

*En familia**Sex, Incest, and Violence in Mexican Families*

“My breasts stopped growing when my grandfather touched them,” Elisa revealed in explaining her petite body, which has the appearance of a slender, flat-chested adolescent. Tearfully she described the sandpaper sensation of her maternal grandfather’s hands on her tender skin, an aging man who in his eighties fondled her breasts from age seven to eleven. Back then Elisa’s father’s behavior was also confusing to her. After his night shift as a cab driver in Ciudad Juárez, Elisa and her mom would patiently listen over lunch as her father shared the horror stories and dangers he experienced at work and how blessed he felt to be back home after a long night in the frightening streets of the city. Then, after lunch, he would take Elisa by the hand to accompany him for a nap that never felt right.

“You must change, you must change, because if you don’t, I kill you.” Helián still recalls the words that his father would repeat consistently while using his thumb to penetrate his anus during his childhood from ages three to eight. At the time, Helián was an effeminate boy who suffered in pain and confusion, not understanding what his father was trying to tell him with these horrifying actions and death threats. “But change what?” he wondered. Why would his father kill him? Helián never asked; he was afraid. At the age of eight, his father penetrated him anally with his penis and left him bleeding on the bathroom floor. He received medical attention, but the tragic event was never discussed in the family. When I interviewed Helián, he was living legally as Heliana in Monterrey, a college-educated, bright, beloved, and popular school teacher in her forties who takes self-prescribed hormones and dresses modestly. “Have you ever watched *Tootsie*?” Heliana asked me in an animated tone of voice, as she explained that she was neither transgender nor transsexual and that Dustin Hoffman offered her years ago a cre-

ative and humane way to survive in homophobic Mexico, where, to be an effeminate gay man with a soft, gentle voice was a death sentence.

“Why the fuck my parents took so much care of me, if in their own house their own sons abused me, and they did not even know about it!” Renata exclaimed with tears of rage. Sobbing, she described the scattered but graphic memories she began to experience vividly and with shock and confusion after she and her husband attended a spiritual retreat the year before we met for her interview in Mexico City. In her memories, it became more and more clear that her oldest brother forced her to have sex with him when she was four or six and he was seventeen or nineteen. Raised in an upper-middle-class family concerned about the dangers of the outside world, Renata and all of her siblings completed college while enjoying a pampered life of comfort and privilege, private schools, and at least one vacation trip to Europe. Renata’s parents, now deceased, will never know what she experienced with her brothers. Although she has told her sisters about it, she does not know if she will ever confront her brothers.

“Isn’t your stepdaughter becoming pretty? Why don’t you check her out?” Although Samuel felt confused by these questions asked by a woman he met through a chat room as he experimented with cybersex in his free time at a cybercafé in Guadalajara, the conversation also aroused his curiosity. Eventually he yielded to the temptation to engage in sexual activity with his eleven- or twelve-year-old stepdaughter. Carefully hiding his actions from his wife, he fondled her in her sleep and later undressed in front of her and kissed her deeply on the mouth. Eventually the guilt overcame him and he confessed to his wife about his cybersex activities and what he had done to the girl. His wife was devastated but appreciative of his honesty; together they sought professional help.

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You have begun to read a book that will be very difficult to get through. Needless to say, the entire project was an emotionally challenging endeavor. After listening to each one of the life stories, however, I believe it would have been even more painful for me not to give life to this book.

This book is about the life stories of sixty Mexican women and men who, like Elisa, Renata, Helián, and Samuel, honored me with their trust

and shared their most intimate and frequently untold stories of incestuous relationships and sexual violence in their families. I met and conducted in-depth interviews with these adult women and men in Ciudad Juárez, Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Monterrey in 2005 and 2006, and established contact with them through the generous support of activists, women's groups, community organizers, and other professionals. I also include the insightful and thought-provoking lessons I learned from interviews with thirty-five of these professionals.<sup>1</sup> Some of them include activists whose names now appear in publications about Mexico and human rights, policymaking, and laws aimed at protecting children and women.<sup>2</sup>

### Incest in Mexico

Why write a book about stories of incest and sexual violence in Mexican families? As a Mexican feminist who identifies as a public sociologist studying sexuality-related concerns and topics affecting the well-being and living conditions of Mexican families, I realized in 2005 that it was time for me to choose the subject for my next project. At the time, I was interested in pursuing a project that would address the urgent needs of a community that had been close to my heart for about four years: Ciudad Juárez. Since 2001, I had been visiting this border city as a long-distance volunteer to run workshops on violence against women and gender inequality for community-based agencies in the city. I have a background as a couples and family therapist working with Latina immigrant women, including Central American women who were raped during war. The experiences of these women moved me to organize the workshops, and in 2005, I asked local activists how I could be of help as a researcher. "What kind of research is needed by the professionals who work with families that have experienced sexual violence?" I consistently inquired in these conversations. I learned that while other researchers were already highly involved in investigating the perverse disappearance and violence against hundreds of women in the city, other topics needed immediate attention, yet they had remained invisible and ignored. Through these informal conversations I learned that girls and women who seek help from community-based agencies rarely report that a stranger is the person exercising violence against them.

Rather, it is frequently someone *within* their families—not *outside* the family—who has sexually assaulted or molested them. Yet, life stories about the people who endure these experiences have not been examined and published. Incest and other sex acts within families, I learned, were the best-kept secrets of women and their families. This was an unexplored enigma for clinicians and professionals who had read little or nothing about incest or related topics in Mexico. Their limited knowledge was based on what they had recently learned from publications written and published in the United States, such as the influential work of sociologist David Finkelhor. As I did preliminary research, I learned that my activist friends in Ciudad Juárez were correct: the social sciences have been complicit in this silence. To this day, the few publications on incest-related concerns in Mexican society include personal accounts or autobiographies, descriptive statistical examinations, legal and judicial themes, and studies on popular culture in the humanities. However, there is no empirical research to date about incest, sexuality, violence, and family life in Mexican society.<sup>3</sup>

This book is a feminist informed, sociological study that documents and discusses the life stories of Mexican women and men who have experienced sexualized acts, interactions, and relationships within their families and contrasting urban patriarchal cultures and economies. In the book, I explore *why* and *how* sex, in varying forms, may be used against the will of children and women and as a complex form of power, control, and everyday family life. The women and men represented in these stories grew up in families where silence and confusion around sexuality were an unquestionable norm. I allow the stories to speak for themselves and avoid concepts such as survivor and perpetrator—concepts that some of these Mexicans actually perceived to be too pathological, foreign, or offensive to even capture the complexity of their lives; I use “victim” selectively. The stories also expose the ways in which the thrills of voluntary sex are lived within family cultures of secrets, betrayal, and lies, and the mysteries of love and romance.

Why is sexual violence in Mexican families so under-researched and under-examined? I gained some insight into this silence through my interviews. In general, the silence around sexual activity in Mexican families creates an atmosphere of ambivalence and ambiguity in which sexual secrets fester. These cultural ambiguities are reinforced by the double

standards of morality that disadvantage women within both the family and society, and by family ethics promoting the idea that women should serve the men in their families—all of which makes girls and young women especially vulnerable. In a patriarchal society where women are trained to be sexually available to men, a girl or a young woman who is forced to have sex by her uncle, for example, may perceive it as “normal” and never talk about it. This woman’s life may become an emotional labyrinth if these encounters become repetitive or seductive while she realizes that her uncle is loved by her own mother for being the generous source of economic support to her family. Some of the men that I interviewed who engaged in sex with other men of their same age group (for example, two adolescent male cousins) told me that it was difficult to know if their mutually consensual sexual encounters were always completely voluntary, or involuntary. They also explained that they were more distressed about the fact that they were having sex with another man than the fact that this man was a member of the family. The life stories that I gathered led me to question the very definitions of incest and to uncover deeper insights regarding the complex interplay of family, culture, and state that forms the backdrop of these sexual experiences. I also learned with certainty that Mexico is a profoundly sexist and homophobic society.

### Studying Incest in Mexico: Writing about Mexican Families

Incest and sexual violence in families are prevalent in the history of many cultures and societies and are not exclusive to Mexican society. Incestuous activities have been identified in influential texts in Western and Westernized societies including but not limited to the Bible, and they have been examined across all academic disciplines covering human behavior. European and U.S. male intellectuals such as Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Talcott Parsons, and Edvard Westermarck have theorized about incest from different historical periods, disciplinary perspectives, and cultural standpoints; anthropologists have offered groundbreaking revelations and examinations of these behaviors in different cultures, and psychiatrists, psychologists, and sociologists have looked at these patterns as well.

In the United States, pioneering books on incest include *Kiss Daddy Goodnight* (1978) by feminist writer and activist Louise Armstrong,

*Father-Daughter Incest* (1981) by Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman, and *The Secret Trauma* (1986) by sociologist Diana Russell, who also conducted research on incest in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> Sociologist David Finkelhor (1994) identified sexual abuse of children as an “international problem” in an ambitious and comprehensive study of twenty countries (with the United States and other developed nations included), highlighting the prevalence of these incidents involving blood relatives as well as paternal figures such as stepparents and adoptive parents across a wide variety of cultures and nations.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, although my focus is on Mexico, it is important to emphasize: Incest is not *only* a problem for this nation. Incest and sexual violence within families is a phenomenon that occurs in many societies around the world, as does sexual abuse at large.

For the purposes of this book, I consider the definition-in-progress I have suggested in the past, which actually emerged from this study: “Incest refers to sexualized contact (involuntary and/or voluntary, and the gray area in-between) within the context of the family; this may take place between individuals sharing the same bloodline and/or within close emotional family relationships and involving vertical (i.e., relatives in authority positions and minors or younger women) or horizontal relationships (i.e., relatives close in age).”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, I am still working within the conceptual traps I discuss in this book and consider that *involuntary* incest takes place through a wide array of expressions of sexual violence.<sup>7</sup> Incest is in fact diverse and complex, and it may involve varying degrees and sophisticated types of coercion. In chapter 5 I incorporate the concept of *kinship sex* as I look at a complex, non-linear multidimensional continuum between coercion and consent. All concepts—incest, sexual violence, and kinship sex—are interconnected and examined within contexts of power and control dynamics, and relationships of gender inequality shaping family life.

The goal of *Secretos de familia* is to offer a close up view of *incest* and *sexual violence where they exist* in Mexican families while also zooming out the feminist sociological lens to provide a more structural analysis of these phenomena. In other words, this book is *neither* about Mexican families per se *nor* about family life in Mexican cultures. This book is *only* about the Mexican families where incestuous activities and sexual violence have become intricate labyrinths to be deciphered by the members

of these families. Although the lines between non-incestuous families and incestuous families in Mexico may at times become fine and blurry, this book offers a critical perspective about the ways in which patriarchal beliefs and practices perceived as harmless and “normal” in mainstream, non-incestuous families may take perverse turns and create the nuanced and complex social conditions and circumstances that make girls, boys, and women vulnerable to the expressions of sexual violence I examine in this book. In other words, these Mexican-specific cases provide an opportunity to explore incest and sexual violence as sociological phenomena, rather than through an overly psychologized lens.

Because the book offers a contextual analysis, there are certain features of Mexican society that are significant in explaining incest and sexual violence at the social institutional level. As a social critic of the ways in which influential publications have promoted stereotypes about Mexican families, the book *The Children of Sánchez* comes to mind.

Repudiated by some and celebrated by others, *The Children of Sánchez* (1961) was first published in English by U.S. American anthropologist Oscar Lewis as an “autobiography” of a family living in Tepito, a working-class section located near the center of Mexico City. A movie based on the book was made years later, starring Anthony Quinn and other famous movie stars. I originally read the book in its Spanish version—*Los hijos de Sánchez*—as an undergraduate student in Monterrey. I had some form of ethnographic flashbacks of this book, especially when my informants shared detailed descriptions of crowded housing and *vecindades* (urban dwellings) in their recollections. At the end of my interviews, I also became aware of the sophistication of the life stories that women and men had shared with me with so much honesty. I thought about relevant methodological and conceptual concerns and limitations. For instance, the so-called concepts of the culture of poverty and machismo did not capture the complexity and richness of the stories I listened to for specific reasons.

First, Lewis suggests his controversial paradigm, the culture of poverty. From this perspective, people growing up in enduring poverty develop specific attitudes and behaviors, an entire value system that is reproduced and sustained across generations. That is, the poor trapped in vicious cycles of poverty develop a culture of their own—“poverty is inherent in the culture of the poor.”<sup>8</sup> From a point of view that has

been used to pathologize poor African American families as well, people who live in pervasive poverty end up being blamed for their own socioeconomic marginality, society and culture are perceived as static and fixed, and thus any form of social intervention or change is practically impossible.<sup>9</sup>

And second, Lewis relied on machismo as a paradigm to explain patriarchy, men's lives, and masculinity, a concept that was useful to announce and make sense of gender inequality in Mexico in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Interestingly, machismo as an idea has gained popularity to this day; people use it in everyday life conversations to make sense of gender inequality, and scholars use it to discuss issues related to patriarchy in Mexican society (including myself, very early in my career). However, more than fifty years have passed already since this influential book was published, and new perspectives to examine gender inequality and manhood have emerged. According to some critical gender studies scholars, machismo as an idea and paradigm has become outdated, limited, and problematic, especially given the advances made in gender studies and men's and masculinity research with populations of Mexican origin in recent decades.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, I wrote this book with a keen awareness of the problems of over-generalizing and the dangers of perpetuating misleading cultural impressions. Sociologist Josie Méndez-Negrete has been accused of "reproducing a culture of poverty" or "a blame-the-victim" paradigm in her revealing book, *Las hijas de Juan: Daughters Betrayed*, a moving auto-ethnography of incest in the context of Mexican migration and family life in California. Her work has paved the way for me to honor the culturally based concerns raised by many of the professionals I interviewed, while also being mindful to not perpetuate damaging images about Mexican women and men and their families; her *testimonio* resonated deeply with the stories I listened to. With an open, receptive heart that embraces these intellectual responsibilities, I have written this book.

### Beyond Culture Blaming

"*Nomás no me vengas con la misma historia de Los hijos de Sánchez* (Just don't come to me with the same story of *The Children of Sánchez*)," were the words that accompanied the stern warnings, pointing fingers, and

rolling eyes I received from some of the professionals I interviewed.<sup>11</sup> These reactions became evident especially when I asked if they thought there was anything specific about Mexican society that may make girls, boys, and women vulnerable to sexual violence within the family. I reassured them about my interest in addressing the importance of challenging archetypal, stereotypical, and pathological images of Mexican children, women, men and their families as portrayed in the literature referring to a “Mexican culture,” and stressed my interest in offering a sociological understanding of a complex phenomenon.

In these instances, attorneys, activists, and other professionals talked to me about the ways in which poverty and poor working-class families have been misrepresented and demonized in some publications about family life in Mexico, often referring to the book published by Oscar Lewis decades ago. Consuelo’s words in this book illustrate the kind of family image these professionals were concerned about:

Right after supper, everyone would go to bed. Marta in the big bed with her daughters; Mariquita, Conchita and I on my little bed; Alanes and Domingo and Roberto doubled over with cold on the floor; and now, the maid and her children, also on the floor. Night after night, this was the sad picture before my eyes. I tried to make it better, but by that time, I was almost afraid to speak up. (Lewis 1961, 417)

These professionals shared stories of incest and sexual violence in wealthy Mexican families, putting emphasis on the serious nature of this social problem for other countries and cultures. Some also reflected on the ways in which scandalous cases of sexual violence in poor families have been exploited and exposed by sensationalist newspapers preying on their fatal destiny, such as *Alarma!*<sup>12</sup> Poor families—unlike their upper- and middle-class counterparts—do not have the money and power needed to cover up their family tragedies and sorrows. Poor families are also the ones, they asserted, looking for professional help at NGOs or community agencies and public institutions, thus their cases usually become more visible and they become a statistic, and are frequently perceived as “the only ones” experiencing these complex and painful life experiences. In short, I was warned not to be *clasista*—classist—and oppress poor families even more.

In the end, the warning given to me by some of the professionals echoed anthropologist Matthew Gutmann's reflections from two decades ago about the impact of Lewis's work: "In their attempt to understand Mexican men, especially poor Mexican men, numerous writers have utilized specific data of Oscar Lewis's ethnographic studies to promote sensationalizing generalizations that go far beyond anything that Lewis ever wrote" (1994, 9).<sup>13</sup>

The voices of the professionals warning me against Oscar Lewis also confirm the life stories in this book: incest and sexual violence happen *across* and *within* all socioeconomic strata, with specific family contexts and social forces triggering the acts of sexual molestation or rape of a child. My goal is to offer a feminist sociological perspective to examine a complex social problem while taking into account (1) the historical evolution of laws on incest, sex, and sexual violence in the family, and children's and women's human rights in Mexican society while looking closely at their colonial and indigenous origins; (2) dominant cultural perceptions of sexuality, double standards of morality and family cultures promoting gender inequality, patriarchal religious practices and values, regional cultures, economies and ideologies, and pop culture; (3) social, political, and cultural perceptions of children as less-than-human, as extensions and property of their parents.

## Methods

I conducted a total of sixty in-depth life history interviews with forty-five biological women and fifteen biological men; one of the men lived as a woman at the time of our interview (see Helián's story). They were born between the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s and were raised in a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. The women and men I interviewed had a wide variety of skin colors and shades, as well as a rich expression and combination of phenotypic characteristics including but not limited to hair and eye color, hair texture, as well as height, and body size and structure. Only two of them (Otilia and Esmeralda) openly identified as "indigenous." All of them were able-bodied, with the exception of one informant who made a special request and asked me not to reveal that information anywhere in the study. Appendix A

shows their demographic characteristics, including age, marital status, religion, education, and sexual and romantic history.

I met all of them for the first time in 2005 and 2006 as I conducted my fieldwork in the four cities that became my research sites (i.e., Ciudad Juárez, Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Monterrey). I met them through the help and support of many of the professionals I met in a wide variety of community-based and academic settings. As in my previous project with Mexican immigrants living in Los Angeles, I realized that informants selected themselves. That is, the people who agreed to be interviewed felt highly motivated to share their individual stories, with many of them being generous storytellers, reflecting their comfort with sharing life stories—*los relatos de vida*—a methodology successfully used in Mexico by social scientists.<sup>14</sup> *Los relatos de vida* are rich oral practices of traditional stories and anecdotes in Mexican families—*narraciones de cuentos tradicionales y anécdotas familiares*—reproduced from generation to generation and with roots in prehispanic societies.<sup>15</sup>

I collected the life stories presented in this book through in-depth individual interviews I conducted in a private safe space that was frequently provided by the organizations with whom I had established a relationship. My clinical background as a couples and family therapist gave me the necessary skills to engage in these conversations, to take care of myself, and also to support the individuals who were so generously sharing their difficult life stories. I was therefore shocked to realize that psychotherapy and research represent two completely different epistemological processes. For instance, immersing myself in the wounds of an interviewee with the purpose of conducting research soon revealed to me a state of consciousness I did not experience as a psychotherapist years ago, when I conducted clinical work with U.S. Latina immigrant women with histories of sexual violence. I discuss this theme in *Epistemologies of the Wound* (2006) and *Ethnographic Lessons* (2010a).

Listening to moving and frequently emotionally overwhelming interviews dramatically shaped the ways in which I decided to conduct my labor-intensive analysis, and eventually to write this book. I decided to present the storytelling approach of these life stories for specific reasons. First, the assertive methodological reflections of senior rape researcher Rebecca Campbell (2002) struck a cord with me. She states: “I question the emotional accuracy of academic research on rape. It now strikes me

as too clean, too sanitized, and too distant from the emotional, lived experiences of rape survivors. What is the ‘rape’ portrayed in academic discourse? To the extent to which academic discourse frames rape as an individual problem of individual survivors, devoid of emotionality, it may miss the mark representing the problem of rape in women’s lives and our society” (97).

Telling and writing the life stories as they were told to me, with painfully graphic details about their experiences, exposes these lived experiences *as is*, that is, without sanitizing them. This also resonated with the importance of addressing the messiness of human behavior in a wide variety of social contexts, as eloquently articulated by sociologist Jodi O’Brien (2009).

Second, as I listened to each one of the stories, I became aware of the political dimension of this project: I became a witness to a life story of sexual violence while conducting each interview; this was especially the case for people who were breaking their silence and talking about it for the first time. This also transformed the way I looked at these narratives and how I studied, analyzed, and presented the so-called data, something I discuss in more depth in *Ethnographic Lessons* (2010a).

Third and most important, I am telling stories about incest and sexual violence because the people who shared them with me did it with so much hope and with a sincere motivation: they re-lived their pain with the purpose of sharing a story of life so it could be *told* and thereby help others in similar circumstances. They felt motivated especially to know that their stories could be of help to a wide variety of professionals interested in creating social change. In short, telling a story is an ethical and political commitment I made with these sixty women and men.

Writing the stories became an ambitious and time-consuming intellectual journey. I read each individual interview transcript at least twice, developed a long list of thirty-plus categories of analysis so I would not miss anything in the organization of these stories, and then wrote each story without missing or distorting anything. The time spent was also a result of the ethical concern and care I felt for the people who had so generously shared their lives with me. Some stories are longer than others, and some are more graphic and detailed than others. Per their request, I had to omit specific aspects of their stories, as in the case of Otilia, which I published as a case study.<sup>16</sup> Regardless, I took great care

to represent and include all the details as they were shared with me. Finally, not all of the stories of the sixty people I interviewed are included in this book in their entirety; a few have been (or will be) published elsewhere because of the specificity or the unique nature of their cases. All stories were usually united by the same family patterns I discuss in this book.

This study was conducted while following the same professional and institutional ethics and procedures that have guided my previous research with Mexican populations. I conducted my ethnographic work after I received IRB approval at the University of Texas at Austin in 2005. None of these subjects participated in any of the previous research that I conducted in the past, which was based on fieldwork I conducted in the 1990s in Los Angeles, California.

Appendix B discusses additional methodological and ethical dimensions of this study, which I have examined extensively in other publications. Working on these publications helped me make sense of what Rebecca Campbell identifies as “emotionally engaged research,” an ethnographic journey that demanded a lot of emotional and intellectual work on a wide variety of methodological dimensions, something I had to do before I could even immerse myself in the emotionally overwhelming and intellectually abundant narratives so I could organize and analyze them and write this book. Finally, in order to protect the privacy of my informants, I use pseudonyms to identify the people who shared their life stories with me.

### Shifting Definitions of Incest

“Do you want the legal definition of incest? Or do you want the clinical definition of incest?” professionals very frequently inquired as I asked them about what the concept “incest” meant to them. I soon learned that tension and contradiction have long existed around incest as a concept, historically and among legal and mental health professions.

As a nation that became independent in 1821, Mexico created its laws while still being influenced by the Catholic Church. For instance, a professor of law with extensive expertise in human rights explained that, following Judeo Christian religious and cultural traditions, these laws had to legally punish a taboo—incest. From other attorneys I also

learned that the *Leyes de Reforma* (mid-1800s) were fundamental for a complete restructuring of Mexico's legal system and created the separation of Church and State. The legal system that experienced important changes with regard to family law in 1870, 1884, and 1917, however, has been historically patriarchal.<sup>17</sup> Laws that were later represented by state penal codes

have traditionally and briefly identified incest as intercourse between blood-related “*ascendientes*,” “*descendientes*,” or siblings. Legally, incest is assumed to be voluntary sexual activity between equals who are blood-related. In general, in Mexico, the law punishes incest as sexual activity within the family but it overlooks issues of power, control, or abuse within families. Sexual violence within families is punished but as an aggravating factor of other crimes. For example, rape and child prostitution (among others) may receive a higher punishment if they go from “*ascendiente*” to “*descendiente*.” Thus, incest per se (with all its complexities) is lost in these legal classifications, it is punished only indirectly and remains invisible.<sup>18</sup>

As of today, many state penal codes legally define incest as a “crime against the family.” As of July 2013, more than half of the thirty-two penal codes follow such legal description, with five states associating incest with a violation of an individual's sexual freedom, sexual safety, or “normal” (meaning “healthy”) psychosexual development. Tlaxcala and Puebla had no laws against incest when I conducted my fieldwork; “Maybe that is an oversight,” commented a Mexico City attorney. Appendix C shows these contrasting patterns across the country. Additional research needs to be conducted to learn more about how these changes came into effect, and the changes in the making that some attorneys anticipated. As recently as 1980, in fact, a man who stole a cow received a more severe legal punishment than a man who raped a woman. In some states, these laws punishing what one attorney identified as *abigeato* (i.e., abigeat or theft of cattle) are still in effect to this day. “*¡Hay tanto por hacer!* There is still a long way to go!” became an expression I heard repeatedly in 2005 and 2006. Some professionals said they were optimistic about the future in a nation that has transitioned recently to becoming an urban society that is exposing new generations

of Mexicans to high technology and information, and catching up (at least at the discourse level) with international treaties on issues affecting the well-being of women and children.

Through my interviews, I learned that incest was both more prevalent and more sophisticated than the outdated definitions the patriarchal Mexican state suggests. Interviewees did not always use the word *incesto* or *incestuoso* to identify their experiences of sex as violence in their families, which included a wide array of actions and nuanced expressions that range from the perverse and coercive experiences that Elisa, Helián, and Renata endured when they were children, to the voluntary and pleasurable sex that a young adolescent man enjoyed with a male cousin close in age. I also learned that *la familia* meant much more than the “father, mother and children” traditional image. Family included extended family members, men who become stepfathers at different stages in children’s lives, in-laws and in-laws’ blood relatives, and people who are emotionally and morally close to them as *amigos de la familia*—women and men who were “like family.” Paradoxically, accepting others as family (for example, an aunt’s new boyfriend or husband) may automatically grant people that *mamá* or *papá* barely know the moral authority to take care of children without even knowing if the person is emotionally or morally competent to be in charge of minors. In my conversations with two former seminarians who were sexually abused by controversial priest Marcial Maciel, I also learned that a young man may perceive a priest as a paternal figure and thus, being abused by him, meant being exposed to what one of them identified as “spiritual incest,” meaning that the priest is also *el padre* who sexually abuses a “spiritual son” while also betraying *la madre iglesia*—the mother church.<sup>19</sup>

Catholicism is central to understanding incest and sexual violence in Mexican families with regard to issues involving the social organization of silence, secrets, complicity, and the confessional; double standards of sexual morality, guilt, and informants’ interpretations of their experiences of abuse; Catholic-informed moral beliefs and practices affecting women and sexual and gender nonconformers; Catholic and other Christian religious leaders abusing children within and outside their families; and the contrasting views of sexualized violence in families offered by the Catholic priests I interviewed, all taking place in times of moral scandal of sexual abuse by priests and relevant transitions in

Catholic leadership. Beyond the Catholic faith, all of the above apply selectively to other informants raised in Christian-based religions in Mexico.

My intent is to contribute to conversations and dialogues about critical issues involving the human rights and well-being of children and women in Mexico, gender and sexuality studies, family studies with Mexican populations, and the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence. In particular, the stories and research in this book provide a culturally informed basis for understanding the interplay among family, culture, and state in perpetuating not only sexual violence within families, but also the structural conditions that foster this vulnerability and violence. My research strongly indicates the cultural specifics of these actions (including cultural practices that implicate priestly sex abuse as a form of incest) while also providing a framework for subsequent studies of incest across cultures.

### Sexual Violence, Advocacy, and Other Interventions: Past and Present

Women as the target of violence exercised by men in what is known as Mexican territory goes back to prehispanic Mesoamerican times.<sup>20</sup> Indigenous women then became rape-able as part of the conquest: sexual violence was strategically used for political projects of invasion and colonization, involving at times some forms of reproductive coercion.<sup>21</sup> Colonial Mexican society witnessed additional sexualized secrets, including those that involved rape by a relative, as discovered and documented by historian Carmen Castañeda's revealing examinations of twenty-one confessions guides.<sup>22</sup> Priests used these religious texts to control the sex lives of indigenous populations in revealing ways: incest (or "sin" between people who were blood-related) was frequently identified as a sexual prohibition in these documents, and "(rape) forcing a woman, or corrupting a woman by force" is listed less often as such.<sup>23</sup> Loss of virginity and damage to the honor of her family was much more of a concern than a woman being raped. "The loss of virginity represented both a criminal and civil offense to a woman, but especially to her family."<sup>24</sup> *La dote*—the dowry—was demanded from rapists, and/or the obligation to marry her.<sup>25</sup> The penalty in the end was a way to

reinforce a clear sexual norm: sexual relations must take place within marriage.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, I wrote, “Rape of a woman by a close relative showed how ineffective these legal measures and social prescriptions were, especially when girls and adolescent women were the victims. In such cases, judges were more concerned about protecting the families involved in these trials, which relegated women of all ages to a marginalized position in the legal processes” (2013a, 405).

Meticulous historical examinations of the ecclesiastical justice and the legal apparatus in colonial and independent Mexico have reflected the ambiguity of these incest laws, leaving as well unanswered questions.<sup>27</sup> In the meantime, women and children did not have rights as fully sentient, autonomous human beings, and nineteenth-century “legal commentators still warned that husbands and wives could not be equal because that would risk the ‘continual mutiny of the subjects against the established authority,’ and undermine the stability of the Mexican state.”<sup>28</sup> A little known nineteenth-century feminist jurist, Genaro García, is a noteworthy exception to this patriarchal rule.<sup>29</sup> The most noticeable political and social changes were about to happen in the two centuries to come, and more specifically in more recent decades.

Although laws about incest have existed in some form of legal limbo since Mexico won its independence in 1821, near the end of the twentieth century, left-wing and women’s groups and other advocates had made important strides to promote laws aimed at protecting children and women from different forms of sexual violence while addressing issues of power and control. Women’s right to vote was established in 1953 and women and men become equal under the law according to Article 4, which passed in 1974 in anticipation of the International Woman’s day to be celebrated in Mexico the following year.<sup>30</sup> Senior attorneys and human rights activists I listened to were consistent in their memory: CAMVAC (*Centro de Apoyo a Mujeres Violadas*) was established by a group of professionals in 1979 in Mexico City. CAMVAC offered psychological, legal, and medical attention to women who were raped, very likely the first organization of its kind in the nation. The brave groundbreaking pioneers who created CAMVAC experienced situations of danger and clandestine life, according to some of these senior professionals. COVAC (*Colectivo de Lucha contra la Violencia hacia las Mujeres*) in Mexico City and CAM (*Centro de Apoyo a la Mujer*) in the state of Co-

lima were founded later, between the early and mid-1980s.<sup>31</sup> “This is what existed before starting to work more closely with the State,” according to anthropologist Eli Bartra, reflecting about those times of transition (1992, 28). Since the late 1980s, according to González Ascencio (2007), a law professor in Mexico City, important changes were taking place at the State level:

With regard to judicial practice, specialized agencies in sex crimes came into existence since 1989; *fiscalías* (equivalent to District Attorney’s office) in that area of specialty; centers of professional attention and therapy; units to assist intrafamily violence and commissions of equity and gender in the different *secretarías de Estado* or government departments and the legislative branch; commissions for women at the state level also exist, as well as one *Instituto de las mujeres*—Institute for women—at the national level. In this way is culminated, in appearance, a long path of social and cultural transformations tending towards elevating the status of women and to recognize, based on the facts, her legal equality vis-à-vis the man. (78)

Before the end of the millennium, collective efforts facilitated the creation of other nongovernmental organizations exclusively concerned about issues related to sexual violence, such as the *Centro de Orientación y Prevención de la Agresión Sexual, A.C.* in Guadalajara, and ADIVAC in Mexico City.<sup>32</sup> By then, the Mexican masses had been exposed to a sexual abuse prevention campaign called *Cuédate a ti mismo* (Take care of yourself) produced by Televisa, an influential TV broadcasting company with wide national coverage. In the mid- or late 1980s, Televisa started to air commercials relying on the “*Ojo Mucho Ojo*” slogan to teach children to “watch out” for any risk of potential sexual abuse.<sup>33</sup> This campaign did have some impact in the population, as reported by some of the people I met and interviewed.<sup>34</sup> By then, the rise of psychology (officially established and recognized as a profession in the 1970s) and the role of feminism, and the long history of women’s movements, had become strengthened. Shelters to protect women were established in the mid-1990s.<sup>35</sup>

At times in conversation with Mexico City and at times by themselves, Guadalajara and Monterrey by then had been following their own distinctive paths in their own efforts to offer professional services

to children and women exposed to different forms of sexual violence from a variety of professional avenues, including but not limited to private practice, public institutions, and groups of clinicians and professors formally and informally addressing these issues at different private and public college spaces, in schools that taught nursing and public health, law school and criminology, social work, psychology, and psychiatry, among others.<sup>36</sup>

And finally, Ciudad Juárez exposed to Mexico—and then to the world—some of the most extreme and brutal expressions of sexual violence against women, which started to become documented in the early 1990s by the *Grupo 8 de Marzo*. This organization became the institutional ancestor of *Casa Amiga*, which opened its doors to the public in 1999. Casa Amiga became the first organization on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border to offer a wide variety of professional services to women seeking answers to a life without violence.<sup>37</sup>

By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the State had passed laws aimed at helping women achieve gender equality and a life free of violence, reflecting (at least on paper) a commitment to international treaties and agreements advocating for women's rights.<sup>38</sup> In a 2007 special report called *Delitos contra las mujeres* (Crimes against women), Olamendi explains that, "The consideration of incest as a crime has different arguments, some of which go from the concern that incestuous relationships may result in children with genetic problems, to those that have to do with social rejection toward this behavior" (48). The same report explains that, "Sexual abuse has not been established as such in any of the penal codes" (44), and offers an informative classification and analysis of all crimes identified under the *violencia sexual* category, state by state, as of that date. In this report, incest laws still echo colonial society.<sup>39</sup> Professionals working directly with people of all ages and genders with histories of different forms of sexualized violence frequently echoed research on rape in Mexico: "The risk of rape is greater with a relative, the partner, or a friend of the family," and clarified that any statistics of sexual violence within families is only "an estimate" of a social problem that can be difficult to assess with accuracy—incest is more prevalent than what we can imagine.<sup>40</sup>

Social networks of highly committed professionals concerned about violence related issues were already well established in all four cities

when I conducted my fieldwork in 2005 and 2006. I frequently listened to some of them talking about *la cultura de la denuncia* (the culture of denunciation), which became evident as part of the campaign that was running during that time: *El que golpea a una, nos golpea a todas*—He who hits one (woman), hits all of us (women). Sponsored by the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, the TV commercial aired women celebrities showing faces with blood and bruises, inviting potential victims to report similar incidents. Professionals who used the concept of *la cultura de la denuncia* described the ways in which TV, radio, and public service announcements have encouraged citizens (especially women) to report physical and sexual abuse. They said this was part of a national and very public campaign against domestic and sexual violence, which has become visible in Mexico in recent years.<sup>41</sup> And two public institutions, the INEGI and the INMUJERES, in 2003 conducted and published the first national survey on family relationships, known as the ENDIREH, a landmark and a major reference according to the professionals I interviewed.<sup>42</sup> In 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that marital rape is a crime.

In the midst of these progressive changes, not far from Mexico City in May 2006, San Salvador Atenco witnessed events of intense police brutality and torture, including sexual violence against women. And sexual violence against indigenous girls and women (including but not limited to military related conflict and violence, and sexual trafficking) is not news, exposing the contradictions, paradoxes, and the long way still to go in correcting these injustices.<sup>43</sup>

Mexico is not only a cultural mosaic, but also a changing and unpredictable patriarchal collage. This fluid mosaic also validates the paradigm of “regional patriarchies” I proposed to examine contrasting patterns of hegemony and gender inequality in Mexican society.<sup>44</sup>

- A concept propelled by Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, *feminicidio* is now part of everyday language and popular culture, and in 2014, the *Real Academia Española*—the Royal Spanish Academy—accepted the term as part of the new edition of their official dictionary.<sup>45</sup>
- A municipality that is part of Monterrey’s metropolitan area, Apodaca has witnessed the disappearance of more than one hundred young poor women as cartels have become involved in a wide variety of criminal activi-

- ties. This is only part of the pool of women who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and human trafficking within and beyond Mexican territory.<sup>46</sup>
- *El bullying* is a concept Mexicans use these days as they talk about peer violence and the tragic news involving school children dying as a consequence of it; this concept has been used as well by President Peña Nieto and representatives of both the lower house and upper house of the Congress as they addressed their concerns about this social problem.
  - In Guadalajara I met a teenager through an attorney working on her case. She was well advanced in her pregnancy by her father; she agreed to meet with me for a casual, informal conversation but later declined. Girls like her continue to be considered scandalous in the media, frequently provoking reactions about abortion-related debates and other concerns. Mayra Pérez Cruz, for instance, died in Tabasco at the age of twelve in May 2014; she was fourteen weeks pregnant as a consequence of rape by her stepfather, who was arrested.<sup>47</sup>
  - In 2008, the government of Mexico City published the book, *Tu Futuro en Libertad* (Your Future in Freedom), a free publication for youth (available in hard copy and online). This is the most comprehensive and accessible publication of its kind, offering professionally informed, open, and candid discussions about topics related (but not limited) to sexuality and reproductive health; dating, love, and relationships; misogyny, relationship violence, and sexual violence; self-esteem and self-care friendship; sexual and gender diversity; sexual health, sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptive use, and pregnancy; drug use; and human rights and citizenship.
  - The same week Mayra died, far away in Monterrey, a progressive activist held a poster that read, *Las ricas abortan. Las pobres mueren. ¡Basta de hipocresía!*—The rich have abortions. The poor die. Enough with hypocrisy! This was part of a heated confrontation between groups of women defending opposing views with regard to abortion, and the background surrounding local congress in Nuevo León approving the first of two rounds to pass a law that recognizes life from the moment of conception.
  - Women's rights to a life without violence have become a central concern for INMUJERES (the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres), an organization created by the federal government in 2001. INMUJERES has inspired the establishment of similar state-sponsored institutions in each state in the country.<sup>48</sup> In all the cities where I conducted my fieldwork, I met highly committed college-educated men working in a wide variety of violence

prevention programs as well as support groups designed exclusively for men seeking help.

- I interviewed women and men who either witnessed or experienced personally the exchange of girls for sacks of corn or beans, or other goods, as young women were traded between families to provide sexual comfort and companionship to adult men who live alone in some parts in the country. Women and men directly witnessed this or experienced it within their own families and in different rural and urban communities of origin. One of my informants and her sister were sexually trafficked by her own parents, a pattern reported by researchers studying trafficking of women in Mexico.<sup>49</sup>
- In 2002, Mexico City passed a law to criminalize discrimination, and in 2003 the *Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación* (CONAPRED) was created. A public institution, CONAPRED was established after a law to prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination was approved by Congress.<sup>50</sup> Mexico City and its iconic *zócalo* continue to offer spaces for *manifestaciones y protestas* involving a wide variety of social justice related issues.

The juxtaposition of all of these images reflects the mixed feelings expressed by the professionals I met in these four cities. Many of them were highly involved in progressive activism and talked with optimism about the progress the country has made, yet they frequently talked about their skepticism and the long road ahead regarding laws involving the human rights of children and women in Mexico, and Latin America as well. For instance, the parallels and similarities uniting the lives of women living in two neighboring nations—Mexico and Guatemala—is illustrated by the stories I share in this book and the inspirational research that sociologist Cecilia Menjívar (2011) conducted with *ladina* women. Menjívar offers a paradigm that goes beyond “culture blaming” or the so-called *machismo* and exposes the complex forces that weave together inequality, everyday life, economic violence, and women’s suffering.<sup>51</sup> My hope is that this book will contribute as well to these important ongoing conversations.

### Toward a Feminist Sociology of Incestuous Families in Mexico: The Gender and Sexuality of Incest

The women and men I interviewed taught me important lessons about the social and cultural constructions of gender and sexuality that

facilitate a variety of sexualized exchanges, from rape to voluntary sex, and the grey area in between, within families. First, women who reported the daughter-father incestuous arrangement exposed what I identify as *conjugal daughters*. The women who reported a wide variety of sexualized exchanges with their biological fathers may engage in a sexual function in their family and become the sexual partners of these men, at different stages of their lives and within contrasting family, class, and racial arrangements. A daughter becomes a conjugal daughter as a way to be of sexual service to a father because of (1) the ways in which girls are socialized to be of service to the men in their families (e.g., brothers and fathers), a process I identify as *gendered servitude*; and (2) patriarchal prescriptions that identify the marital arrangement as one that is established to satisfy the sexual needs of married men. A daughter becomes a sexual substitute for her mother (frequently absent, disempowered, or helpless as a mother and/or as a wife), who may also become jealous of her daughter. And a conjugal daughter may also openly serve both—a father as well as a complicit mother—for the sake of their marital relationship and thus become what I identify as a *marital servant*.

Conjugal daughters and marital servants exist because of the sexualization of the parental child, social codes of *honor* and *vergüenza* (honor and shame), a father's perception of the family as the symbolic hacienda (i.e., *el derecho de pernada*), kinship reassignments (i.e., a daughter as a wife, a wife as a daughter), idealized incestuous norms of heterosexual lifestyles of romantic love and sex in popular culture, visible and underground patriarchies, internalized sexism within the family and society at large, patriarchal notions of the *paterfamilias* and sexual slavery, and cultural rituals of misogyny. The patterns listed were identified mainly for biological fathers, although a stepfather may also engage in these arrangements.<sup>52</sup>

Second, sisters and *primas*—female cousins—of all sexual orientations and contrasting urban contexts may become the objects of sexual curiosity, initiation, experimentation, frustration, and other perverse sexual adventures of their biological brothers and male cousins. Their stories exemplify what I identify as *family sex surrogates*, that is, sisters and *primas* may temporarily satisfy the sexual needs of their brothers and *primos* under complex and nuanced forms of sexual violence.

Family sex surrogacy goes hand in hand with gendered servitude. Under specific family contexts and circumstances, gendered servitude makes brothers and primos believe that they are also entitled to sex as a service within the family. The fact that a man may experience a sense of entitlement while sexually objectifying the girls and women within the family (something women and men in their families learn to perceive as “normal”) does not require that a man uses force to exercise this kind of privilege. It is no surprise then that many of these women described their brothers, for instance, as nonphysically violent, and at times affectionate, loving, and seductive as part of sexual coercion.

The sexual objectification of girls within the prima-primo relationship exposes the cultural validation of patriarchal entitlement of male relatives to have access to their sexualized bodies within extended families. This is illustrated by Mexican popular sayings such as *A la prima se le arrima* (You can get physically/sexually close to your female cousin) and *Entre primos y primores nacen los amores* (Between cousins and beauty, love is born). Although these relationships may include protagonists who are close in age, it exposes the ways in which sisters and primas are exposed to different expressions and levels of sexual violence within the confines of spaces that are perceived as familiar and safe but dangerous, including but not limited to their homes, their relatives' homes, and social spaces and contexts where family relationships, interactions, and exchanges of kinship take place. This becomes what I identify as *family sexual harassment*, a concept with the potential to make these practices visible. These everyday acts of misogyny within families usually take place in plain sight of adult women in positions of authority who ignore these forms of sexual objectification, who consider it a form of “gender helplessness.” These adult women subscribe to two of the cultural translations of “Boys will be boys” in Mexico: “*Los muchachos nomás estaban jugando*—The young men were *just* playing,” or “*Así son los muchachos, no les hagas caso*—That is the way young men are, ignore them.” This in the end becomes a social corollary facilitating what Gavey (2005) identifies as the “cultural scaffolding of rape.”

Gavey explains, “the discourses of sex and gender that produce forms of heterosex that set up the preconditions for rape—women’s passive, acquiescing (a)sexuality and men’s forthright, urgent pursuit of sexual ‘release.’” (3). That is, Gavey problematizes “the whole domain of sexual

taken-for-granted” that become key in the formation of rape cultures. Similarly, I discovered that a cultural scaffolding of rape is created in these families: normative beliefs and practices with regard to boyhood, play, and the sexuality of children (as desexualized and innocent) all intersect to create what is perceived as “normal” and thus as harmless. These gender and sexual taken-for-granted actually create the conditions for sexual harassment of girls and young women in families. This is only a microcosm of a larger ideological system that has socially organized different levels and degrees of sexual violence against girls and women in a wide variety of relationship contexts and other everyday life circumstances.

Third, one of the most relevant findings of the study involved the uncle-niece incestuous arrangement. Narratives describing an uncle exercising sexual coercion against his niece are the most frequently reported expression of violence in this study (more so than fathers or stepfathers, for example). As a group, women reported from highest to lowest frequency: uncles, fathers, brothers, stepfathers, cousins, and grandfathers.

Why are *los tíos* so frequently reported in this study? I incorporate three key concepts to explain this pattern: *family genealogies of incest*, the *feminization of incest*, and the internalization of sexism within the family. All of them are interrelated and explain why an uncle who sexually molested a niece does not become an isolated case, but rather one among a complex constellation of systematic and systemic multigenerational patterns promoting ideologies and practices of gender inequality that become fertile soil in the reproduction of *family cultures of rape*. Although rape in its most orthodox definition does not always happen in these families (i.e., penile vaginal penetration), family cultures of rape refer to the ideologies and practices that are conducive to rape, that is, family cultures that facilitate a wide variety of escalating expressions and degrees of sexually intrusive behaviors and attitudes that a family member may engage in (individually or collectively) vis-à-vis girls, boys, or men younger in age, and women within immediate and extended families (see also note 7).

The overrepresentation of maternal uncles (versus paternal uncles) in these uncle-niece reports illustrates the *feminization of incest*, which exists precisely because women have been devalued as authority fig-

ures and thus an uncle feels not only entitled but also safe to engage in these sexual transgressions. Frequently with similar histories of sexual violence themselves, adult women in these families have been socialized to internalize the same sexist beliefs that have oppressed them as women their entire lives yet use them to further punish and stigmatize a younger generation of girls, making them responsible as well for these unspeakable acts.

Fourth, men's stories challenge stereotypical ideas that associate sexual abuse of children with a culture of poverty: marginality and crowded housing, and the idea that "sexual abuse is only a problem of the poor." As a group, men reported from highest to lowest frequency: uncles, brothers, male cousins or *primos*, stepfathers, and fathers. Cases involving a grandfather were not reported by the men. Also, the maternal versus the paternal side is almost identical for uncles and *primos*, and only slightly higher toward the maternal side (an important contrast when compared to women).

I introduce the concept of *kinship sex* to examine men's narratives along a continuum between two extremes: consent and coercion, happening across all socioeconomic strata. These stories expose sexualized exchanges between boys during childhood or adolescence, which men may recall as seductive, voluntary, and playful. In contrast, narratives about coercive sex, especially with an older primo or an uncle, expose the dangerous dimension of the continuum. The continuum is neither flat nor unidimensional, but rather it is multilayered, nuanced, and complex. Some men experienced all of these possibilities of sexualized exchanges with one or more relatives.

Homophobic practices within the family and related issues of masculinity in the lives of effeminate and other gender nonconforming boys shape sexual vulnerability in these families, including the gay twist to the expression that objectifies male cousins: *Al primo me le arrimo*. Self-identified gay men more frequently reported homophobia as a precursor of sexual violence in the family than do self-identified lesbian women. I offer some reflections about this pattern, illustrating among other things the need to look at how gender inequality and prescriptions of masculinity, femininity, sexuality, secrets, and silence may shape distinctive patterns of vulnerability to hate crimes within families and society at large.

And fifth, in these incestuous families, all of the preceding gendered and sexualized processes are established and reproduced as part of everyday life. That is, incest is not an isolated event that happens in a social vacuum, incest is socially contextualized. Incest and other family sex acts are not isolated but reported to be a part of everyday life and daily family interactions. For example, incest takes place as protagonists cleverly decipher the geography of homes and arrangements of schedules and spaces to safely assail a child. Children in turn employ strategies of their own to anticipate and outsmart the act. In addition, incest becomes possible because of daily life pressures of hardworking yet absent parents who negotiate child care in ways that expose the child to abuse. I learned that socioeconomic forces may facilitate the conditions of sexual vulnerability in the lives of children, and that sexual violence might be reinvented as part of the U.S.-Mexico migration within transnational families.

All of the above are intricate and powerful social constructions, yet they have the potential to be contested and challenged, as illustrated by the women and men who taught me why and how human resilience and social change are still possible, beyond the most unbearable pain.

### Organization of the Book

Because this book offers an emerging basis for future theorizing and research on sexual violence in Mexican families, I focus here on the ethnographic accounts provided through in-depth interviews. This book is significantly distinct from existing studies and first-person accounts on incest in that I do not focus on the psychology of trauma. Instead, the book invites readers to shift the focus and look through a critical feminist sociological lens at the family life processes and social, cultural, and economic forces that expose girls, boys, and women to sexualized violence in the first place.

The narratives in this book are purposely graphic. The intent is not to shock, but to fully engage the reader with the everyday contexts and their life-changing consequences for these women and men. My hope is that by offering an honest portrayal of these women's and men's testimonies, I will both honor the heartfelt openness of the experiences the interviewees shared with me and also invite future readers to conduct

highly needed research on incest *within cultural contexts* in the social sciences, gender, and sexuality studies, Mexican family studies, and sexual violence. See appendix B for additional reflections about these methodological issues.

Although I describe these women's and men's experiences of violence in graphic detail—experiences that affected their emotional lives and the quality of their romantic and sexual relationships, usually leaving a wide variety of imprints on the heart—the book does not focus on examinations of the emotional trauma *per se*. However, I selectively and briefly incorporate a description of the emotional consequences of sexualized violence on both women and men (i.e., low self-esteem, depression, suicide attempts, relationship conflict, among others) in the four storytelling chapters. Women's and men's reports of the effect of sexual violence on their emotional, sexual, relationship, and family well-being are important issues that deserve subsequent in-depth examination, which is beyond the scope of this book.

Chapters 2 through 5 are storytelling. In these chapters I offer richly descriptive and graphic narratives of women and men within specific family relationships, arrangements, and experiences, and because I want the experiences of the interviewees to speak for themselves as much as possible, I focus on the narratives as the primary orientation and then include an analytical section at the end of each chapter. Each analytical section is designed to examine these stories of sexual violence within the family from a feminist informed sociological perspective. The analytical section includes the theoretical contributions made throughout this book, including but not limited to the incorporation and discussion of concepts such as conjugal daughter, marital servant, gendered servitude, family sex surrogate, family sexual harassment, family genealogies of incest, feminization of incest, kinship sex, among other concepts.

Chapter 2 explores the wide variety and nuanced sexual functions that girls and women—daughters in particular—play within patriarchal Mexican families, especially within the father-daughter arrangement, and within and across contrasting and complex social, cultural, and economic contexts. Chapter 3 examines the stories that expose the sophisticated ways in which—and the complex social, cultural, and economic reasons *why*—sisters and primas became sexually vulnerable

to their brothers and primos, respectively. Chapter 4 examines the stories of women who are exposed to sexual violence at the hands of their uncles—*los tíos*. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 depict stories of daughters, sisters, primas, and nieces who are not passive victims, but who are women who fight back using the contextual means available and as they decipher ways to cope. These stories also expose the complex ways in which the men who exercised violence against these girls and women were at times reproducing the very same violence they were subjected to as little boys in their own families.

Chapter 5 includes the stories of men of different economic and family arrangements who were sexually abused as boys by a father, brother, older cousin, or an uncle, more so than by an older woman in the family. These stories expose the personal and family journeys the boys experience as they break their silence in their attempts to decipher their emotional turmoil. These stories also reveal the complex dynamics of an ethic of respect for the family, concern about the well-being of their mothers and the rest of the family, and a wide variety of family and economic pressures, as well as fears of homosexuality and homophobia and hate crimes in the family.

Chapter 6 revisits and summarizes the contributions based on the stories of incest discussed in the book, as well as the feminist informed examinations, and identifies the theoretical relevance, public sociology implications, and suggestions for future research.

Finally, as I revisit the findings and contributions of this study in the last chapter, I stress the importance of challenging archetypal, stereotypical, and pathological images of Mexican children, women, men and their families, while simultaneously offering a sociological understanding of a complex phenomenon. I learned, for instance: a mother or a trusted adult who believes and takes action when a child reveals experiences of abuse becomes a source of love and trust, which in turns helps the child to be stronger emotionally and resilient to whatever emotional impact he or she experienced. But, like life itself, resilience goes beyond childhood. From Itzel, Nydia, and other informants (women and men) I learned that children who share their painful experiences with other *fuentes de amor*—sources of love—may actually heal to an extent when they *trust in* and they are *believed by* family authority figures, teachers, partners, friends, siblings, including sisters, aunts, cousins, or others

who were abused by the same relatives. This trust and love in connection to family justice may actually become a source of protection from potential trauma. As illustrated in some of the stories, this resonated with women who explained to me that an experience of sexual molestation or even the most horrifying rape experience had not been as painful as a family's reaction, which might have included additional harsh emotional and physical punishment that consequently promotes self-blame and deeply affects their emotional and personal well-being.