hopes to dispel some of the dangerous and still widespread patriarchal myths around incest.

This booklet is an attempt to explain why we at the Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre believe that incest, is neither the cause of societal disorder nor an individual anti-social or pathological act. We hope that you will find our explanations of incest, and the reasons we



give for working as we do, an empowering experience.

*\*Though workers at the BRICC choose to use the term "survivors" to describe anybody who has experienced sexual violence, we will use the term "victim/survivor" to acknowledge women's own definitions of their experiences*

### **poetry**

When I was younger he would always  
protect me  
If I had a problem he'd always be there  
He told me I was his favourite and  
He would never do anything to hurt me  
I can't understand how he could do these  
things  
If he really did care

He would come into my room late at night  
In the end I didn't put up a fight  
I couldn't understand why he would do this  
to me  
Why couldn't he be my father like he was  
supposed to be  
No matter what I did I can still live  
But I'm not sure if I can forgive

*Kellie, 16 years old*

## **Understanding Incest**

### **Chapter 3: The Family**

#### **The Family as Haven**

The family as haven is an ideological construct that obscures the fact that for the daughters (at least) the family is a prison (Elizabeth Ward, in *Father-Daughter Rape*)

The family is the most obvious and immediate patriarchal institution within which women and children are most at risk from structurally legitimised or condoned violence. Perpetrators may go to great lengths to hide the violence that is occurring within the family. This is a reasonably easy task in cultures where the ideology of the home and the family is sacrosanct. The home, as a 'man's castle' provides a safe place for perpetrators. Victims of familial violence are often discouraged from spending time with relatives or 'staying over' in friends' homes. They may even be forbidden or discouraged from having close friends. This is not too difficult. In such homes the father's word is often 'Law'. Furthermore, patriarchy devalues women's relationships with other women female friends are viewed as socially insignificant; women's 'idle gossip' is not to be taken seriously; a wife is expected to relinquish her relationship with her mother in favour of a relationship with her husband; sisters, along with all other women, are placed in competition with one another. Overall, the notion of parental authority legitimises 'discipline' which may hide the violence perpetrated on children, and until quite recently, the violence perpetrated on wives.

It is a measure of women's strength that despite this seemingly inescapable situation they (and their children) often become skilled at resisting the excesses of patriarchal power- both within and outside the home.

Despite the promotion of the 'nuclear family' ideal, many women and children have chosen to create new and egalitarian family structures. These new family structures directly challenge

the notion of women and children as 'property of men'.

### **State interventions into the family**

The ideas that a man's home is his castle and that family matters are private ones have, over the last hundred or so years, existed side by side with increased policing of the family unit. 'The family' (especially mothers and children) and 'the home' have increasingly become the focus of state intervention through the 'new' professions of social work, psychology and psychiatry: the rise of child care clinics, welfare agencies, compulsory education, social security and so on. At the same time the 'scientisation' and professionalisation of sexual, behaviour, 'mother craft' and childbirth, among other things, has led to a bevy of 'experts' and a devaluing of women's knowledge. These patriarchal institutions create the 'norms' which determine deviance; who and what is right and who and what is wrong; who and what is 'bad', and who and what is 'good'. Of course, in any discussion of state intervention into the family, it is imperative to acknowledge the more overt intervention into working class and non Anglo families, but especially the widespread and violent state intervention into Aboriginal families. The pain that this has caused Aboriginal women cannot be overestimated. State intervention into Aboriginal families has meant that Aboriginal girls, who up until quite recently were routinely removed from their parental homes, were also routinely at risk from the sexual abuse of white men in the various homes, schools and service situations in which they were placed.

### **Norms and deviances**

#### ***The eroticisation of the child***

An insidious norm in western society is the eroticisation of the child. The bodies of little girls particularly, but also the bodies of young boys, are sexualised in popular culture: films, video clips, magazines, novels etc. Within modern western cultures even adult women are thought to be more sexually desirable when they look and behave like children. Being 'sexy' is being small; having a thin body; wearing a pouting childlike expression; being innocent; being silly; being sexually naive; being 'precocious'; being 'naughty'. Paedophilia, as the sexual desire for children, is, like incest, less a deviance than a modern societal norm. The eroticisation of the child suggests we live in a culture in which adult sex is constructed as paedophilia - an abuse of power. Such eroticisation of the childlike is an eroticisation of the constructed powerless. This is part of what feminists mean when they talk of a 'rape culture'.

#### ***Daughters***

Girls are brought up with societal expectations regarding the role of a daughter. Daughters may fear deviating from the norm - but they may also fear what the norms of passivity and powerlessness entail. For many girls being 'normal' means being passive, sweet, obedient, non-assertive, a miniature wife and mother, a carer, a keeper of the peace or a cute little daddy's girl. Failure to maintain these norms brings punishment and/or parental disapproval: yet such 'normal' behaviour facilitates rape/incest. This is because these socially approved and rewarded behaviours make young girls available and vulnerable to potential perpetrators, especially family members. Young girls in incest situations are trapped by ideologies of 'the family' that seem to leave them no way out. The fact that so many girls and women have survived incest is far more amazing than the fact that so many have been abused.

### **Shifting the boundaries of the law**

Despite overwhelming odds, women have had some success in focusing the attention of the state onto the violence of husbands and, more recently, onto the violence of fathers. The struggle to make the private political on women's terms has had some results... The struggle however is far from over.

It is only recently that 'domestic violence' has been recognised as a crime. It is even more recently that rape in marriage has been recognised as a crime (1981 in NSW, and subsequently in all states in Australia). These crimes are perpetrated by husbands, and sometimes by boyfriends or 'de factos'. Criminalising father-daughter rape, however, has

been a more difficult task. Perhaps fatherhood is the last bastion of modern patriarchy - The Law of the Father! In recent years the state has, to some extent, usurped the position of the father. Whether this enables women to gain more or less access to power is a matter of speculation. It may be that at this time it is possible to introduce into law the concept of 'rape in the family'. It is perhaps important to remember, however, that in the matter of the law, the state (along with the church) has always been keen to uphold the position and rights of biological fathers.

### ***Father's Day***

On this special day Dad

Of course I'll think of you...

Knowing that you really are an

Arsehole through and through

You beat and raped my Mum,

You beat and raped me too...

I've grown, survived and been supported...

Without any help from you!

*Julie Sarkosi*

## **Understanding Incest**

### **Chapter 4: Some common myths about incest**

#### **Whose truths?**

The truths spoken by women and girls are considered to be less legitimate than truths spoken by men. As women we need to ask why this is so. Who determines what is the truth and what is a myth (or a lie)? And where do truths acquire their legitimacy? Thus far, patriarchy has had a monopoly on truth, rationality and justice. There are of course many historical and philosophical notions that we could search out in order to explain how patriarchy has managed to sustain such nonsense, but they are really beyond the scope of this booklet. It may be worth considering, if only briefly, one of the most abiding, powerful and destructive modern sources of patriarchal 'truths' about incest. These 'truths' continue to have considerable influence on how incest is thought about in non feminist arenas. This source is psychoanalytic theory.

#### ***Psychoanalysis***

Psychoanalysis is a body of knowledge which claims to describe reality, but which in fact creates realities, truths and norms by asserting their scientific validity. Psychoanalysis is a knowledge which is legitimated through its relationship to the medical institution and through its continued popularisation within therapies which focus on sex and sexuality. Most modern psychiatry and psychotherapies either stem from or use some of the ideas first espoused in nineteenth century Vienna by Sigmund Freud, 'The Father of Psychoanalysis'. We maintain that Freud's ideas have been devastating for women. The fact that they have been so influential in modern therapeutic practices, is yet another reason for women to be exceedingly suspicious of 'therapy'.

#### **Sexualising the family unit**

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries psychoanalysis was an influential medical discourse which, along with the new science of sexology, helped to sexualise the family unit. Many of the sexual identities now familiar to us can be located here: the precocious little girl; the incestuously desiring daughter; the frigid wife; the hysterical woman. Age-old ideas of women as irrational, as unable to be just, or truthful, were modernised, sexualised and scientised by Sigmund Freud. It was Freud's psychoanalytic theory of male sexuality (aided and abetted by sexology) which described a biologically 'hydraulic' male sex drive. From these sexual identities and notions of sexuality come the myths that:

- A. once aroused men can't stop themselves from reaching, or attempting to reach, orgasm; penile penetration and orgasm being definitive of The Sex Act;
- B. (frigid) wives are responsible for their husbands raping their daughters;
- C. (sexually precocious) little girls are responsible for their own rapes;
- D. (hysterical) daughters fantasise their desires for their fathers (and hence make up stories about incest);
- E. homosexuality is an infantile stage of development; heterosexuality is the norm.

### **The Incest Taboo and the Oedipal Myth**

Significantly, Freud based his psychoanalytic thesis on the Greek myth of incest, the story of Oedipus. In this story a son commits the two unforgivable sins of patriarchy: one, he has a sexual relationship with his mother (incest) and has children by her, and two, he kills his father (patricide). These are sins against patriarchy since they take sexual power, reproductive power, and life itself, away from The Father. The Oedipal myth could be called the first myth of Patriarchy. Freud uses the Oedipal myth as a way to describe the development of 'man' from primitive culture through to modern civilisation - or the (healthy) development of male and female sexuality from childhood through to adulthood - or, in Freudian terms, sexual development from the 'perversities of childhood' through to 'healthy adult hetero sexuality'. Very briefly, according to Freud, the first desires of very young boys and girls is an incestuous one for the mother- this desire must be overcome if patriarchy and heterosexuality are to be achieved. In order for children to achieve the norms of patriarchy and enter into 'healthy' (civilised/ heterosexual) adulthood both boys and girls must turn from the mother to the father. According to Freud, this turning away from the mother comes about through the child's recognition of the mother's lack of a penis (and hence her lack of power). Boys must desire to be like the father (have the penis and the power), while girls must shift their desires towards the father (and eventually to a father figure) and to the birth of a son, who fills in for the penis (obviously a more complicated movement than it is for the boy!). Freud claims that failure on the part of the child to enter into and pass through each stage in order to successfully complete the transition to adulthood, results in infantilism, homosexuality, paranoia or female hysteria. The important message in all this is that The Father holds the trump card: penis equals power. The girl's desire for the father is not at all a problem in patriarchal terms, but is in fact obligatory on her path to 'real' womanhood.

Radical feminists have probably been the most scathing critics of psychoanalysis and its claims about sexuality—claims which have entered popularised notions of normal male and female sexual behaviours. Some feminists have tried to use or to subvert psychoanalysis, arguing that it merely describes rather than proscribes sexual norms. Some feminists trash it. Others try to ignore it. It is amazing to many of us at BRICC that Freud's explanations of father-daughter incest should have been taken seriously by so many people for so long. It is also clear to us that these ideas, and recent versions of the ideas, continue to be so influential that they are hard to ignore in discussions of incest. Freud's mythology concerning incest describes, legitimises and props up a rape/incest culture. We think this is another good reason for feminists to be extremely sceptical of 'therapy'.

### ***So, she came here***

So,  
She came here  
and when she looked around...

She didn't really take much notice  
of the government policies,  
or the interest rates,  
or the unemployment figures,  
or the angry faces  
shouting:  
WOGS, GO HOME

She just went on believing,  
that all that was needed,  
was...  
just...  
a...  
little...  
hard...  
work.

So,  
she worked,  
and worked,  
and worked...

as a factory worker,  
or an ironing woman,  
and a cleaner,  
and a housemaid.

And when she grew tired...  
her body screamed,  
her back bent over,  
and her arms...  
waved,  
wildly,  
as if struggling  
against the tide,  
of children,  
and machines,  
and drunk, angry  
husbands...

So,  
they,  
came,  
and took her to a Park\*...  
-for a rest-  
And,  
they explained Australia to her,  
in  
the  
the  
language  
of  
electricity...  
and she had a rest.

You see,  
they didn't know:  
that she had seen people die:  
that she had fought off men  
groping in the dark,  
that she had left, her family,

friends, and her enemies,  
BEHIND...

MONEY SPEAKS ENGLISH.  
My mother can't

*Julie Sarkosi*

## Understanding Incest

### Chapter 5: Life choices and survival strategies

#### Sexual Practices

Sometimes sexual practices, which feminists understand as survival strategies or life choices, are considered by 'experts' (eg some doctors, psychs, or social workers) to be 'problems'. Some examples of sexual practices which might be labelled as 'problems' by the 'experts' include; choosing to have a series of sexual partners, choosing to have no sexual partner, or choosing to have a same-sex partner. When women are survivors of child sexual abuse 'experts' often say that these sexual practices are 'problems' which are directly related to the abuse. This may or may not be true. Sexual practices may be survival strategies, life choices, or both of these. Some survival strategies may not play a large part in your life, or they may be choices taken in a particular period in your life. Women may or may not experience their sexual practices as problems. We suspect, however, that these sexual practices are often more of a problem for patriarchal systems than they are for women. Of particular concern to the institutions of patriarchy are practices which refuse the type of sexuality which we are told is 'correct' and 'healthy'. Here are just some examples of practices which patriarchy finds a problem:

#### *Promiscuity*

Promiscuity refers to the practice of having sex with a series of partners. This term is often used to denigrate women. Men are seldom, if ever, referred to as promiscuous. This form of sexual practice is understood by feminists as a way of life informed by a decision not to form intense or long-term sexual relationships. This decision is not necessarily consciously 'thought through', and may or may not have positive consequences - as is the case with any sexual choice. It may be that in some cases promiscuity may relate to a lack of trust- that is, a fear of being sexually and emotionally vulnerable to others. This is sometimes the case when trust has been violated, for instance when women have experienced incest/rape as children. If trust is the issue then promiscuity seems one among many rational responses to childhood experiences of incest: a useful survival strategy. However, the sexual choice to be promiscuous may have nothing to do with past abuse, or survival strategies. Whether related to abuse or not, the practice of having several sexual partners is a valid life choice for some women. Because women who have many partners refuse to be the property of one man, they threaten patriarchy. Because women choosing several sexual partners are seen by men to be taking the sexual initiative (the traditional prerogative of men), they are often labelled as 'sluts' or 'nymphomaniacs'. Promiscuity threatens men's sexual power.

#### *Celibacy*

Celibacy is the deliberate choice to not to have sexual relations with others, not merely the time without sexual relations. This term is also often used to denigrate women - unlike men's celibacy which is usually seen as an ethical choice. Often women who choose celibacy are referred to by men as 'frigid'. This is probably because it is difficult for many men to comprehend that a woman may choose to refuse their sexual advances, let alone the sexual advances of any man. 'Experts' often see women's refusal to be involved in a sexual relationship as a problem stemming from childhood sexual abuse. They may suggest that celibate women secretly hate men, or are secretly afraid of men. This may or may not be true. Again, celibacy may or may not be a strategic response to childhood experiences of sexual abuse. Whatever the reason for celibacy, the decision not to have sex with others is understood by feminists as a legitimate sexual choice. There are many reasons why women

might choose to be celibate at various times in their lives. Celibacy has many positive aspects for women. For instance, it can create a space for women to develop and value nonsexual friendships. The refusal to be available to men threatens men's collective power.

### *Lesbianism*

Lesbianism is sexual relations between women. This too is a term which is often used to denigrate women. Women who are referred to as lesbian or 'dyke' may or may not be lesbians. When used as a derogatory term lesbian often refers to women who refuse men's advances; women who do what are considered to be 'men's jobs'; women who wear 'non feminine' clothes; women who talk 'too much'; women who are 'bossy'; or women who are feminists. Lesbianism is still seen by many 'experts' as a problem. Such experts may suggest that this problem is a reaction to childhood abuse. They might suggest, as they do for celibate women, that lesbians hate men, or are afraid of men. Again this might or might not be true. 'Experts' might see lesbianism as a 'passing phase' or worse, an illness which can be cured. Again, while men's violence may be a rational reason for women to choose women rather than men as their sexual partners, this is only one of many reasons why women might choose lesbianism. Importantly, lesbianism is usually about a love of women, rather than a hatred, or fear, of men. It too is a legitimate sexual choice which may be quite unrelated to notions of sexual abuse. Lesbianism is a refusal of sexual 'norms'. Whether or not individual lesbians deliberately refuse these norms, lesbianism challenges the normality of heterosexual relations and the patriarchal family. Thus lesbianism poses a threat to men's power.

It is up to women to define or not to define their own sexuality. We may make different choices at different times. Women having control of their own bodies, sexuality and identity challenges the patriarchal notion that women are the property of men.

Because there are so many women who have been abused it is easy to make the mistake of linking sexual practices with abuse. This linkage often occurs in 'therapy', where notions of what is deviant or sick depend upon the norms of hetero patriarchy.

### ***Hijacked***

When YOU said YOU loved ME,  
I thought  
you meant  
you desired me  
you enjoyed my company  
you respected my intelligence  
I made you laugh  
I made you think  
I made you come...  
When,  
What you REALLY meant was:  
Look after me  
Don't embarrass me in public  
why do you read so much  
I think you're stupid, but in a cute,  
entertaining  
sort of way  
I nearly pissed myself laughing when  
you mentioned politics  
I love the way you give head

Sorry...  
my mistake, AGAIN.

## **Social practices**

Some strategies which have helped women to survive and to resist, may have become destructive or detrimental to their lives. It is not always possible to clearly differentiate the positive strategies from the negative ones: some forms of resistance to men's power, or men's violence, are not always useful in the long run - although they may have been so in the beginning. What is more, the change (from positive to negative strategy, or visa versa) may not always occur in a linear or progressive fashion. For instance, sometimes women may feel stronger, or safer, than at other times. Sometimes certain behaviours or practices may be more appropriate, pleasurable, or useful, than at other times.

Some strategies are referred to by therapists as 'personality disorders' or syndromes (in the past they were referred to as female hysteria). These so-called 'disorders' may be used (consciously or unconsciously) as personal strategies for surviving sexual violence and resisting the 'norms' of femininity. However, such strategies may come to outlive their usefulness. That is, what was once a survival technique or a form of resistance may become a problem. It is of course important to define 'problem' as what is a problem for you, and not for your therapist, your family or others.

## **A word about 'memory'**

Another important point relating to your own definition of what is a problem for you, concerns memory. Forgetting may be a survival strategy or a form of resistance. It may be that forgetting is more 'natural' than remembering. Memory, understood as an unbroken and linear story, tends to be the way in which people in western cultures currently make sense of themselves as a 'whole' person. This has not always been the case, nor is it the case in all cultures. It may be that this particular way of understanding the person is less important than we currently believe. Memory is often fragmented and blurred, and it takes a lot of effort and imagination to create a 'life story'.

If your memories of childhood abuse are a problem for you, then this problem needs to be taken seriously. If however you know or think you were abused, but this is not a problem for you at this time, there is no need to make it a problem. This may seem strange, but it is important to recognise that there is nothing wrong with you if you do not perceive what happened, or is likely to have happened, as a personal problem at this point in your life. Alternatively, if you think you were abused but cannot remember the details of the abuse, again this is only important if it is a problem for you. Trying to remember details of abuse which you may have strategically closed off as a child is not necessarily useful, positive, or even terribly important - unless not remembering is causing other problems for you. Again, it is important that you decide what is a problem for you - not your therapist, your family, the media or others.

This is also true of other strategies such as various drug use (including alcohol or prescription drugs), or other practices which might limit your potential or become dangerous to your health and well-being. Generally, you know when what was useful to you has become destructive, or when it is time to seek out some new information regarding changing your current strategies for survival. If you feel BRICC cannot offer you the tools you need to change these strategies, we have a resource list and a library which might be able to offer you some different ideas, or alternative services. It is up to you to decide what you need and what you are comfortable with.

## **Chapter 6: Legal issues**

### **Legal Definition**

The Queensland law on incest is concerned with the traditional and legal family. The



definition of incest within this context relates to the practice of 'sex' within the legal family. Sex is defined from a male perspective as penile penetration, thus excluding other sexual practices which may be equally violating in situations of incest/abuse. The limitation of concern to 'sexual intercourse' is a reminder of old concerns with 'reproductive harm', rather than with more recent concerns with harm to children. There is no recognition here of the problem of child rape being one of older perpetrator/younger victim. Importantly, such a definition of incest ignores the traditional family as a site of gendered power relations, and the authority of age. Despite the recent interest in, and (often grudging) legal acknowledgement of the existence and problem of incest, the Queensland criminal code adheres remarkably to the moral concerns of the nineteenth century.

### **Gendered Law**

The gendered nature of patriarchal law prioritises the rape of boys over the rape of girls. Vaginal penetration of a 16 year old girl is a misdemeanour in Queensland, with a maximum penalty of five years. However, sodomy, which affects boys as well, carries a 14 year maximum penalty and is a crime. The age of consent (to be penetrated) is also different for boys (18) and girls (16). This reflects the patriarchal horror of male vulnerability to rape by other men in the legal system. The rape of young women and girls raises no such horror and condemnation. Whether women decide to individually seek justice through the legal system or not, we need to be aware of injustices in the male-dominated legal system, and be prepared to challenge them.

### **To Report or Not To Report**

The decision to report or not to report is an individual one. BRICC supports any decision made by women using our service. Although BRICC workers are not legal advisors, we can provide basic information about the reporting process and can refer women to legal services.

If you do decide to report a childhood rape, a verdict of 'not guilty' does not mean that the judge and jury necessarily believe that you were not raped. The prosecution needs to prove that the defendant is guilty. For this they need evidence. It is often the case that there is not enough evidence to prove guilt in a rape case, this situation is exacerbated when several years have passed since the offence was committed. A finding of not guilty can be devastating, particularly if you feel your own reality is being questioned.

Sometimes, however, police questioning itself will lead to an offender admitting guilt in incest cases.

The reporting of rape/incest of a child is quite different from reporting your own incest. Again it is important to seek the advice of a legal person. The following information may help you make your decision, but it should not be the 'last word' on reporting.

### **Reporting incest of children**

Two institutions are involved in the legal processes concerning the prosecution of incest of children. The law, which is interested in punishing the offender and the welfare system, which is interested in the protection of the child. Unfortunately, as the laws presently stand, the law and the welfare are likely to end up 'punishing' the child. This 'punishment' may take many forms. One possibility is the removal of the child from the home against their will, for their 'protection'. If the offender is charged, removal of the child from the family home may also occur for the duration of the period between reporting and going to court. Occasionally the perpetrator will be held in custody during this time and the protection of the child will not be an issue for the court. However, it is often the case that the perpetrator is not held in custody while awaiting his trial, and in this case it is the child who is, in effect, held in 'custody'.

In some cases the perpetrator may be found 'not guilty' in the courtroom yet social workers will consider the child to be 'at risk' in the home, and therefore removed despite the child's wishes. Sometimes no action is taken, also against the child's wishes. This complete disregard for the child's wishes is an act of betrayal. These are considerations which are

especially pertinent if you are considering reporting a case of incest which is likely to be contested by the parent/s of the child. Of course the child's safety is paramount. If they are old enough to make their own choices about reporting it is very important to listen to what they have to say. The experience of incest is one which disempowers children. Failure to listen and to hear what the child is saying can exacerbate any feelings of powerlessness. Failure to hear what a child is saying can cause them to lose their sense of self and lead to feelings of despair.

In recent years there has been some contention between welfare and the courts concerning ways in which children's evidence can be introduced into the courtroom with the least trauma to the child. The introduction of videoed evidence, such as interviews with police, psychs, or social workers, is now admissible in many courts. The admissibility of this evidence however does not mean that it is well received by all legal persons. Since there is no possibility of legal cross—examination in the situation where evidence is presented on video, magistrates and judges sometimes consider this evidence to be contrary to legal standards and act accordingly (Smart, 1989:58).

Despite the problems of reporting incest, there is no doubt that reporting is an important way of saying to the child that you take their story seriously: that you believe the story; that they deserve protection from the abuse; and that the perpetrator deserves to be punished. Of course the more that rape and incest come before the law, the more incest becomes a public issue. However, it is not the responsibility of raped women and children to make public, or to politicise, their rapes. Each case of child sexual abuse is different and it is important to consider all the factors involved. Well informed and sympathetic legal advice is imperative in order to make a decision about reporting the incest of children.

### ***You Koories (Murrís) Out There***

No more being shame  
'cause you's were never the blame  
Tell your Daughter  
Tell your Sons  
Don't let them be the next Ones  
Warn them of the dangers  
And tell them it's not only strangers

*Peggy Sue Cummins*

## **Chapter 7: The politics of incest**

Since definitions of, and concerns with, incest have changed over time, and since there is still some confusion over the meaning of the term 'incest', it might be useful to consider here how these different definitions and concerns have arisen within particular political contexts.

Early legal definitions of incest were based on sexual relations occurring between close family members (the practice of intra-familial sex). The idea of consent was irrelevant to these definitions. It was not until the late 1880's and the rise of first wave feminism and the social purity movements, that child sexual abuse, as the harm of inter-generational sex, was legislated against. This was done through child protection acts and through 'age of consent' laws which made it an offence to have 'carnal knowledge' of children. While consent was a feminist issue in these debates, it was not an issue for the social purist movements. The way in which the resulting laws forbidding sex with children were worded, meant that consent remained a non-issue.

There was a strong resistance to legislating against sexual abuse within the family. This resistance took the form of denial. The first modern legislation against incest as child sexual abuse within the family was instituted in Britain in 1908. In the debates leading up to the introduction of this law a member of the House of Lords argued "I do not know the statistics, but I cannot help thinking that the amount of mischief is very small" (Hansard 1908, in Carol

Smart, 1989:53).

Since this time the public has been forced to acknowledge the widespread incidence of intra-familial, inter-generational rape, as woman after woman has come forward to tell her story. This 'speaking out' about incest/rape has gathered momentum over the last twenty to thirty years as incest survivors, feminist lawyers and rape crisis workers have, within the context of second wave feminism, made public and politicised the extent of sexual violence.

### **Modern Courts of Law**

Modern courts of law are generally uninterested in consensual incest between adults. The focus now tends to be on incest as the sexual abuse of children by family members. 'Family members' usually refers to those of direct biological lineage, that is, the father, brother or grandfather of the abused child. In some jurisdictions laws on incest have been widened to include step—fathers, adoptive fathers, step-brothers and adoptive brothers of the abused child. In cases of incest the notion of consent is irrelevant. The sexual abuse of children outside 'the family' is addressed in a separate law for instance, Sexual Offences against Minors, or, Sexual Offences against Children. As in the laws on incest, current laws on sexual offences against children do not need notions of consent if the sexual abuse occurred while the child was under 16 years (the age of consent for girls). From this age onward, the laws pertain to rape or sexual assault.

### **Contested meanings**

Incest is one of the most contested sites within the law. Over the past hundred years or so (approximately mid 19th century onwards) there has been a power struggle occurring in western courts of law. This power struggle has been, and continues to be, between the medical 'experts' (ie the 'Psych' Professions) and The Law. Since the 1980's incest has been an important focus, or site, of this struggle (see, Smart, 1989 57). Before this time, the psych professions had a tradition of believing all incest to be a female fantasy. Because they believed that in most cases incest had not actually occurred, psychs were seldom called as expert witnesses for the prosecution. Now psychologists and psychiatrists are often called as 'experts' in incest cases. Of course, many psychiatrists and psychologists still believe incest to be a fantasy. Thus incest is also a site of contest within the medical professions. Feminist lawyers and 'experts' complicate such struggles because, while their focus is different, their concerns are similar: the harm done to the child. Thus feminists too are involved in power struggles over the meaning and existence of incest. One such area of debate is around the so-called 'False Memory Syndrome'. Women and children sing the courts are caught up in these power struggles. Within this modern medico-legal context the difficulty of 'proving' a case of incest is not only attributable to the law versus the expert (eg the legal admissibility of video tapes of 'experts' interviewing the child) but to the age-old misogynist constructions of women and girls as unreliable witnesses, and liars.

### **Creating feminist 'spaces' within the law**

The volatile situation existing within the courts, caused by the power struggles over meanings of incest, is not wholly negative. It is possible that this volatility can be used by feminists to 'create spaces' within the law for feminist meanings of incest.

Of course, it is important to recognise that the institution of law exercises more power, or has more access to 'legitimised' power, than do feminist agitators. Nevertheless, when feminists have been involved in struggles around child sexual abuse, as in first wave feminism, the problem of violence against women and children has been forced into public and legal focus. However, there is always the danger that feminism can be seen as just another welfare ideology. The importance of feminism is that it goes beyond the problem of individual sexual harm to a critique of the institution of the family; a critique of the institutions of medicine and the law; a critique of constructions and practices of sexuality; and a critique of the 'normalisation' of incest and rape. That is to say, feminism does more than publicise incest: it politicises it.

Given the legal definition of incest as intra-familial 'sexual intercourse', with no reference to

'consent', there seems to be a need for feminists to discuss whether or not there is a need to:

- A. Campaign to widen the legal definition of 'incest' to include all or some of those crimes which presently come under the law concerning the sexual abuse of children.
- B. To abandon the use of the term 'incest' while retaining an interest in potential legal definitions of the rape of children by male adults who are in positions of authority in relation to these children (eg campaign for a legal definition such as rape in the family')
- C. To continue to use and to politicise the term incest as rape; that is, to shift the focus from the current legal definition of incest to a feminist definition of incest (this seems to be the current feminist position) or
- D. To abandon the term incest and shift the focus from legal terminology to a feminist terminology, such as father/daughter rape, or rape in the family. This would politicise this particular form of rape of children.

The widening of the term incest in the legal arena seems improbable given its traditional meaning as sexual intercourse between immediate family members. The broadening of the term 'family' may be more open to negotiation than the introduction of consent into the incest law. However, to broaden the notion of family without introducing notions of consent could raise considerable problems. The co-existence of the terms 'rape' and 'the family' are difficult in legal terminology (given the idealisation of the family). Nevertheless, this co-existence was effected in laws against 'rape in marriage'. Perhaps then it is possible to campaign for a law concerned with 'rape in the family'. That is, feminists could abandon the term incest altogether. Yet, a lot of hard work has gone into politicizing incest as a particular form of rape of children.

In the context of debates around incest and the formulation of new laws, it is often the case that many ways of understanding incest are operating. However, these differences are not openly acknowledged. This is particularly evident in the legal desire to create one law which purports to know what incest is (Bell:~47-8). Despite obvious difficulties, the current ambiguity of the meaning of 'incest as a harm' gives rise to a situation which might be exploitable. A considerable amount of discussion needs to occur around the term 'incest' if the legal definition is thought to be important. What is equally important perhaps is the feminist recognition that the law is not the only site for resistance to rape/incest. It may be that maintaining feminist definitions of incest, with scant regard for legal definitions, will continue to be the feminist answer to this problem concerning different meanings of incest. Even if one were to focus on the legal system, it is useful to acknowledge the many ways of understanding, or talking about, incest.

### **Incest and Patriarchy**

Below is an overview of how non-feminist concerns with incest 'as a harm' have been differently framed in various historical periods.

Non feminist concerns around incest have generally been associated with ideas of societal chaos - supposedly stemming from the breaking of religious or political codes of sexuality. These non feminist concerns with incest as a disruption to the organisation of society have been explained in different historical periods as:

- a disruption to political, economic, or other allegiances organized through the practice of men's exchange of women between families and other groups.
- a disruption to the good order of the family and 'the state' through the incestuous conception of genetically imperfect offspring
- a disruption to social order through pathological sex acts attributable to antisocial personality disorders
- a disruption to the family unit; giving rise to, or being the result of, a 'dysfunctional' family

### *The Incest Taboo?*

Because of these concerns with incest as a harm to society, it is widely claimed that there is and always has been a world-wide incest taboo.

At the Brisbane Rape and Incest Crisis Centre we are not convinced that a father/daughter incest taboo (if it has ever existed) has ever worked in the interest of maintaining social order. Rather, we believe that it is the actual practice of incest as father-daughter rape, not the incest taboo, which provides the key to making sense of the social structure of patriarchy under which we presently live.

That is, we believe that patriarchy - as a system of societal order in which men have more access to power than women - is maintained through the sexual, political, social and economic subordination of women. Within this system women's fear of men's potential violence, especially when this violence is experienced or threatened at a very young age, has proved to be a particularly successful strategy in the maintenance of patriarchal order.

Importantly, for us at BRICC the 'harm of incest' is the harm done by men to the bodies, psyches and lives of all women and children.

### ***poetry***

Do you really? I hear you say.  
Take one step back, uncomfortable laugh.  
Do you really call yourself a feminist?  
I never would have guessed.  
You look like such a nice girl.

And I cried when you told me  
Someone hurt the farmer's daughter.  
The woman 'round the corner.  
No, I didn't know her.  
Does it matter?

And I sat and watched the movie  
No one seemed to notice  
How he spoke down to her  
The way she made the dinner  
Set the table 'just the way he likes it'  
And still he wasn't happy.

And look at all the billboards  
Telling me what I should be  
To be loved  
To be wanted  
Telling what's worthwhile and making worth  
beyond my reach.

And you ask, why do you look so sad?  
And I realise you haven't noticed anything.  
Just a movie  
Just a billboard  
Just a man and his wife.  
And it's tlien that I know  
Perhaps you'll never see the way I do  
Even looking in the same direction.

*Bella Holmes*

### **Understanding Incest**

This booklet has talked a lot about the law, and the way in which the law is a site of struggle over the meanings of incest and the rape of children. The law decides what is a crime, and

who is a criminal: what violence is legitimate, and what violence is not legitimate. Yet, while workers at BRICC recognize the importance of the law in terms of its reflection and construction of the meanings of men's violence in western culture – we do not see the law as our only site of struggle. Law reform is only one of many ways in which we can challenge men's violence against women and children. Women and children resist men's violence in many ways. It is important to acknowledge the many ways we, as both children and adults, have resisted incest: staying out late, running away, telling a friend, challenging the dominant family stories, challenging the dominant cultural stories, refusing to believe we are to blame, telling our story!

This booklet too challenges some of the ways in which incest is thought about and offers a feminist way of understanding incest. It is itself a form of struggle against incest. This is the case for all our work at BRICC. BRICC does not offer counselling services, rather it offers women a feminist way of understanding the violence that has happened to them. At BRICC we do not see incest as merely an individual act of violence, but as part of a much wider culture of violence: a culture in which women and children are constructed as powerless and as able to be raped. We want to change this perception of women and children, and we want the violence to end. For this reason we wish to politicise the violence of men against women and children. Women and children can, and do, do this in many different ways. One of the many ways in which we do this is through joining together with women internationally and all over Australia in local 'Reclaim the Night' marches. These marches are a way of celebrating women's power as well as recognizing the limitations placed on women's freedom by the violence of this culture. Reclaim the Night marches usually take place on the last Friday of October. We hope you will join us.

Survival and Resistance are key words at BRISSC and we are always encouraged by women's innovative survival strategies and resistance to the violence of patriarchy.

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