

# CLINICAL ISSUES IN TREATING THE MALE SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ABUSE

## 1. *Reluctance To Seek Treatment*

Male survivors are often less inclined to self-initiate therapy; they are more often “nudged” into therapy by a family member, friend, or partner. Males often compartmentalize their victimization to avoid or postpone dealing with the aftereffects directly.

## 2. *Minimization Of The Experience Of Victimization*

Cultural norms reinforce the perception that males cannot or should not be sexually victimized; some cultural norms even define early sexual experiences for males as “rites of passage” into adulthood.

## 3. *Shame-Based Personality Dynamics*

Protective armor may encase core “damaged goods” feelings; many men feel gender shame about powerlessness to protect themselves from victimization.

## 4. *Exaggerated Efforts To Reassert Masculine Identity*

Many male victims develop coping responses that are grounded in hyper-masculine attitudes/behaviors.

## 5. *Fear Of Intimacy With Other Males*

Boys and men frequently fear that acknowledgement of sexual victimization will be perceived by others as disclosure of homosexuality; vulnerable to coping strategy of extreme isolation from other males &/or intense homophobic attitudes/behaviors.

## 6. *Confusion About Affectional/Sexual Preference*

Many victims of same gender abuse struggle to separate learned sexual response patterns from core feelings of affectional/sexual preference.

## 7. *Behavior Patterns That Reflect Power/Control Dynamics*

Male victims may gravitate toward either end of the power/control continuum (i.e., either striving to be authoritarian or prone to passivity) in their style of interpersonal relationships.

## 8. *Externalization Of Feelings*

Male victims are susceptible to the male myth that it is O.K. to act on feelings but dangerous to feel feelings.

## 9. *Vulnerability To Compulsive Behaviors*

Compulsive behaviors are often disguised as within the context of socially acceptable masculine behavior – i.e., hyper-sexuality, submersion into work, strenuous exercise, ritualized use of food/alcohol, etc.

## 10. *Fears That Sexual Victimization Creates Predisposition To Sexual Offending*

While it is true that most sexual offenders have a history of sexual victimization, it is not true that most

sexual victims become sexual offenders. However, it is common that males who acknowledge sexual

victimization frequently encounter a “vampire syndrome” reaction.

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