

# Female Perpetrators & Male Sexual Abuse victims: Society's Betrayal of Boys

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The reality that boys are sexually abused by women is not widely accepted. Some people view it as an impossible act – that a male can't be sexually assaulted by a female – and others view it as sexually titillating. The existence of female perpetrators and male victims confronts many of our most firmly held beliefs about women, men, sexuality, power, and sexual assault. It challenges our very notions about what sex is.

## THE VIEW THAT MALES ALWAYS WANT AND BENEFIT FROM SEX WITH FEMALES

On the whole, discussions and writings about sex refer exclusively to heterosexuality, which is considered normal and natural. The commonly held view of heterosexuality is that men are always wanting and seeking sex with females; males are dominant, while females are submissive. Men initiate sexual encounters, and women accept or decline male invitations for sex.

## IF A FEMALE INITIATES SEX WITH A BOY – HE IS CONSIDERED LUCKY

If a female initiates sexual contact with a male, this is viewed as a rare and exciting opportunity that no man should let pass by; he should be grateful.

Given these commonly held beliefs, many people see nothing wrong with a woman pursuing a boy sexually. In fact, in some circles it is considered a good way to introduce boys to heterosexuality. Some fathers take their young sons to prostitutes with the mistaken belief that it is "good" for them. A number of movies, stories, jokes, and fantasies portray older women sexually "seducing" young boys in positive terms.

## WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE MEN WHO WERE SEXUALLY ABUSED BY WOMEN?

Sadly, many men who were sexually abused by women are locked in silence, shame, and self-loathing. Society tells them that not only was their experience not abuse, but that they should have enjoyed it, and if they didn't there must be something terribly wrong with them.

Even when their experiences are recognized as abuse, they may be viewed as having been "weak?" or "not man enough" because they were unable to stop it, defend themselves, or put it behind them.

The myth that men can't be victimized particularly by women is firmly entrenched in many cultures. Many men who dare acknowledge that they were sexually abused by women are cruelly laughed at and humiliated. Most do not dare say a word about it for fear of feeling any more ashamed than they already feel.

Many men who were sexually abused by women feel deeply ashamed of themselves, their sexuality, and their gender. Sadly and mistakenly, they believe that there must be something profoundly wrong with them that they were abused in this way. Some men defend against feeling this way by being in a constant state of anger or rage – one of the few emotions that are socially acceptable for men. Many male survivors cope with the abuse by drinking, using drugs, living recklessly, avoiding intimate relationships, numbing their feelings, dissociating, and becoming depressed, anxious or angry.

David Lisak, Ph.D. (1994), in his research with 26 adult male sexual abuse survivors (many of whom were abused by women), found that the effects of the abuse on the men could be grouped according to the following themes:

- ANGER
- BETRAYAL
  
- FEAR
  
- HELPLESSNESS
  
- HOMOSEXUALITY ISSUES (mostly for men abused by men)
  
- ISOLATION AND ALIENATION
  
- LEGITIMACY (being able to take the abuse and its effects seriously)
  
- LOSS
  
- MASCULINITY ISSUES (feeling okay about being male)
  
- NEGATIVE CHILDHOOD PEER RELATIONS
  
- NEGATIVE SCHEMAS ABOUT PEOPLE (difficulty trusting others)
  
- NEGATIVE SCHEMAS ABOUT THE SELF (feeling bad about one's self)
  
- PROBLEMS WITH SEXUALITY
  
- SELF BLAME/GUILT
  
- SHAME/HUMILIATION

For a more detailed description of these themes and to read some moving quotes from the interviews with the men, [read this article in PDF format here](#).

#### MOTHER – SON SEXUAL ABUSE

Men who were sexually abused by their mothers, or other women in parenting roles (such as aunts, grandmothers, sisters, etc.) often feel the most inner turmoil, shame, guilt, and self-loathing. They were betrayed by the very women who were supposed to take care of them and to protect them. It is no wonder that men who were sexually abused by their mothers feel a profound sadness and emptiness.

Abuse by a mother is often the last abuse to be dealt with when there have been other perpetrators in the survivor's history. Many men and women have said that the abuse by their mothers was the most shameful and damaging form of childhood victimization that they experienced. (Elliott, 1993, pg. 21)

Men who were sexually abused by their mothers often have a very difficult time disclosing the abuse because they feel a loyalty – a traumatic bond – with their mothers. It may be a conflicted bond, but a bond still the same. This bond may stop them from disclosing what they believe would be a “betrayal” of their mother's trust and confidence.

#### THE SON MAY BE PUT IN THE ROLE OF HUSBAND

In my clinical experience, a common dynamic in mother-son sexual abuse is that of the son being placed in the role of husband. In this context, a son is likely to feel aligned with his mother and protective of her, wanting to please her and take care of her. He may even be put in the position of trying to protect her

from her abusive husband, which will invariably leave him feeling inadequate and ineffectual. As a child, his mother's abuse may seem less threatening than his father's, but her abuse is no less serious just the same. In time, the effects of her abuse will take its toll on him.

With this reversal in roles, abused boys sometimes grow up having problems being taken care of, preferring to place themselves in care-taking positions. They may become very submissive, catering to the needs of their sexual partners. On the other hand, they may be very angry at women, viewing all women in the same way – as being emotionally manipulative, controlling, abusive and untrustworthy – and take revenge on them.

#### FEMALE PERPETRATORS CAN BE JUST AS VIOLENT AS MEN

It is common for mothers who sexually abuse their sons to rely on emotional manipulation and control, for example, by telling the child that by doing a certain act it will make mommy or aunty “feel good”; pretending that the abuse is really a form of bathing and cleaning; pretending that it is meant to make the child “feel good”; pretending that it is cuddling. It is also the case that mothers and female perpetrators are violent. This is particularly evident in ritual abuse where women, along with men, are sadistic toward children (and adults).

Female perpetrators can be just as violent as men. We know this, yet the stereotype and reality of the “emotionally clingy” female perpetrator is given more attention because it confirms our beliefs that women are weak, emotionally dependent, and non-violent. I have heard horrendous stories from men (and women) who were beaten and tortured by their mothers and other women in their lives, and not only in the context of ritual abuse.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

Men who were sexually abused by women rarely see their reality reflected in articles, books, services, and web sites that are created for sexual abuse survivors. The fact that it is not widely acknowledged or accepted that boys as well as girls are sexually abused, and women as well as men sexually abuse children is damaging to men who were abused by women.

Many male survivors live in isolation, fear, shame, anger, and silence precisely because they know the taboos in our culture about talking about this form of abuse. It needn't be this way. We can acknowledge that boys are abused and women abuse children without diminishing the reality of male perpetrated violence and female victimization. Understanding this form of abuse contributes to our knowledge about abuse in all its forms – something that we will all benefit from.

#### REFERENCES:

Elliott, Michele (Ed.). (1993). *Female Sexual Abuse of Children*. New York: Guilford Press.

Lisak, D. (1994). The psychological impact of sexual abuse: Content analysis of interviews with male survivors. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 7, 525-548.

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