Child Sexual Abuse: Understanding and Working with Male Victims

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the roadmap

- Part I  Male Victimization: The Numbers and the Issues
- Part II Working with Survivors: Investigation, Prosecution, Justice and Healing
thanks and attribution

• Christopher Anderson and the staff of MaleSurvivor.org
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- Victor Vieth and the staff of the National Child Protection Training Center, Winona State Univ, Winona Minnesota
- National District Attorneys Association, National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse
child sex abuse: reality

• most CSA is **serial** in nature; not a “one-time event”
• most perpetrators **groom** their victims
• most perpetrators are **known** to their victims and trusted by family members
• most victims **never report** to authorities
• most perpetrators are protected by one **institution** or another
Part I

Male Victimization: The Numbers and the Issues
male victims: the forgotten

• CDC Adverse Child Experience Study: rate of offending at around 1 in 6 males (sexually victimized before the age of 16)

• National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Study (2010) estimates around 1 in 4.5 males experience sexual abuse in their lifetimes
Can therefore estimate more than 25 million male survivors in the United States.
male victims: four issues

• Am I gay?

• Does this mean I’m not a “real man?”

• Does this mean I’ll do this to someone else?

• What if the abuser is an older female (or male assuming identification as homosexual)?
male victims: the experience

• most studies indicate: average age at first abusive contact is 10.1 years

• the perpetrators
  – male perpetrators 61%
  – female perpetrators 28%
  – both 11%
male victims: under-reporting

- male victims appear to under-report sexual abuse more than females
  - fear
  - shame
  - stigma associated with homosexuality
  - masculine stereotypes demanding reticence, silence, “being tough,” etc
male victims: toxic responses

• *man up, get over it*
• *men can’t be raped- whatever happened, you must have wanted it*
• *stop playing “the victim”*
• *if it was an older woman, you’re the luckiest guy in the world*
• *probably means you’re “gay,” better keep quiet*
male victims: toxic responses

- being a victim = being weak
- there are no resources for males, so no use telling anyone
- you’re more likely to become homosexual as an adult (“anally eroticized”)
- you’re more likely to become an abuser
Because an erection, an orgasm, or ejaculation does not equal consent.
male biology

• men’s bodies normally react to genital stimulation: a boy or man having an erection or orgasm can feel like his own body betrayed him

• perpetrators often use this “evidence” to convince victims they “wanted” it and/or that this is “natural”

• Males often threatened to have the abuse told to others, which can be terrifying
male biology

• Confusing/painful if boy/male did not want sexual contact w/ perp

• In homophobic culture, getting an erection from touch of a male can be very confusing

• Fear due to thinking I am bad, dirty, sinful or will be labeled weak, sissy, queer regardless of sexual orientation

• SHAME and SECRECY are universal outcomes; Sexual abuse robs survivors of ownership of their sexual selves
is there a connection between past abuse and offending?

• **Most important point:** Men (or women) who are sexually abused are not more likely to abuse others because of it
  – no “vampire theory” exists

• **Survivors of sexual abuse** do often act out, but against **themselves**
the ‘vampire’ and past abuse myth

Among the material findings are: ...

3. Adults will lie and over report their history of childhood sexual victimization.”

‘hot for teacher’ myth

”Whether or not it seems fair, when adults and children have unforced sex, the child is always the victim.”

Kenneth Lanning
Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis, P 6
homosexual offender myth

• "...[M]ost men who molest little boys are not gay. Only 21 percent of the child molesters we studied who assault little boys were exclusively homosexual

• Nearly 80 percent of the men who molested little boys were heterosexual or bisexual and most of these men were married and had children of their own."
homosexual offender myth


• Male perpetrators: 61%
• Female perpetrators: 28%
• Both male and female perpetrators: 11%
[a] total of 43 percent of high school boys and young college men reported they had an unwanted sexual experience and of those, 95 percent said a female acquaintance was the aggressor.”

male victims & female offenders

• typical scenario is an adult female “seducing” an adolescent (or younger) boy
• usually regarded as something between harmless & beneficial
• actually almost always deeply hurtful, even if pleasurable
  – inhibits ability to form normal relationships
  – affects self-esteem and growth
survivors and self-abuse

• self-medication
  – alcoholism, drug abuse, smoking, over-eating, other addiction

• reckless lifestyles
  – regardless of sexual orientation, survivors sometimes drift toward reckless and unhealthy lifestyles involving excessive risk, sexuality, etc
Part II

Tips on Effective Engagement
assessing for the possibility of abuse

• Listen for clues and pieces
  – “my childhood was messed up”
  – “I don’t like X” but can’t/ won’t say why

• Look beyond surface appearances
  – may present as angry/difficult to connect with
  – engage in destructive behaviors
  – Many come from communities that distrust police/social workers; cannot take personally
  – often won’t be able to explain clearly what is happening (has happened)
likely ineffective questions

• Were you sexually abused?
• I know you were sexually abused.
• If you were abused, you’d remember it.
• Just tell me, it will be ok.
• Tell me the truth, and we will make sure this person never hurts you again.
• I know how you must feel.
avoid comparing or minimizing

• do not minimize or compare negatively to other more “harmful” cases
• you don’t know if you have the full story; poly-victimization is extremely common
• each survivor deserves the full measure of our compassion
• psychological harm is measured subjectively by harm that is felt, not objectively by the injury
• males are especially likely to minimize
• there is no hierarchy of abuse.
examples of effective questions

• have you ever felt uncomfortable or ambivalent about someone touching you, even if you may have wanted their attention?

• what messages did you hear/have you been told about sex? About sexual orientation?

• how/what were you taught about sex?
examples of effective questions

• Did anyone ever make fun of or make you sensitive about your private parts, your body, your genitals? Or complimented you in a way that felt uncomfortable?

• Did anyone ever coerce or force you to do things you did not want to do?

• Did anyone ever tell you they were treating you special or doing you a favor, yet you felt bad or wrong or worried about what you were doing together? Or worried that there could be bad consequences if anyone ever found out?
communication techniques

• Listen for feelings conveyed through tone of voice
• Pause before answering
• Respond to answers before asking next question
• Convey empathy through tone of voice & sounds

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4116270/
empowering communication techniques

• Avoid place holders like “Okay” “I see” “Got it” “Really” or “I understand”

• Be gender neutral as much as possible when asking about perpetrators

• Avoid physical contact; especially immediately after disclosures

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4116270/
guiding principles

Safety always comes first
Trust must be earned
Healing interactions are collaborative
Survivors need to be empowered to have choices
in case of disclosure - BPT

Believe
• No matter what you hear, believe that the person before you is being truthful

Stay Present
• Stay in the moment with the person. Try to maintain eye contact. Don’t rush to judgment, or seek causes, who to blame, or remedies.

Say “Thank You”

ctmirror.org/2015/02/09/op-ed-empathic-support-can-improve-healing-for-survivors-of-abuse/
kintsukuroi

(n.) (v. phr.) "to repair with gold"; the art of repairing pottery with gold or silver lacquer and understanding that the piece is more beautiful for having been broken