

Characteristics Observed in Male Sexual Abuse Victims

- by Ken Singer, LCSW

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(www.malesurvivor.org)

Denial of Vulnerability

Difficulty recognizing that what happened was sexual abuse. High need for control in interactions with others. May appear stubborn and rigid for control in interactions with others and frequently engage in power struggles, or seem passive, codependent and conforming. Both are protection from feelings of vulnerability.

Confusion Regarding Sexual Orientation

Orientation is exhibited in many ways. Some men claim heterosexuality but are sexual with other men. Some homosexual men question their orientation and wonder how they might be different had they not been abused. Other men may not engage in any sexual behaviors with males or females and are unable to determine their sexual orientation.

Confusion of Emotional Needs With Sex

Needs for nurturance may be identified as sexual. Many needs may have been met through the sexual abuse and sex continues to be viewed as the only way to be cared for. Real relationships with other men and women are often seen as threatening and sexual behavior may actually be one of the few ways to relate superficially and still have some needs met. Societal norms encourage men to equate sexual prowess with personal value and discourage direct expression of emotional needs. Some men become "Don Juans" or give the impression they are "superstuds" as a way of proving to themselves and the world that they are not gay or weak because of their victimization histories.

Gender Shame

Confusion and anxiety regarding masculine identity. Extremely uncomfortable around other men. Does not like to be touched by men and often avoids situations where he may be seen unclothed. Because he does not feel part of the group, he is often isolated with few male friends. Shame is especially powerful regarding feelings about masculinity. "Real men" don't get abused, they can protect themselves. Internalized male models are shaming or nonexistent. May exhibit more feminine characteristics as an attempt to separate from negative masculine image or to avoid identifying with the male abuser.

Multiple Compulsive Behaviors

Sex, food, chemicals and work are examples of common compulsive behaviors used to satisfy an internal drive to continually push oneself to avoid feeling pain and to meet dependency needs but is not productive or helpful.

Physical and Emotional Symptoms

Hypertension and frequent chest pains. Recurring dreams or nightmares of being chased or attacked, choked or stabbed. Difficulty urinating in public restrooms. Depression and anxiety.

Pattern of Victimizing Self or Others

Most victims do not become offenders. Many dysfunctional behaviors may be seen as an attempt to feel more powerful, punish oneself or numb the unwanted feelings connected with the abuse. This may involve passive-aggressive behaviors or subtle put-downs. Some men, act out by exposing, obscene phone calling or voyeuristic activities. Anger toward self can involve suicide attempts or putting oneself in a high risk situations which could lead to injury or death without actually attempting suicide. Victim may react to a current situation as if it were similar to the childhood abuse experience. Victim feels powerless and cannot see the current situation for what it

is. Coping mechanisms mimic survival means used during childhood. May actually become involved in abusive relationships as an adult that are in many ways similar to the childhood sexual abuse experience.

Boundary Transparency

Unrealistic fear that others can see their failures and vulnerability. They fear they can do nothing to protect themselves. This inability to protect self and feeling unsafe can result in difficulty establishing even minimal trust. Other reactions include anxiety, rage and withdrawal. May have a history of boundary intrusions other than sexual abuse, especially physical and emotional abuse.

Chaotic Relationships

Many difficulties around intimacy, autonomy (self-sufficiency) and commitment to a relationship. Extreme and intense swings in needs for closeness and distance with others. The need to be cared for and have dependency needs met is in conflict with fear of vulnerability and re-victimization. This behavior repeats the victim-perpetrator experience with the partner when that person alternately becomes a perpetrator and a protector.

Poorly Defined Sense of Self

Self protection has resulted in submersion of self with little internal locus of control. Behaviors are similar to codependency. Importance placed on attempts to avoid feelings of confusion and vulnerability.

Source: <http://www.themensproject.ca/CharacteristicsObservedInMaleSexualAbuseVictims>