The Incest Taboo: a collection of disaster theories

- Sexual competition in family
- Marry out or die out
- Terminological confusion
- Freud’s Oedipus and Electra Complexes
- Inbreeding depression
- The Westermarck’s Effect
Incest and the Marital Universe

Exogamy boundary: one must marry outside this group

Endogamy boundary: one must marry inside this group

Terms coined by McLennan in 1865 in reference to descent groups
Some Endogamous Rules

- Age
- Generation
- Religion
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Caste
- Social class
A distinction

- Incest deals with the prohibition of sexual relations
- Rules of exogamy and endogamy define the universe of legitimate mates
- In some societies one can have sex with an individual but cannot marry them
Standard range of the incest taboo in the US. Red is universally prohibited while yellow is sometimes prohibited.
Incest Laws in the USA

[Map of the USA showing different states highlighted in various colors indicating the types of incest laws.]
Marriage Laws

- Biblical: extensive bans on affinal marriages but no ban on cousin marriage. Derives from Church of England canon law.

- Western: few bans on affinal marriages but prohibition on cousin marriage. Derived from Roman Catholic canon law.
Affinal Marriage Bans and Cousin Marriage

- In more than a dozen states it is unlawful for a man to marry his
  - Sister-in-law
  - Mother-in-law
  - Step-daughter
  - Step-mother

- 30 states in the US regulate cousin marriage but no Western nations have any regulation on cousin marriage
Causation in incest

Proximate cause
- Westermarck effect which suggests that individuals who are reared together find each other unattractive as mates. Such individuals are usually siblings.

Ultimate cause
- Inbreeding leads to the production of less fit offspring for two reasons
  - Deleterious pairings of recessive genes
  - Reduction of genetic diversity
Evidence for the Westermarck Effect

- Kibbutz marriage patterns
  - Yonina Talmon
- Sim pua marriages in Taiwan
  - Arthur Wolfe
- Parallel cousin marriage in Jordan
  - Janet McCabe
- Moral sentiments
  - Lieberman
Moral Sentiments and Incest

- We have a kinship estimator based on patterns of interaction (co-residence based on common parental investment). That is, we learn who are kin and non-kin.
- This is fed into a sexual value estimator – high value for non-kin.
- Decided not to ask whether they had committed incest but rather their views on the morality of incest.
- Interview data indicated a positive correlation between duration of co-residence (length of time living with siblings) and judgements of moral wrongness of incest.
- Furthermore, co-residence duration is a stronger predictor than kinship.
- Research undermines phenotype matching or MHC similarity.
Consequences by degree of inbreeding

The Effects of Inbreeding

Disability and Mortality

Degree of relatedness

Disability
Disability & Mortality