

Gender Identify and Agency of Traumatized Subjects in Incestuous Family

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Abstract : Incestuous abuse can be considered a form of domestic violence that exemplifies gender inequality. It challenges the common image of home as “haven of safety”. In Taiwan, even after years of feminist NGOs’ effort to encourage victims to speak up, the shared cultural representations of family, still praising piety towards the parents, seem to keep the incest trauma in secret. As clinical practitioners have observed, most devastating psychological sequels of incest trauma are often related to silencing. Thus one can expect that in families centered cultures, the difficulties for victims to disclose are greater, and the traumatic consequences more severe. This poses crucial therapeutic issues for clinicians working in those cultures. Since 2009, the author, a trained psychoanalyst and researcher, has been conducting “clinical fieldwork” on incest trauma in Taiwan. Employing ethnographical method, our theoretical references are both psychoanalytical and anthropological. The necessity of interdisciplinary efforts in incest trauma research will be addressed and discussed. The analyses of the present paper will focus on five incestuous families: four Han families, and one aboriginal. Although Taiwanese aboriginal peoples have been pretty much sinicized since decades, it is worth observing the convergent and divergent aspects in these two cultures. Moreover, findings of a previous research conducted in France during 2002-2004 will serve as background for the purpose of comparison. The results will be presented along with three questions: 1) How the perception of family influences the process of disclosure? 2) How the incestuous experience comes into play with victims’ gender identity and sexuality, pivotal for the subjectification? 3) How victims more successful in gendered subjectification modify their dynamics with their traumatizing family? This research finds that most victims tend to defend their own incestuous families, and that victims’ subjectivity and agency are actually entangled in the power structure of incestuous family.

Keywords : incestuous family, subjectification, gender identity, agency

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