

CHAPTER 2



Encoding Sexual Abuse as Sexual Initiation

Boys are socialized to believe that men want sex whenever it is offered to them. The sexual behavior of adults with boys has often been misunderstood and underreported because it is not considered abusive or even unwelcome. If boys have premature sexual experiences, especially with girls and women, they are thought to be “sexually initiated,” not molested. This results from the false belief that boys and men cannot be sexually victimized. They thus often come to think of themselves, at least consciously, as fortunate rather than as exploited in these sexual encounters. Popular literature is replete with examples of “coming-of-age” stories in which boys are introduced to sexuality in a positive way by older women, as we shall see in this chapter. Thus, boys may not have an acceptable way of understanding premature sexual experience with women as anything but enjoyable. If they do not welcome sexuality with women, they feel deviant, and may expect others to see them that way too. For all these reasons, the sexual betrayal of boys by women, both overt and covert, is especially underreported and underrecognized, even though, as Lisak et al. (1996) report, 39 percent of the men in their sample who acknowledged sexual abuse histories reported having female victimizers.

Sex with men usually has very different connotations, whether the boy is headed for a predominantly gay or for a predominantly straight

orientation. I will limit my discussion of sex between boys and men in this chapter to situations in which a boy developing a gay identity encodes the sexual activity as consonant with his own erotic desires. In Chapter 3, I will analyze the masculine gender ideals that influence how sexual abuse is encoded. In Chapter 4, I will discuss same-sex situations in which intertwined conflicts about sexual orientation and masculine gender identity confound how both predominantly straight and predominantly gay boys may encode same-sex abuse.

In this chapter, I will focus on how boys encode sexual situations with women, and then discuss how these issues play out in mother-son incestuous relationships. I will then consider the circumstance of a gay boy who considers himself a full partner in sexual activity with a man. Finally, I will highlight how the encoding of abuse interacts with sexual object choice, and the contrasting encoding problems of both straight and gay boys who are abused by men versus those abused by women.

ARE BOYS IN CHARGE OF SEX WITH WOMEN?

Consider a cartoon that appeared in *The New Yorker* on August 25, 1997: The scene is a young boy's bedroom. The window shade is down. The paraphernalia of young boyhood are strewn all over the room. On the wall are pennants and a poster. The bureau displays a model airplane, and the drawers are open with his clothes spilling out. A baseball bat leans against the wall. Scattered about the floor are a board game, a model car, and a football. Clothes are in disarray on the floor and chair. In the bed are a boy of perhaps ten or eleven and a young woman apparently in her late teens or early twenties. Both are sitting up, both are naked, and both are smoking in a postcoital scene straight out of a French film of the 1960s. The woman is a glassy-eyed blonde, exhaling clouds of smoke. The boy gestures grandly to her as he says in the caption, "I want you to know, Sheila, that you'll always be more than just another babysitter to me."

The joke is clear. The boy, prepubescent or perhaps in early puberty, is in charge of the sexual encounter with his much older babysitter. He is letting her know that their relationship will end but that she will be a wonderful memory as he goes on to other, perhaps better, conquests. If we see anything below the surface of this cartoon, it is that the woman is the victim of a cad who is trying to let her down gently. Meanwhile, we see him as a skilled and lucky seducer. Such is the collective societal view of premature sex between a young boy and an older woman. She has been generous to him, and is certainly not a sexual abuser. If anything, she has been used by a lecher who is responsible for what is happening

and is to be admired for his success with her. It is assumed that he has no anxiety about their relationship.

If you are amused by this cartoon's image, imagine for a moment that the sexes are reversed, that a ten-year-old girl is naked in her bed with her twenty-year-old male baby-sitter, smoking a cigarette and telling him he'll always have a special place in her heart. For most of us, the joke is suddenly no longer funny. We understand that young girls should not be in bed with their baby-sitters, and we would consider the man the predator and the girl the victim, unlike the portrayal of the couple in the cartoon. This imaginary reversal of the sexes highlights our double standard about child sexual abuse.

CAN WOMEN RAPE BOYS?

A thoughtful newspaper account of the trial of a thirty-seven-year-old woman charged with the statutory rape of a thirteen-year-old boy captures societal attitudes about sexual behavior between women and boys. Writing in *The Boston Globe*, Karen Aronoso (July 9, 1996, pp. 15–17) describes “an age-old double standard: Men who have sex with children are criminals; boys who have sex with women are lucky. . . . Sex with any female—particularly a mature, experienced one—is perceived as good fortune for a boy. Intercourse is rarely considered unwanted.”

Aronoso quotes neighbors and others familiar with the case:

“I'm sure the boy wanted this. He knew what was going on. He could tell people, ‘Hey, I had sex with an actual woman.’ ”

“She's just a little immature, not violent or anything like that.”

“It's definitely rape, but we all kind of accept it because of the way society says boys should be sexually active at a young age.”

“[For an adolescent boy] it's like a dream to have sex with an older woman.”

These comments reveal the pervasiveness of cultural attitudes that tacitly or openly condone sex between boys and women. Ganzarain and Buchele (1990) note how difficult it is to convince a jury that a woman has molested a boy. This was summed up in the remarks of the chief of the child abuse prosecution unit in the case Aronoso describes. Noting that only once in five years had she previously prosecuted a rape involving a woman and a boy, she is quoted as saying, “The reaction in these cases is usually winking and nodding and saying boys will be boys and that this is all part of the learning experience. . . . It's very hard for boys

to come forward because they feel ashamed at admitting they've been victimized."

About this last point, Aronoso notes: "When a boy does say he has been raped, both his peers and his elders may express disbelief. . . . Traditionally viewed as strong and self-sufficient, males are expected to escape any situation they find unpleasant." And, further, "When a stereotypically maternal figure seduces a child, society may cast her aggression as no more than poor judgment and not harmful."

Maloney (1995) describes the myths about men and women that make it difficult to imagine women as sexually abusive. Among the cultural illusions he enumerates about men and women are that men are responsible for all sexual activity, including sexual abuse; that sex with a woman is always an enjoyable rite of passage for a boy; that all sexual abuse is overt; that boys and men can protect themselves from the "weaker sex" and therefore if they are assaulted they are fools; that if a male victim doesn't enjoy sex with a female abuser he is homosexual; that men enjoy kinky and aggressive sex; that all men's orgasms and erections are voluntary; and that a woman can do no harm sexually because she has no penis.

More notorious than the Massachusetts case is the story of Mary Kay LeTourneau, a thirty-five-year-old Seattle schoolteacher who was impregnated by her thirteen-year-old sixth grade student, a boy she had also taught in second grade. A married mother of four, LeTourneau gave birth to a baby girl, who is being raised by the boy's mother. She was convicted of two counts of child rape and sentenced to seven and a half years in prison. According to *People* (March 30, 1998), at her sentencing "she expressed remorse and pleaded for leniency. 'I did something I had no right to do. Morally and legally it was wrong. Help me. I give you my word it will not happen again'" (p. 47). Accordingly, she was given parole for all but six months of her sentence, and was released on condition that she attend a program for sex offenders and not see the boy again. Days after her release from prison, however, she had stopped taking the medication prescribed for her bipolar disorder and was rebelling against her psychological treatment. She was soon rearrested for being in a parked car with the boy (*New York Times*, February 4, 1998, p. A17). Her parole was revoked, and shortly thereafter it was discovered that she was six weeks' pregnant by him. At the time she was rearrested, it appears she was getting ready to flee the country with the boy (*People*, March 30, 1998). There was no further prosecution of LeTourneau. She gave birth to a second daughter while in jail, and this child is also being raised by the boy's parents, who are said to be accepting LeTourneau as a member of their family (*New York Times*, October 18, 1998, p. A30, and October 24, 1998, p. B18).

While this woman's behavior was recognized as sexually abusive

and she was brought to trial, she was penalized far more leniently than a man in her position might have been. Imagine what would have followed had a thirty-five-year-old married male teacher impregnated his thirteen-year-old student. Is it likely he would have been given a six-month sentence and let out on parole based solely on his word not to recontact the girl? The answer, I think, is self-evident. Without going into the appropriateness of one sentence over another for any abuser, I believe that the sentencing in this case embodies the different societal attitudes about men and women as sexual abusers.

Meanwhile, the boy in the case maintained that “he had initiated the sexual relationship, and that LeTourneau had tried to resist before finally giving in” (*People*, March 30, 1998, p. 47). Insisting that there was nothing wrong with what had happened, the boy told a reporter, “All that matters was that we loved each other” (*New York Times*, November 9, 1997, p. IV3).¹

But *is* that all that matters? Can any thirteen-year-old, no matter how mature, be ready to make the life decisions this sixth grader was encouraged to make by his teacher? Thinking that love is all that matters might in itself be considered a sign that he is not ready to make such a complex choice about his future. In Chapter 1, I noted that there may be some occasions when early sexuality is nontraumatic for a given child. This is more likely to be the case for an adolescent nonviolently involved with an adult whose gender is appropriate for his own object choice. However, I also commented that a boy may have little capacity to judge the effects of premature sexuality on himself, or even to name it as troubling or agitating.

Because of the cultural myths that women cannot be sexually exploitative, the traumatic impact of abuse of boys by women is particularly minimized in our culture (see Mendel, 1995).² Indeed, one sexual abuse researcher has gone so far as to say that “sexual abuse by women is virtually nonexistent” (Crewdson, 1988, p. 70). Consequently, a boy

¹ In a related case where there was no pregnancy, a female high school teacher in Minnesota was sentenced to nearly seven years in jail for having sexual relations with a fifteen-year-old male student. She was also ordered to register as a sex offender and submit her blood sample for DNA testing. She said she loved the boy, but he testified that she was a “monster” whom he never wanted to see again. His father described him as a formerly carefree young boy who became angry and depressed because of his relationship with the teacher (*New York Times*, August 2, 1998, p. A23).

² For discussions of female sexual abusers of boys, see Sarrel and Masters (1982); Marvesti (1986); Condy, Templer, Brown, and Veaco (1987); Johnson and Shrier (1987); Banning (1989); Krug (1989); Shengold (1989); Kasl (1990); Mathews, Matthews, and Speltz (1990); Baron, Burgess, and Kao (1991); Harper (1993); Bachmann, Moggi, and Sirmemann-Lewis (1994); Elliott (1994); Siegel (1996); and Miletski (1997).

is likely to feel he is “supposed” to enjoy sexual encounters whether they are welcome or not, especially if the initiator is female but not his mother. As Johaneck (1988) says, “[T]he boy who is molested or abused by a woman is often unaware he is being victimized. . . . If a boy discusses such events with his peers, he is often congratulated for his luck, with no one paying any attention to his uneasiness or feelings of being used or exploited” (p. 108).

For example, Ramon, a man who as a child and teenager was molested primarily but not exclusively by men, used his experiences with women to “prove” that his experiences with men did not mean he was homosexual. He was therefore initially unable to encode his experiences with women as abusive in any way. As Ramon initially portrayed it, he had been sexual with women because he wanted to, but he was more ambivalent and ashamed about his activities with men. He said that he felt reassured by the pleasure he felt with the women, that being with them even at age ten “made up for” being sexual with men as well. When I suggested that whatever his desires at the time, he had been molested as much by the women as by the men, he was surprised. But when I asked what he would think if he heard about a ten-year-old boy engaging in sex with an adult woman, he nodded vehemently and said, “Of course! It shouldn’t happen!”

CINEMATIC DEPICTIONS OF SEXUAL INITIATION OF BOYS BY WOMEN

As Johaneck (1988) notes, “Popular literature is replete with stories of boys who are introduced to adult sexuality by older women” (p. 108). Boys who look to such popular media as film for information about premature sexuality with women (for example, *Tea and Sympathy*, *The Graduate*, *Harold and Maude*, *The Last Picture Show*, and *Summer of ’42*) find virtually no support for any feelings of anxiety or discomfort. Such experiences are almost universally portrayed in a positive light, as the sexual initiation of an adolescent into manhood by an experienced, caring, and/or attractive older woman (even, in the case of *Murmur of the Heart*, his mother³). There is virtually no sense in any of these films that a boy may not always be happy to be sexually involved with an older woman. Although in some cases the boys initially react to their seductions with embarrassed fumbling, often they become magically skilled lovers, reinforcing the idea that a relationship like this transforms

³ A darker view of maternal incest is depicted in *Spanking the Monkey*.

them into “real men.” Any long-term negative consequences for them are ignored or minimized.

Conversely, the women are generally portrayed as nonexploitative and nonmenacing. Indeed, they may be depicted as noble and self-sacrificing, even as victims for whom we feel compassion when the boys eventually abandon them. They are never seen as adults sexually molesting children. However, if we look closely, many of the women are needy and have personal agendas that influence their decision to become sexually involved with the boy. For example, they may have shaky marriages, feel neglected or old, or be in mourning for a former lover.

Even if we accept the premise of each individual film that in the particular situation being portrayed there was no abuse or trauma involved, we must also consider the overall cultural effect of film after film in which sex between a boy and an older woman is seen as positive for him. There is no model for a boy in such a situation to feel it is acceptable not to welcome, enjoy, and take pleasure from the relationship. This is the crucial point I wish to make: portrayals in this popular medium *only* support the idea that boys are happy to be offered sex with older women, and virtually *never* endorse the view that such situations are or can be sexual betrayals.

Such depictions reinforce and perpetuate attitudes toward sexual victimization that make it difficult for boys to process and heal from traumatic sexual experiences with women. A boy cannot help but deduce that feeling anxiety, dread, or apprehension about these situations makes him different from other boys and perhaps even unmanly. He learns to ignore these sensations, deny them, or never allow them into awareness.

ENCODING FEMALE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR WITH HETEROSEXUAL BOYS

I got a call one day with an unusual and urgent request from a young woman named Doreen. She said she had been in treatment with another therapist for several years, in part because of a history of childhood sexual abuse by her brother, Ed. Having decided to confront Ed about the abuse, she had asked him to fly in from the distant state where he lived. She had told him only that she needed to talk to him about something very important to her. Ed was arriving that afternoon, and she was planning to talk to him that night about the abuse. She wanted to know if I could be available to meet with him if he felt he needed to talk to a therapist afterward. Almost in passing, she mentioned that she wondered if Ed had also been sexually abused as a child.

I said I would be willing to meet with Ed. After hanging up the phone, I considered the interesting nature of their relationship. Doreen knew Ed would drop whatever he was doing to come a long distance to talk to her if she said she needed him. And, although Doreen was convinced that Ed had abused her, she obviously loved him enough to try to find him psychological support in the midst of preparing herself for what clearly was going to be a difficult confrontation. Or had her abusive history prepared her to take care of her abuser no matter what? I could not tell.

Ed telephoned me the next morning and we arranged to meet. He was an open-faced, likeable man in his late twenties, dressed casually, with the long hair and beard of an outdoors man who would never have to punch a time clock. He seemed bright and articulate, though not particularly psychologically minded.

Ed was still in shock from his confrontation with Doreen. He had no recollection of the events she described, although he did not deny they had occurred. As Doreen recounted the story, on several occasions when he was eight and she was five Ed tickled her while she was in bed. The tickling had gone beyond the bounds she was comfortable with, involving rubbing of her chest where breasts would be, and also stroking of her thighs and vagina. She protested, but he just laughed and continued.

Ed did remember childhood sexual activity with Doreen, but from a later age, when he was about fourteen and she was eleven. They had gone into the woods with friends who were also brother and sister and of the same ages as Doreen and Ed. There, the four of them had undressed, looked at each other, then played together without any overt sexual touching involved. He remembered this occasion as one that involved excitement and guilty pleasure because they thought they would be punished if they were caught. His overall sense, though, was that it had been a "lark." Ed said he told Doreen about this episode, but she did not recall it. Her explanation, which he accepted, was that she probably had not remembered the incident because it had apparently been consensual and therefore not traumatic.

At first, Ed was mainly interested in talking about how he should discuss the memories with Doreen so as to be as healing and helpful to her as possible. In this context, we talked about his need to be open, to allow expressions of anger, and to accept responsibility for the kind of brother he had been and continued to be. It was clear that there was much in the relationship that was mutually positive and supportive.

We talked about their family and upbringing. Nothing sounded particularly remarkable: the family was middle class, there were two other siblings, there had been family separations, and there seemed to have

been basically positive relationships among the siblings and between the children and their parents. I asked what it had been like between him and Doreen as children. Ed said they had been close but then he laughed and said he had “loved to tease her and drive her crazy, like any brother liked to do with a younger sister or brother.” He supposed “there might have been a competitive streak” between them.

Then I mentioned that Doreen had said she wondered if Ed had also been abused as a child. Ed chuckled amusedly, saying he had not been. Later, however, Ed mentioned having had an eighteen-year-old female baby-sitter when he was about seven who encouraged him several times to touch her bare breasts under her sweater. Laughing again, he said he wished he’d been older when it happened because he would have enjoyed it. As it was, he was “dumb enough” to tell his parents not to hire her any more.

I stopped him and inquired further. Why did he think it was “dumb” to have her fired? Startled, he said, “Because I’m sure it felt very nice to touch her breasts, and I’d love to do it now.” We had to go over the events several times before he acknowledged the difference between an adult man imagining with pleasure fondling a young woman’s breasts and a boy of seven feeling uncomfortable with the guilt-inducing and frightening stimulation of fondling the naked breasts of his caretaker. I said, “You certainly behaved like someone protecting himself from abuse when you asked your parents not to use her any more.” His laughter vanished, and he nodded uneasily, obviously troubled, saying he had never thought about it that way.

As we retraced the events of that period, it became clear that the incidents with the baby-sitter had stimulated Ed considerably. Additionally, I think it plausible that they had encouraged him to add behaviors into his already rough but probably normative treatment of his little sister so that it became abusive. He had been taught that intimate touching is acceptable in a hierarchical relationship even if the less powerful participant is uncomfortable with it. Not surprisingly, he took this new knowledge to the relationship in which *he* wielded the power, began to touch Doreen intimately, and did not stop when she protested. In addition, of course, Ed shifted the balance of power with the baby-sitter and had her fired.

This vignette highlights important aspects of the experience of childhood sexual abuse, including some of the potential differences between how boys and girls ultimately understand what happened to them. Both Doreen and Ed were sexually abused as children. From an external standpoint, neither had encountered profound or even malevolent violation, yet each had a sense of having been invaded and feeling helpless in the face of a more powerful person’s sexual wishes. But

Doreen understood that she had been abused. Ed, on the other hand, while uncomfortable at the time, later thought of himself as “dumb” for not having enjoyed what “should” have been an exciting sexual awakening. Like many men, he had over time apparently revised a sexually abusive boyhood experience with a woman so that it became retrospectively defined as normative (Holmes and Slap, 1998).

What about Doreen and Ed’s different memories of their childhood sexual experiences? I believe Doreen was correct when she said that she remembered the earlier episodes because they were traumatic and forgot the later one because it was consensual. An alternate explanation, that the later experience was dissociated or repressed because it was traumatic, seems much less persuasive to me. On the other hand, even though Ed was the guilty party in the earlier occurrences, he did not recall them. Perhaps his nonrecall resulted from a repression of guilt feelings about what he had done to Doreen. Or perhaps these events were not as important to him as the incidents with the baby-sitter, to which the abuse of Doreen was a reaction. They certainly seem not to have been as exciting to him as the episode with the other brother and sister. In any case, it appears that both Ed and Doreen selectively remembered experiences that were pivotal as they grew up, pivotal particularly in relation to feelings about burgeoning sexuality and boundary violations.

The differing attitudes of Ed and Doreen illustrate one way men and boys may encode their sexual abuse by women differently than women and girls encode their abuse by men. In addition, we can see in them the different societal norms about sexual activity with girls and boys. Sexual abuse of girls is more common than abuse of boys, but it is also more universally condemned when discovered (Groth, 1979). And, while I do not doubt that girls are traumatized by abuse as much as boys, girls may be readier than boys to recognize their abuse *as* abuse. This recognition helps girls come to terms with the abuse as adults.

WHEN THE ABUSER IS MOTHER

In general, then, it is difficult for boys to encode sexual behavior with women as molestation. Encoding sexual mistreatment by a mother is far more complicated. Mothers are often thought to be their sons’ primary object of erotic desire. The Freudian concept of the Oedipus complex conveys the powerful longing sons have for their mothers. Its resolution is insurance that sons do not act upon these strong wishes. But the deep sense of erotic connection boys want with their mothers is rarely thought to be a wish for actual genital union.

Mother-son incest is perhaps the most taboo incestuous relation-

ship in American society. I have often been greeted with blank stares of horror and disbelief, even in professional settings, when I bring up overt mother–son incest even as a theoretical possibility (see Welldon, 1988, for a discussion of attitudes toward mothers as desiring, erotic individuals). The traditional focus of psychoanalysts on the mother–son incest taboo highlights its ubiquity in our culture as well as the power of the wishes it is thought to restrain.

Maloney (1995) enumerates some of the cultural myths that underlie and/or result from this taboo: every woman loves her children unselfishly; mothers have their children's best interests at heart at all times; mothers are altruistic and loving; mothers are there to meet the needs of their husbands and children; a mother may be sexual as a spouse but is asexual as a mother; and a mother is never sexually attracted to her children. These myths are powerfully entrenched in our culture and buttress the strong cultural prohibition of incest by a mother.

On the rare occasions that overt incest between a mother and son comes to light, it is more likely than covert incest to be considered wrong. Siegel (1996) reminds us that incestuous mothers have been regarded by mental health professionals as more deeply disturbed than incestuous fathers, though neither she nor I agree with this assessment. I myself have heard it stated flatly that only a psychotic mother could abuse her son.

Maternal sexual betrayal of a son often occurs covertly, in the guise of some aspect of caretaking and nurturing, as when a mother gives her son unneeded enemas or spends too much time washing his genitals. Kyle, for example, was lined up, along with his sisters, for weekly anal examinations by his fanatically meticulous mother. She claimed to be checking for worms, and scrutinized each of them with metal probing instruments while the other children watched. Such situations are rarely recognized as either sexual or abusive. If the behavior is noticed at all, it is at worst likely to be considered the result of the mother's overcompulsivity or overzealousness in her maternal role.

Gabbard and Twemlow (1994) explain the denial of maternal sexual abuse, as well as the denial of abuse of boys by any woman, by arguing that "deeply ensconced gender-based stereotypes play a role in minimizing the traumatic impact of maternal seductions on male children. Within our culture we have clear gender biases regarding who is the seducer and who is seduced, who is the victimizer and who is the victim, and who is likely to be damaged by the sexual act" (p. 172).

There have been some reports of mother–son incest in the psychoanalytic literature. Margolis (1977, 1984) and Shengold (1980, 1989), for example, both remark on the heightened sense of specialness and entitlement felt by adolescent boys they treated who had been abused by

their mothers (see also Siegel, 1996). Gabbard and Twemlow (1994) also note this sense of specialness, but add: “The sense that their exalted status is tenuous, contingent, and provisional leads these men to develop a pervasive anxiety related to the perception that a disaster may occur at any moment” (p. 183). One possible explanation for this pervasive anxiety is the boy’s guilty and ambivalent pleasure in the incest. However, anxiety is often explicitly engendered by the interpersonal dynamics of the abusive situation. For example, the mother of the patient Gabbard and Twemlow describe would abruptly interrupt their sexual activity, leaving him overstimulated and bereft. In addition, she threatened to hurt him if he “let go” and ejaculated when they were together. Not surprisingly, as an adult he developed the symptom of ejaculatory inhibition. Finally, the mother made it seem as though her son was the aggressor in their sexual activity and that she was relieved when his father appeared and pulled him off her. Thus, she organized the incest in such a way that her son could never be sure that his special relationship with her would continue.

Given the extreme taboos about mother–son incest, recognizing such behavior as both incestuous and abusive can be cataclysmic for the son. The inner consciousness that he was excited by erotic contact with his mother can be especially devastating and confusing. He may be proud on some levels of his sexual “prowess” (Siegel, 1996), and this may lead to a sense of grandiosity about his abilities to seduce women (see Chapters 8 and 10). At the same time, however, the incestuous activity was likely to have been suffused with distortions by the abusing mother, as when Gabbard and Twemlow’s patient was told by his mother that he had been the sexual aggressor. In turn, the son may need to create distortions of the situation, either then or later, in order to bear thinking about it at all.

Silber (1979) relates how his patient’s distortions of reality stemmed from his early maternal abuse. This man was abused by his mother at nap time over an extended period during his preschool years and later. At first, she invited him to explore the scar from the caesarean section she had had at his birth, telling him he was entitled to do so because he had been the cause of it. Then she extended downward the area he could explore until he was rubbing her vulva. Over time, she shifted his body to be on top of hers and rubbed him against her genitals by holding on to his hips. At other times, in the guise of play, she forced his face to her genitals and rubbed his abdomen. Silber hypothesizes a series of defenses that his patient developed in response to the trauma of this abuse, including an ability to enter hypnoid states and a pervasive denial of reality, especially in his interpersonal relationships, that extended into his adult years. (See Chapters 7 and 8 for a more extended discussion of

these dissociative defenses and their effect on an individual's ability to relate to others.)

Brooke Hopkins (1993) has written a moving account of his sexual victimization by his mother at a very young age. At the time, he understood the abusive events to be wrong and, in some unarticulated way, simultaneously abusive, yet powerfully inviting. He describes how at about age six he waited after bedtime for his mother to get into bed with him and spend the night. He thought at the time that perhaps it would have been better if he had been a girl, because then he wouldn't have to worry about "that thing of mine" (p. 34) and all the erotic urges he felt toward his mother:

Somehow, I felt, it would have been easier with another kind of body, one more like hers, because what was happening was, I knew, not supposed to be happening, and very dangerous, even though I yearned for it every night, had become completely addicted to it, and could hardly have imagined myself living without it. But by the time she slipped into bed with me, her six-year-old son, all these thoughts vanished in the sheer pleasure of having her body next to mine. (p. 35)

He describes the intense sexual excitement he felt for his mother, the nearly unbearable desire that he simultaneously loved and feared:

[I was] almost unbearably excited by being so intimately in bed with her, by exploring her body with my hands . . . , feeling her warmth and her smell. Sometimes my penis would be so stiff from rubbing against her that I was afraid it would break off, literally like a stick. . . . [T]here were moments when I could hardly contain myself with the desire to be touched as well. It was about this time that I began to anticipate my mother's coming down the hall with a combination of the most intense longing and an almost equally intense dread. (p. 43)

He touched her body everywhere, and, seemingly passive, she allowed such contact without ever openly acknowledging what was happening. The only exception was when he once tried to touch her vagina and she "said sleepily, 'No, I'm sorry. You can't touch me there. That place is saved for your father'" (p. 44). Hopkins then relates how his father put an end to the overt sexuality between him and his mother by suddenly coming into his room one night and violently pulling his mother out of Hopkins's bed.

Richard Berendzen (Berendzen and Palmer, 1993) has written another compelling personal description of the extreme confusion of a boy in an overtly incestuous relationship with his mother. Berendzen is the former president of American University in Washington, DC, who resigned in disgrace after it was discovered that he had compulsively

made telephone calls suggesting he was committing child sexual abuse. After undergoing extensive psychotherapeutic treatment, he wrote a book linking his bizarre behavior to his own severe history of childhood sexual abuse by his mother (and on one occasion being included in sexual intercourse with both parents). In the book he writes about his disorganizing responses to the overt sexuality with his mother:

What happened . . . came in a dizzying blur, feelings of confusion, disgust, and terror slamming into each other, toppled by momentary convulsions of nausea, excitement, and shame. *A hurricane overtook my small boat.* I tied myself to the mast, closed my eyes, and tried to survive the storm. I felt a deep revulsion, a revulsion buried under my skin. My body knew a secret, hidden from the world. Yet within this awful revulsion, I experienced momentary pleasure ripples of tingling sensation. To experience pleasure and disgust for the same reason and almost simultaneously created overwhelming confusion and torment. If I knew I hated what happened between my mother and me, how could my body respond as it did? Arousal led to pleasure, which cap-sized instantly in shame and disgust. It sickened and bewildered me to hate my body for making me feel good. (p. 21; emphasis added)

Hopkins and Berendzen thus encapsulate the all-encompassing ambivalence of the survivor of sexual abuse by a mother, and perhaps, in a heightened form, the reactions of any child victim of sexual abuse by a caretaker. The child experiences desire and excitement along with disgust and revulsion. His inner world is deeply immersed in a civil war that would have terrible long-term effects on the psyche of any child.

The boy thus must somehow reconcile the paradox of his own warring emotions. But, as Berendzen dryly, and bleakly, concludes, “Paradox does not fascinate a child” (p. 21).

ENCODING MALE ABUSE OF HOMOSEXUAL BOYS

Like a heterosexual boy abused by a woman, if a boy growing up to be gay is abused by a man, he may think of it as something he deliberately sought or at least liked. This situation is especially complicated because being involved in erotic same-sex behavior may itself be experienced as shameful, and may give cause for others to consider the boy himself depraved or wanton. Wright (1995) describes how a thirteen-year-old boy, not a hustler, was arrested along with the adult man who was having sex with him. Instead of being treated as a victim of a crime, however, the boy was *himself* charged with sexual immorality. This makes sense only if we believe that boys, whether gay or straight, are in charge of themselves, sexually and otherwise, and therefore are totally responsi-

ble for all their actions. This is a concept whose other implications I will examine in Chapter 3.

I will further discuss the subject of abused men's sexual identity and sexual orientation struggles in Chapter 4. For the moment, however, consider the reactions of one gay man to his early sexual experiences with an older man.

Coming to treatment with me in his retirement years, Owen was a man with complex reactions to his homosexuality, to being exploited by his family, and to his sexual misuse by an older man throughout his adolescence. The complexities of these experiences led him to believe for the rest of his life that he had not been sexually abused, even though he freely acknowledged that if he were to hear of a child going through experiences identical to his own he would try to protect the child from them.

Owen grew up in a family whose roots in its midwestern community went back many decades before his birth. His family was respectable and hardworking, though never wealthy. Indeed, during Owen's formative years in the Great Depression they were quite poor, although never in an absolutely disastrous financial situation. The oldest of six, Owen was raised with a strong sense of duty to his family, and in particular was given considerable responsibility for his younger siblings. This became more pronounced when a younger sister was invalidated for several years by a life-threatening debilitating disease requiring frequent hospitalizations and constant special care.

Owen's interest in other boys was well established by age eight, when he was involved over a period of time in consensual sex play with a ten-year-old friend. At age twelve, Owen began a long-term "affair," as he called it, with Calvin, a twenty-nine-year-old man.

Calvin was a man of some wealth, a member of the town's most prominent family. He openly courted Owen, though the sexual nature of this courtship seems not to have been apparent to others, and showered him and his family with various gifts and favors. He was a constant visitor in Owen's home. He owned a car, something of a rarity in the town at that time, and willingly gave rides to various members of the family. Owen recalled his father requesting him to ask Calvin if the father could use the car, so it appears that the specialness of the relationship between Owen and Calvin was clear and openly acknowledged. Owen was ashamed of having to ask Calvin to do such favors for his family, but only in therapy nearly sixty years later did he begin to think about how the family used him to get what they needed from Calvin. Owen's father once asked him if Calvin ever did anything with Owen that "he shouldn't." Owen quickly answered "No," and the question was never brought up again, even when Calvin took the family on vacations at his own expense and shared a room (and bed) with Owen while the rest of the family shared another room.

When Owen went away to college, the sexuality in the relationship with Calvin ended at Owen's request, though a friendship continued until Calvin's death. After Owen married, Calvin also married, and even asked Owen to be his best man. Owen declined because he was afraid that somehow people would know that he and Calvin had been sexually involved if he filled this role. Calvin later had children of his own, and only in his treatment with me did Owen begin to wonder whether Calvin had abused his own children.

It was in the context of our exploring Owen's attitude toward his homosexuality that he told me about his "affair" with Calvin. Owen never considered the relationship to have been abusive, even though, as I have said, he acknowledged that if he heard about such a relationship between a twelve-year-old boy and a twenty-nine-year-old man he would feel it was inappropriate and exploitative. But he maintained that there was no abuse from Calvin because Owen knew how interested he was in sex with men and with Calvin. Owen insisted that since he had always loved sex and was delighted to be sought out as a sexual partner by nearly any man, he could not have been abused by Calvin. Equally important, and not unrelated, Calvin was very loving in manner to Owen and emotionally supportive in a variety of ways. This support was largely lacking elsewhere in Owen's life, where he was expected to nurture his younger siblings while much of the parental attention was focused on his dangerously ill sister. In addition, for many years Calvin was the only person Owen knew who seemed content about being homosexual. I will further discuss Owen's feelings about his homosexuality in Chapter 4.

It was almost an afterthought for Owen that he never felt he loved Calvin, and was far more interested in boys his own age. That Calvin loved him was sufficient for them to have a six-year "affair." This seems to be primarily related to Owen's inner sense, which lasted all his life, of being homely and perhaps unloveable. He experienced himself simultaneously as highly sexual but unattractive, and learned that sexualized responses from men, starting with Calvin, ultimately made him feel both loved and sexually fulfilled. He therefore could not imagine that such attentions could be abusive.

PRIMARY OBJECT CHOICE AND GENDER OF THE ABUSER

We have seen many demonstrations of how men are likely to encode their abuse as "sexual initiation." This is particularly true if the abuser is not a parent and is of the same gender as the boy's eventual primary object choice. Thus, a straight man who was abused by a sister or a

female baby-sitter, or a gay man who was abused by an uncle or a male camp counselor, often thinks of the episode as one he should have liked or actually did like, rather than as anxiety-laden or abusive.

In the example of Ed earlier in this chapter, this dynamic was demonstrated in a heterosexual man abused as a boy by a female baby-sitter. We will also see that Ira, another heterosexual man abused by women, felt that he was lucky to have an affair with his college professor, and never recognized that the downward spiral of his life afterward might have been related to this relationship.

Owen, the gay man just described, similarly maintained that at age twelve he could not have been abused by an older man because he was already interested in sex with men. And as a boy and adolescent Jared thought he was not especially affected by what he considered excited, willing, and pleasurable participation in sex at age five with a teenage boy. In his case, however, he realized later that the experience had severe effects on his adult relationships.

Thus, none of these men initially encoded premature sex as betrayal, and all considered the sexual events they experienced to have been pleasurable, even though each demonstrated sequelae that suggest the experiences had abusive and traumatizing aspects. The picture is very different when the abuser's gender does not match the boy's eventual predominant primary object choice. Elsewhere in this book, especially in Chapters 3, 4, and 8, I will discuss the troubling implications for boys in such situations. I will also note problems for some gay boys abused by men, especially boys whose abuse occurred before they had any understanding of their homosexuality.

For the moment, however, I will briefly illustrate the likely reactions of boys abused by adults of the opposite sex from their eventual predominant primary object choice. Yale, for example, was a gay man who was abused by a nun as a second grader. His scornful attitudes toward others, especially the women in his adult life and the presumably straight boys he seduced in high school, were closely connected to his continuing clear inner sense of having been abused and exploited by her. He openly loved "getting back" at heterosexuals, whom he considered to have mistreated him in many ways all his life. Conversely, Quinn, a straight man who was abused by his grandfather for years from the time he was a preschooler, and Harris, a straight man abused by his father during his latency years, both felt victimized and continued to harbor both rage and dread about men, particularly those in authority. Each felt a mixture of fear, yearning, and contempt about the possibility of intimate relatedness with other men.