

## Legal and Medical Perspectives on Incestuous Sexual Orientation in Men

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### Abstract

This research explores the controversial phenomenon of incestuous behavior in men, emphasizing that such tendencies can reflect a sexual preference rather than being directly caused by borderline or other personality traits or by early maladaptive cognitive schemas. The study involved 48 males with confirmed incestuous tendencies. Nearly half of the participants (49%) exhibited borderline personality traits alongside abandonment maladaptive cognitive schemas, with a median age of 38.17 years ( $SD \pm 9.24$ ) and an average educational level of 13.11 years ( $SD \pm 1.71$ ). Data collection employed the Millon Multiaxial Clinical Inventory-III, the Young Cognitive Schema Questionnaire (YSQ-L3a), and the Paraphilic Disorders Questionnaire (PDQ). Analysis revealed notable correlations between borderline traits and the abandonment cognitive schema, indicating frequent interaction between these factors. However, while borderline traits were associated with incestuous tendencies, no direct link was observed with the abandonment cognitive schema. Factor analysis further showed that neither borderline traits, abandonment schemas, nor their interaction reliably predicted incestuous behavior. These results suggest that male incestuous inclination may stem from atypical sexual interests rather than underlying personality or paraphilic disorders.

**Keywords:** Men, Borderline, Cognitive schemas, Sexual orientation, Incest

### Introduction

Despite being part of social reality, incest continues to be a largely taboo topic within the scientific domain. According to DSM-5, incest—considered a subtype of pedophilia—is defined as a sexual attraction, orientation, and/or preference that can result in sexual relations between parents and children [1]. From a socio-legal perspective, incestuous behavior is classified as a paraphilic pedophilia-type disorder [2] and constitutes a criminal act when it involves consensual sexual activity

between direct relatives or siblings. Legally, incest presents complexities that often conflict with the moral standards upheld by society. The systemic approach to family dynamics suggests that individuals may develop incest [3] tendencies when family subsystems lack clear boundaries, although numerous cultures condemn incest as an abnormal form of relationship, a condemnation reinforced by Christianity and criminal law.

Incest is a phenomenon that can be explored from multiple angles. Historically, it has existed within social structures, and in certain cultural contexts [4] or religious communities [5], incestuous relationships have been accepted through mechanisms of groupthink [6]. Research, including DiPlacidi's studies [7], indicates that incest arises from the interaction of various factors, such as sexual preferences for children, emotional or sexual immaturity, opportunities for abuse, belief in male sexual entitlement, or inability to recognize the consequences of such acts [8]. Evidence also suggests that incestuous

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sexual preference often stems from specific cognitive distortions, beliefs, or attitudes, in which sexual impulses may be misdirected and contribute to a potential predisposition.

The near-universal prohibition against sibling incest is frequently cited as a prime example of a moral norm with evolutionary roots. Westermarck's theory [9] argues that humans have developed a sexual aversion to childhood co-residents as an adaptive mechanism to prevent inbreeding, explaining why incest is widely considered immoral. Nevertheless, feeling sexual disgust toward childhood co-residents does not logically guarantee the judgment that sibling sexual activity is immoral [10]. This gap between instinctive responses and moral norms helps explain the lack of truly universal moral rules [11], despite the universality of fundamental instincts. Hence, even the prohibition of family incest is not universally human.

Yet, the variability of moral norms is not boundless. Maier observes that "norms tend to cluster under certain general themes," while Zanarini *et al.* [12] highlight that cooperative behaviors are particularly prone to cross-cultural disagreement. The emergence of broad moral themes does not imply that norms are solely dictated by biological instincts. Across societies, individuals capable of normative reasoning share similar drives, confront comparable challenges, and face similar selection pressures. Consequently, it is expected that overarching moral themes would appear independently across moral systems, even though broader variation remains theoretically possible within biological constraints [13]. It is unlikely that all moral beliefs are direct products of natural selection. Sociological and psychological factors also play significant roles. Nonetheless, some researchers propose that certain fundamental and widespread moral norms may reflect adaptations derived from biological predispositions [14]. Carr and Francis [15] assert that "natural selection has had an extraordinary direct influence on the shaping of sexual preferences, our 'basic evaluative tendencies' and these basic evaluative tendencies have in turn had a major influence on the evaluative judgments we would make." Even this cautious stance may overstate the case. While the evaluative tendency to consider incest immoral is among our most "rudimentary," evidence suggests that opposition to incest was neither directly shaped nor could have been shaped by natural selection via an instinct with different content [16].

Delcea *et al.* [17], in research including 837 participants, distinguished between sexual interest in children and the tendency toward incest, showing that these are separate phenomena. This distinction suggests that the analysis of predisposition to incestuous sexual preferences must consider unique contributing factors. Notably, the literature does not support sexual psychopathy as a predictor of incestuous sexual preference. At the societal level, sibling incest emerges as the most common manifestation.

Freud's psychoanalytic model of psychosexual development addresses incest through the phallic stage, focusing on the Oedipal complex in boys and the Electra complex in girls. According to Freud, puberty triggers incestuous desire, which must be consciously suppressed to allow separation from parents. In this sense, incest is framed as a barrier imposed by societal and cultural norms [18].

Delcea [19] further proposed that incest can precede borderline personality disorder (BPD), particularly in hospitalized women. Meta-analyses support correlations between experiences of incestuous abuse and a BPD diagnosis in women [20]. However, empirical understanding of incest in men remains extremely limited. Research addressing predictors of male incestuous behavior is mostly restricted to case studies, and controlled comparisons between non-incestual pedophilia and incest, or pedophilia versus pedophilic sexual orientation with the incest subtype, are virtually nonexistent.

Most studies on incest focus on the experiences and consequences for victims. In contrast, this study emphasizes psychosexual dimensions specific to male incestuous sexual preference. Prior research has overwhelmingly centered on female populations, leaving a significant gap concerning men. For the male participants in this study, incestuous sexual preference was verified through case assessment. The principal aim is to demonstrate that such preference is not inevitably shaped by personality disorders or prior abuse. Etiology of sexual preferences should be evaluated independently of sexual psychopathology. Literature identifies genetic factors, neural structures, and learning processes (experience-driven neural modifications), along with environmental influences, as contributing to the development of certain sexual behaviors [21]. The present study seeks to illuminate characteristics of male incestuous sexual preference, highlighting that neither underlying personality disorders nor maladaptive

cognitive schemas directly determine these tendencies. In other words, incestuous sexual preference can exist independently of personality pathology or dysfunctional cognitive frameworks.

## Materials and Methods

### Instruments

Electronic data collection was performed using three standardized tools: the Millon Multiaxial Clinical Inventory - III (MCMI-III), the Young Cognitive Schema Questionnaire (YSQ-L3a), and the Paraphilic Disorders Questionnaire (PDQ).

### Procedure and methods

Due to the sensitive focus on incestuous sexual preference, participant selection was carried out with particular attention to ethical considerations during 2015–2022. Enrollment was voluntary, and participants underwent psychological assessment at three locations: six individuals at the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Cluj-Napoca, nineteen at the Institute of Sexology in Cluj-Napoca, and twenty-three at the Penitentiary Gherla, Cluj County.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Eligibility required participants to be male, over 18 years old, diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, and exhibiting confirmed incestuous sexual orientation. Individuals with neurodevelopmental, neurocognitive, or other comorbid disorders were excluded. The minimum educational attainment required was completion of ten school classes.

### Ethical considerations

All participants provided electronic informed consent, acknowledging the study's purpose, their participation, and compliance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation), which governs the processing of personal data and its free circulation, as well as Law no. 506/2004, which regulates data privacy. The research team ensured that data collection occurred in secure conditions and was strictly limited to the purposes stated. Collected information included optional e-mail addresses, socio-demographic details, and responses to the assessment instruments.

### Methods

After completion of the assessment tools, participant responses were uploaded to a secure cloud platform. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26. Statistical processing included correlation tests and factorial ANOVA. Preliminary checks confirmed that all items were completed and responses were free from material errors.

### Participants

The final sample comprised 48 male participants from the Institute of Forensic Medicine, the Institute of Sexology, and the Gherla Prison in Cluj County, Romania. Each participant was evaluated for borderline personality disorder, early maladaptive schemas—particularly Abandonment—and incestuous sexual preferences. The average age of participants was  $m = 38.17$  ( $SD \pm 9.24$ ), and the mean level of educational attainment was  $m = 13.11$  ( $SD \pm 1.71$ ). Detailed descriptive statistics are presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Age	48	38.17	9.24
Educational level	48	13.11	1.71

### Statistics

Building on the observation that prior research in this area has primarily involved male samples, this study sought to examine potential associations among incestuous sexual preferences, borderline psychopathological vulnerability, and the maladaptive cognitive schema of Abandonment. The Abandonment schema refers to the belief that significant others will be unable to provide consistent emotional support, connection, strength, or practical protection due to factors such as emotional instability (e.g., angry outbursts), unreliability, erratic presence, imminent death, or the possibility of leaving the individual for someone perceived as superior.

The current study focused on exploring borderline personality disorders, incestuous sexual preferences, and the Abandonment cognitive schema. Descriptive statistical analysis (**Table 2**) revealed the following: borderline personality disorders showed a mean of  $m = 81.72$  with  $SD \pm 13.19$ , incestuous sexual preference had

a mean of  $m = 92.47$  with  $SD \pm 5.32$ , and the Abandonment cognitive schema displayed a mean of  $m = 81.61$  with  $SD \pm 14.67$ .

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistic indicators

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Borderline personality disorders	48	81.72	13.19
Incestuous sexual preference	48	92.47	5.32
Abandonment cognitive schema	48	81.61	14.67

The analysis of the studied variables revealed that the obtained scores corresponded to clinical-level ranges. Accordingly, borderline personality disorder and Abandonment cognitive schema scores were categorized into clinical versus subclinical levels.

## Results and Discussion

### *Borderline Personality Disorders and Abandonment Cognitive Schemas*

Previous research has consistently identified links between borderline personality disorders and the Abandonment cognitive schema. In this study, the association between vulnerability to borderline personality disorder and the Abandonment schema (**Table 2**) was explored under the assumption that individuals with this cognitive schema perceive close relationships as unstable and unpredictable. Such perceptions often trigger intense negative emotional reactions, including anger, which are frequently observed in borderline personality disorders.

Correlation analyses confirmed significant associations among these variables. Specifically, for the male sample in this study, borderline personality disorders and Abandonment cognitive schemas exhibited a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.844$ ,  $Sig. = 0.000$ ).

### *Incestuous Sexual Preferences, Personality Disorders, and Maladaptive Cognitive Schemas*

The relationship between incestuous sexual preferences, borderline personality disorders, and the Abandonment cognitive schema was further examined. Existing theoretical frameworks suggest that vulnerability to borderline personality disorders, along with the presence of an Abandonment schema, may influence incestuous

sexual preferences. Statistical results indicated a significant positive correlation between incestuous sexual preferences and borderline personality disorders ( $r = 0.178$ ,  $Sig. = 0.045$ ), while no significant correlation was detected between incestuous sexual preferences and the Abandonment cognitive schema.

### *Determinants of Incestuous Sexual Preferences*

To investigate the impact of these factors on incestuous sexual preferences, factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. This approach allowed for the assessment of the overall effect of all factors combined, the individual main effects, and potential interactions between them. Pre-analysis checks confirmed that eligibility criteria were met: the dependent variable, incestuous sexual preferences, was measured quantitatively, and data accuracy was verified.

Group sizes were consistent, and the distribution of incestuous sexual preference scores approximated normality, with skewness and kurtosis within  $\pm 1.96$  (skewness =  $-0.317/\pm 0.218$ ; kurtosis =  $-0.801/\pm 0.433$ ). Homogeneity of variance was confirmed using Levene's test ( $F = 0.999$ ,  $Sig. = 0.521$ ). Key results from this analysis are summarized in **Table 3**.

**Table 3.** Between Subjects Effects

Source	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Global effect	1.408	.108	.707
Abandonment cognitive schema	.994	.475	.236
Borderline personality disorders	1.594	.090	.449
Interaction Abandonment cognitive schema* Borderline personality disorders	1.269	.218	.530

Analysis of the global effect revealed a non-significant outcome ( $F = 1.408$ ,  $Sig. = .108$ ). When the factors were examined independently, the Abandonment cognitive schema ( $F = 0.994$ ,  $Sig. = .475$ ) and borderline personality disorder ( $F = 1.594$ ,  $Sig. = .090$ ) also failed to reach statistical significance. This indicates that neither factor in the proposed model exerts a substantial influence on variations in incestuous sexual preferences. While borderline personality disorder showed a marginally greater effect (partial eta squared = .236) compared to the Abandonment cognitive schema (partial eta squared = .449), neither factor demonstrated an

impact strong enough to be considered meaningful. Additionally, the interaction between these two factors was not significant ( $F = 1.269$ ,  $\text{Sig.} = .218$ ), with a partial eta squared of .530, confirming the lack of a detectable combined effect.

The study aimed to delineate incestuous sexual orientations in men by distinguishing between personality traits, paraphilic psychopathological tendencies, and early maladaptive cognitive schemas. Findings suggest that male incestuous orientation is not necessarily determined by personality disorders or paraphilic characteristics. The strong correlation between borderline personality disorders and the Abandonment cognitive schema ( $r = 0.844$ ,  $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$ ) underscores a robust link between these constructs, whereas associations with incestuous sexual preferences were comparatively weak [12]. This pattern is consistent with prior literature addressing the relationship between BPD and maladaptive cognitive schemas [15, 22, 23].

Borderline personality disorder is a prevalent psychiatric condition [24], characterized by two symptom clusters: acute manifestations, including self-harm and impulsive behaviors, and temperamental traits, such as low self-esteem, fear of abandonment, and expressed or suppressed anger [17]. Research has repeatedly documented the connection between borderline personality disorder and the Abandonment cognitive schema [19, 25], highlighting the direct interaction between early maladaptive schemas and the development of BPD. Building on the conceptual framework proposed by Carr and Francis [15], Young suggested that BPD involves regression to intense emotional states reminiscent of childhood experiences. He identified key schema modes, including the Abused and Abandoned Child and the Angry/Impulsive Child. The Abused and Abandoned Child mode reflects a state of desperation rooted in childhood experiences of abandonment or abuse.

In this study, male participants with incestuous sexual preferences demonstrated borderline personality structures influenced by early maladaptive cognitive schemas. While these schemas may shape personality development, their effect on sexual preferences and incestuous tendencies appears indirect and undetermined. Mishaw [26, 27] has noted that prior research often emphasizes personality traits as central to sexual pattern formation, while downplaying the role of external environmental factors and contextual influences.

To investigate potential associations within the context of incestuous behavior, a correlational analysis was conducted focusing on incestuous sexual preferences, the Abandonment cognitive schema, and personality disorders. Within our sample, no significant correlation emerged between incestuous sexual preferences and the Abandonment cognitive schema, suggesting that this cognitive factor does not directly influence incestuous tendencies in men for this study. Conversely, a significant correlation was observed between incestuous sexual preferences and borderline personality disorder, implying that vulnerability to BPD may be linked to the development of incestuous sexual tendencies. However, a significant correlation indicates an association rather than a causal effect; it does not clarify whether borderline personality traits directly determine the incestuous inclination.

Further analysis using the Fisher index derived from ANOVA examined variations in incestuous sexual preferences as a function of both the Abandonment cognitive schema and borderline personality traits. Results indicated no significant changes in the dependent variable (incestuous sexual preferences) attributable to either factor individually or their interaction. These findings suggest that neither the Abandonment cognitive schema nor borderline personality traits serve as direct determinants of incestuous tendencies. The statistically non-significant Fisher index reinforces this interpretation, demonstrating that even the interaction between borderline traits and the Abandonment cognitive schema does not significantly influence incestuous sexual preferences. This indicates that other, unexamined factors likely account for the observed incestuous tendencies [28–30].

To further explore the potential impact of these factors, a factorial analysis was performed to assess the individual and combined effects of borderline personality traits and the Abandonment cognitive schema on incestuous sexual preferences. The results confirmed that neither borderline personality disorder, the Abandonment cognitive schema, nor their interaction significantly affected the dependent variable. Although an association exists between borderline personality disorder and incestuous sexual preferences, it does not exert a measurable impact. Likewise, the Abandonment cognitive schema showed no significant association or effect. These findings emphasize that in this sample, incestuous sexual preferences cannot be explained by borderline personality disorder or maladaptive cognitive schemas,



suggesting that the underlying determinants lie elsewhere [31–35].

### Conclusion

Analysis of the male sample with confirmed incestuous sexual tendencies indicates that sexual preferences are not directly shaped by personality disorders or specific cognitive schemas observed clinically. Given the limited inclusion of male populations in existing studies, these findings underscore the importance of further investigating this sensitive and controversial area of sexual behavior.

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