



kort's korner

Homosexuality and Pedophilia: The False Link

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Q: I'VE HEARD THERAPISTS SAY THAT A male adult who sexually abuses a boy isn't necessarily "homosexual." This seems confusing: If he isn't homosexual, then why would he sexually molest boys, instead of girls?

This is a very good question, and there are several ways to respond to it. First, we need to clarify our definitions. When discussing sexual abuse and molestation of children, there's often conflict over terminology. One frequently quoted researcher on the topic of homosexuality and child molestation, Gregory Herek, a research psychologist at the University of California, defines pedophilia as "a psychosexual disorder characterized by a preference for prepubescent children as sexual partners, which may or may not be acted upon." He defines child sexual abuse as "actual sexual contact between an adult and someone who has not reached the legal age of consent." Not all pedophiles actually molest children, he points out. A pedophile may be attracted to children, but never actually engage in sexual contact with them. Quite

often, pedophiles never develop a sexual orientation toward other adults.

Herek points out that child molestation and child sexual abuse refer to "actions," without implying any "particular psychological makeup or motive on the part of the perpetrator." In other words, not all incidents of child sexual abuse are perpetrated by pedophiles. Pedophilia can be viewed as a kind of sexual fetish, wherein the person requires the mental image of a child--not necessarily a flesh-and-blood child--to achieve sexual gratification. Rarely does a pedophile experience sexual desire for adults of either gender. They usually don't identify as homosexual--the majority identify as heterosexual, even those who abuse children of the same gender. They are sexually aroused by youth, not by gender. In contrast, child

molesters often exert power and control over children in an effort to dominate them. They do experience sexual desire for adults, but molest children episodically, for reasons apart from sexual desire, much as rapists enjoy power, violence and controlling their humiliated victims. Indeed, research supports that a child molester isn't any more likely to be homosexual than heterosexual.

In fact, some research shows that for pedophiles, the gender of the child is immaterial. Accessibility is more the factor in who a pedophile abuses. This may explain the high incidence of children molested in church communities and fraternal organizations, where the pedophile may more easily have access to children. In these situations, an adult male is trusted by those around him, including children and their families. Males are often given access to boys to mentor, teach, coach and advise. Therefore, a male pedophile may have easier access to a male child. In trying to make sense of an adult male's sexually abusing a male child, many of us mislabel it as an act of homosexuality, which it isn't.

Feminists have argued for years that rape is not a sex act—it is an act

continued

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of violence using sex as a weapon. In the same way, a pedophile abusing a child of the same sex is not perpetrating a homosexual act, but an act of violence and exploitation using sexuality. There is a world of difference between these two things, but it requires a subtle understanding of the inner motivation of the abuser.

To call child molestation of a boy by a man “homosexual” or of a girl by a man “heterosexual” is to misunderstand pedophilia. No true pedophile is attracted to adults, so neither homosexuality nor heterosexuality applies. Accordingly, Herek suggests calling men’s sexual abuse of boys “male-male molestation” and men’s abuse of girls, “male-female molestation.”

Interestingly, Anna C. Salter writes, in *Predators, Pedophiles, Rapists and other Sex Offenders*, that when a man molests little girls, we call him a “pedophile” and not a “heterosexual.” Of course, when a man molests little boys, people say outright, or mutter under their breath, “homosexual. Herek writes that because of our society’s aversion to male homosexuality, and the attempts made by some to represent gay men as a danger to “family values,” many in our society immediately think of male-male molestation as homosexuality. He compares this with the time when African Americans were often falsely accused of raping white women, and when medieval Jews were accused of murdering Christian babies in ritual sacrifices. Both are

examples of how mainstream society eagerly jumped to conclusions to that justified discrimination and violence against these minorities. Today, gays face the same kind of prejudice. Most recently, we’ve seen gay men unfairly turned out of the Boy Scouts of America on the basis of this myth that gay men are likely to be child molesters. Keeping gays out of scouting won’t protect boys from pedophiles.

In reality, abuse of boys by gay pedophiles is rare, and the abuse of girls by lesbians is rarer still. Nicholas Groth is a noted authority on this topic. In a 1982 study by Grot, he asks, “Are homosexual adults in general sexually attracted to children, and are pre-adolescent children at greater risk of molestation from homosexual adults than from heterosexual adults? There is no reason to believe so. The research to date all points to there being no significant relationship between a homosexual lifestyle and child molestation. There appears to be practically no reportage of sexual molestation of girls by lesbian adults, and the adult male who sexually molests young boys is not likely to be homosexual.” Herek writes, similarly, that abuse of boys by gay men is rare; and that the abuse of girls by lesbians is rarer still.

The topic of female-female molestation continues to be largely ignored. There are few books on female sex offenders, particularly about mothers sexually abusing their daughters. I can find no books

on mothers who sexually abuse their sons. There is one handbook by Hani Miletski, M.S.W., entitled, “Mother-Son Incest: The Unthinkable Taboo.” Unthinkable is an appropriate word—so much so that there is nothing else in the literature on this topic, even though female pedophiles and female child molesters certainly exist.

We know so much more than we did historically and yet have a long way to go. We can understand child sexual abuse further when people’s bias and prejudice are removed and the evidence is empirical and scientific.