

Incest Taboo Uncovered

► THE INCEST taboo is an empty prohibition against something people naturally find unpleasant, a U.S. anthropologist says.

Regardless of whether they are actually related, children who grow up as brother and sister have a distinct aversion to sexual relations and marriage with each other, said Arthur P. Wolf of Cornell University.

In explaining the taboo, most biologists and sociologists have argued that it exists to prevent genetically dangerous unions which would otherwise be desirable to people.

Not true, said Dr. Wolf. Proof for his contention comes from the marriage customs of a small village in Taiwan. Until the 1920s it was common practice for parents in Hsiachichou to arrange marriages while their children were infants. The girl, often less than a year old, was taken in by the boy's family, and she and her future husband were raised as brother

and sister until both were old enough to marry.

Dr. Wolf's question was, How did this custom affect sexual desire in the marriage? By questioning the villagers at length, he found first of all that few, no matter how old they were, had wanted to go through with the marriage in their youth.

Then in the mid '20s when industry moved in and the Government began frowning on the custom, young people were given a way out.

Dr. Wolf believes the reluctance to wed was due to a natural sexual aversion between the couple who had grown up together in the same household. When asked why they did not like the custom, some villagers called it "shameful" or "uninteresting." Others answered the question with embarrassed silence. The only other time they were similarly silent was when he asked them directly about sex.

Also, men married to their "sister"

were three times more likely to seek out a prostitute or take a mistress.

Similar evidence comes from the Israeli kibbutz. Here, children are raised together in "peer groups" but in nurseries rather than families. There is no prohibition against marrying a member of the same peer group, noted Dr. Wolf, yet not one case of such a marriage has been found.

Several explanations for this are available, including the oedipus complex.

However, Dr. Wolf said in *American Anthropologist*, 68:883, 1966, when children grow up in the same family they are forced to control their impulses and passions toward each other.

He believes the memory of punishments and prohibitions, as well as too great familiarity, blocks the appearance of later desire for one another.

When blood brother and sister are not raised together, there is no emotional resistance to incest.

Early Hormones Set Sex

► MALENESS and femaleness are largely determined by the presence or absence of sex hormones in early life, a California study with animals has shown.

Absence of the hormones at a critical period in infancy gives rise to femaleness, while their presence leads to maleness, said Dr. Richard E. Whalen, a psychobiologist at the University of California at Irvine.

Dr. Whalen said his work on rats and more recently, cats, indicates the need for caution in giving hormones to pregnant women to prevent miscarriage. The danger, he said, is in masculinizing the female offspring.

However, Dr. Georgeanna Seegar Jones of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, said that no hormonal substance now given pregnant women has such a masculinizing effect.

Females have a critical period in early life when they do not release hormones, according to Dr. Whalen's research. This time of "castration" is necessary for the later development of femaleness. Thereafter, the pituitary

gland secretes hormones in a "cycling" pattern, related to ovulation.

If a female baby rat is given a hormone—it makes little difference whether it is estrogen (female hormone) or androgen (male hormone)—she will be sterile and display some male characteristics, Dr. Whalen said.

Basic changes must be taking place in the brain, he noted, since pituitary secretion is ruled from there.

Maleness arises from the presence of hormones during the critical period in infancy. Throughout life thereafter, the male rat has a "steady" pattern of hormonal release.

Dr. Whalen said the male animal's sexual behavior can be changed only if he is castrated at birth and deprived of hormones altogether. This seems to weaken sexual desire. It does not, however, make the male act like a female, unless he is later given estrogen.

Dr. Whalen's research suggests that the male and female brains probably function in different ways—a difference created by the early presence or absence of sex hormones.

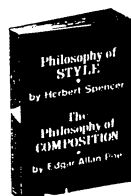
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"If hospitals are to attract the competent personnel required to furnish the kind of hospital care to which Americans have become accustomed, the gap between hospital and industry salaries will have to be virtually closed," Dr. Crosby said.



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