5 The Making of a Whore: Lara Newman’s Story

‘If I had to describe myself in one word, I’d say, “I’m a whore”.’

INTRODUCTION

Lara Newman (a pseudonym) was born in Johannesburg into a middle-class English-speaking South African family. She was 23 years old with two younger sisters aged 18 and 16 at the time of the interview in 1991. She was married and living in Cape Town with her husband, Brian, and two children – a boy aged five and a girl aged two.

After Lara’s father matriculated, he obtained several diplomas but never went to university. He spent the last 20 years in charge of the computer programming department of a major commercial enterprise. Lara described him as very hard-working and devoted to his occupation. Her mother left school after finishing standard eight (10th grade) and worked as a bookkeeper before becoming a full-time housewife.

Lara’s maternal grandfather, who raped her, lived in Durban, a coastal city a few hundred miles from Johannesburg. The sexual assaults occurred over many years during holiday visits.

Although Lara went to school at a Catholic convent, she was brought up as an Anglican. Anglicanism remains her religious preference now. She was studying for a Bachelor of Accounting degree at the time of the interview. Her husband, Brian, passed his matric and is now a successful marketing manager.

I chose the title for this chapter – with Lara’s blessing – because I found Lara’s story particularly helpful in illuminating how the experience of incestuous abuse can train a victim to become a prostitute.

Lara’s story provides many other insights, including the considerable damage frequently caused by incestuous abuse. Her self-understanding and awareness, her intelligence and eloquence, her extraordinary honesty, provide an unusually rich opportunity to understand the complexity of the binds that some incest survivors experience along with confusion and ambivalence. The analysis at the end of Lara’s story will focus on the relationship between incest victimisation and prostitution,
as well as the association between incestuous abuse and sexual exploitation by therapists.

When Lara came to my home for the interview, she was demurely dressed and wore little or no make-up. Her appearance was fresh and natural – which, together with her behaviour, gave quite the opposite impression from the compulsive flirt and seductress that she describes herself as having become. She related very well and warmly to me as a woman, in contrast to the male-identified picture that unfolds in the following account.

The reader should be alert to the dissimilarities between Lara’s story and the stories of Nida Webber, Elsa Foster and Marie Malan that appear to be related to ethnic differences.

LARA’S STORY

Family Background

I love my dad. He’s super. He’s brilliant. But he never used to hug and kiss us much. My mom was also never into touching. Her hugs have been limited to occasions when we say hello after she’s been away a long time or when we say goodbye. If my mother has hugged me ten times in my life, that’s a lot. And she never complimented me when I was growing up. She’d always criticise me, saying things like, ‘You’re too fat.’ I was very clever at school, an ‘A’ student. I tried so hard to get her to say, ‘Lara, you’re the best!’

My mom and her two younger sisters had a very strict upbringing. My grandfather [Lara’s perpetrator] brought them up with weird ideas about sex and didn’t allow them to have boyfriends or to wear make-up or to go out. My mom also brought us up very strictly. She only allowed us sweets on a Friday night, and we only got a small amount of pocket money, not because my parents couldn’t afford it, but because my mom didn’t believe in spoiling us.

When I bathed, I had to take off my pyjamas next to the bath and put a towel around me when I got out so nobody could see me naked. I was never allowed to touch anything below my waist. My mom thinks children’s sexual exploration is disgusting. How ironic that my grandfather taught her that sex is bad and that she must be good, and then he raped me!

My mom never told us girls anything about sex. She still hasn’t told my sisters the facts of life, although Courtney is 16 and Melissa is 18. By the time she got around to broaching the subject with me when I started my period, I’d learned about sex firsthand as well as at school.