



kort's korner

## "You Belong to Me."

THIS ARTICLE'S TITLE REFLECTS THE perpetrator's belief, that the victim now belongs to him/her, to do with as he/she desires; that his or her sexual needs, wants and sexuality overrules those of the victim's. The victim will spend a

lifetime unconsciously reenacting their original sexual abuse or, hopefully, working on healing it and removing the ill effects of the perpetrator's abuse. For sexual abuse survivors, the nightmare is that they are forced to keep a sexual secret. Their tormentor threatens to harm them or someone they love if they ever tell. So they don't—giving the perpetrator even more power. By not going through the healing process, the victim does belong to their perpetrator.

Sexual abuse complicates and confuses an individual's developing awareness of sexuality. It does not make a person gay, straight, bisexual or force sexual or romantic orientation in any direction. However, it can imprint unwanted behaviors or absence of behaviors and desires—and herein lies the problem—leaving a person's real sexual desires hidden, even to him/herself.

### **A Definition of Sexual Abuse**

Whenever one person dominates and exploits another person through sexual activity or suggestion, using

sexual feelings and behavior to degrade, humiliate, control, injure or or misuse, this qualifies as sexual abuse. In *The Sexual Healing Journey: A Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*, author and educator Wendy Maltz equates sexual abuse with a violation of a position of trust, power and protection, "an act on a child who lacks emotional & intellectual maturation." It promotes sexual secrecy among its victims, so that even their own sexual drives, libido, orientation and desires become secrets to themselves.

Overt sexual abuse involves direct touching, fondling and intercourse, against a person's will. A few examples include French kissing, fellatio, sodomy, penetration with objects, genitals and fingers, and masturbation. Use of force is typically involved—often physical, but more often psychological or emotional, such as difference in status or experience, as in employee/employer, adult/child, older boy/younger boy.

Covert sexual abuse is more subtle and indirect. Examples of this

include prolonged hugs, sexual stares, inappropriate comments about body parts such as buttocks or genitals, shaming someone for the kind of man they are, (or more frequently, homophobic name-calling), or treating a child as an adult or even a partner for emotional support. Books like Pat Love's *Emotional Incest Syndrome: What to Do When A Parent's Love Rules Your Life* and Kenneth M. Adams's *Silently Seduced: When Parents Make Their Children Partners: Understanding Covert Incest* do a great job in reviewing and detailing covert sexual abuse's negative effects.

Both gays and straights make the mistake of connecting sexual abuse with homosexuality. Their main rationale is that gays and lesbians must have been sexually abused; and that being "homosexual," means you are a pedophile. This derives from the old psychoanalytic theory that one's sexual orientation is created in the first few years of development, and that if any trauma or negative influences "impair" it, then adolescence offers a second chance at correcting one's heterosexuality gone wrong. Sexual abuse was assumed to be one of the primary reasons that one could get "confused" and turn away from innate heterosexuality.

continued

**Joe Kort**  
AND ASSOCIATES

[www.joekort.com](http://www.joekort.com) | [joekort@joekort.com](mailto:joekort@joekort.com) | 248.399.7317  
Individual, Couples, and Group Therapy | Workshops | Lectures

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## **“You Belong to Me.” continued**

Too many of today’s therapists still consider this true. Some therapists, even gay and lesbian therapists, still see adolescence as a time to help homosexual teenagers re-learn “how to be heterosexual.” Many insist that homosexual clients must have been sexually abused. I have many gay and lesbian clients who still believe this, telling me they must have been sexually abused in their past, even if they have no memory of such a thing. And those who were sexually abused assume that the abuse explains why they’re gay. So the myth persists, and confusion continues over sexual abuse and its effects on gays and lesbians.

Contrary to what so many psychotherapists would like to believe, there is no evidence that sexual abuse can shape, much less create, anyone’s sexual orientation: The only thing it can do is confuse young people about what their sexual orientation really is. However, with good therapy and healing, the sexually abused can come to know their true sexual and romantic orientation, be it gay or straight.

### **Disclosing Your Sexual Abuse**

Male survivors of sexual abuse often worry that in seeking help, they’ll be perceived as “less of a man.” They worry they will be seen as less masculine. Of course the male survivor of sexual abuse fears what others will think of him because, as Maltz says,

**our society gives boys the message that men should be able**

**to stand up for themselves and fight off danger. They’re also told that if a man gets hurt, he should go it alone instead of seeking help.**

Many people already believe the old stereotype that gay men are “more like women.” Even gay men themselves will discriminate against effeminate men, saying, “If I wanted women, I’d have been straight,” and many gay personal ads specify, “No fems.” This all creates the mindset that being gay—or at least, not a macho man—makes you less than masculine. So for gay men to tell others about their abuse would only add to the insult that they are less of a man. Imagine the profound double bind of being gay and having been sexually abused! “Because most abuse of males is perpetrated by other males,” writes Maltz, “heterosexual male victims may worry that they will be seen as homosexual if others hear the details of what occurred. Gay men,” he continues, “may wonder if the abuse made them gay.”

On the other hand, women are more inclined to go to therapy. They may not initially realize that they’ve been sexually abused, but should they discover it during therapy, they are more willing to deal with it head-on than their male counterparts. Lesbians are concerned that their therapist will try to insist that this abuse is what “turned them into” lesbians and/or might worry that this is in fact the

case. Gay men also get this type of feedback and can worry about this. It’s important to arm yourself with as much information about sexual abuse as you can. Learn—for yourself,—where you stand as a sexual abuse survivor. Do not accept how your perpetrator, therapists, family or anyone else want to define you. You need to belong to yourself, as you really have all along!

### **Resources**

The books listed below are available at your local bookstore or online at amazon.com.

#### **for sexually abused males**

*Victims No Longer* by Mike Lew

*Betrayed as Boys* by Richard B. Gartner

#### **for sexually abused females**

*Sexual Healing Journey* by Wendy Maltz

*The Courage to Heal* by Ellen Bass

#### **for sexually abused gay men**

*Gay Men and Childhood Sexual Trauma* by James Cassese

#### **for sexually abused lesbians**

*Can’t Touch My Soul* by Donna Rafanello