

**MALE SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE:
SHAME AND THE HEALING QUEST**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of shame for male survivors of sexual abuse. Five male survivors gave voice to their experience of shame. Using a phenomenological method, semi-structured interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and analysed for themes. From this rich source of data six essential shared themes were determined. The results showed that male survivors experience strong feelings of low self-worth, as would be expected. However, the male survivors in the study also saw themselves as “abnormal”, “freaks”, “perverts” or “monsters”. This self-characterisation points to the great isolation and stigmatisation male survivors face in their social environment. Themes included shame related to the survivor’s male identity, sexual arousal at the time of abuse, and feelings of responsibility for the abuse. All six themes were discussed, as were implications for counselling.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Imagine a typical group of fellows sitting on a deck enjoying a drink and some conversation. One of the men brings up the subject of the sexual abuse of young boys and men, and the shame these boys and men feel in their lives. Imagine the reaction of the rest of the group.

Now try to imagine a subject that could be more embarrassing for that group to talk about. It may be difficult to do so. In mainstream North American society, particularly among males, neither the subject of male sexual abuse nor that of shame is easily talked about. The sexual abuse of young boys and men has been much overlooked, perhaps even avoided.

But boys are being sexually abused by men, women and older children. Rates of prevalence for the sexual abuse of males varies widely in the research. Holmes and Slap (1998) reviewed 166 studies and found prevalence rates ranging from 4% to 76%. In 1984, the Canadian government published a national study titled Sexual Offences Against Children, also known as the Badgely report. It found that 14% of males in Canada are sexually abused (Badgley, 1984, as cited in Mathews, 1996). In a national U.S. telephone survey of men 18 years and older in 1990, 16% reported a history of sexual abuse (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis and Smith, 1990 as cited in Holmes and Slap, 1998). These two large-scale studies provide reasonable benchmark figures. It should be kept in mind when looking at rates of prevalence for male survivors that they are likely to underestimate the actual rate for a number of reasons including the reluctance

many males may have to disclose their abuse, the socially influenced perception that abuse by a female is not really abuse, and other factors.

For much of my information on the descriptive characteristics of the sexual abuse of males, I have relied on a comprehensive review of the literature by Mendel (1995). Most studies researching the age of onset for male victims of sexual abuse found the mean age to be between 7 to 10 years old (see studies cited in Mendel, 1995). With regard to the severity of abuse, Mendel observes that a number of studies show that boys are subjected to more severe abuse than girls are. However, he notes that this is probably because boys are not as likely to report less severe forms of abuse than girls are. Mendel surmises that the reasons for this are that boys are more likely to misconstrue abuse (especially from females) and more reluctant to report abuse, and in addition, parents and professionals are slower to suspect or respond to the abuse of boys. As a result, the sexual abuse often needs to be severe before it is recognised and reported.

With respect to the ratio of male-female perpetrators, there is quite a range (Mendel, 1995). For example, Finkelhor (1979, as cited in Mendel) found that 16% of abused males had been abused by women. Risin and Ross (1987, as cited in Mendel), in a study very similar to that of Finkelhor, found that 43% of sexually abused males were abused by women, and 4% were abused by men and women. The wide range of male-female ratios in these studies is in part attributable to the former widely held misconception that females couldn't be perpetrators, and to the under-reporting of women abusing boys, according to Mendel. These conditions have changed, and Mendel

observes that “the proportion of female offenders within samples of abused males has risen dramatically over the course of the 1980’s and early 1990’s. I would speculate that this is a result of increasing acknowledgement of the sexual victimisation of males, in all its forms and variations (p. 62).”

Although it was commonly believed that boys were abused by strangers, research has dispelled that notion (Mendel, 1995). Most research shows that even in extrafamilial abuse, the vast majority of perpetrators are known to their victim before the abuse begins. In Mendel’s view, the contrary findings turned up in several other studies can be attributed to either population group (hospital) or the means of identifying sexual abuse (only sexual activity reported by the respondent as abusive, which would likely inflate the relative frequency of abuse by strangers) (p. 64).

Male survivors suffer from a myriad of serious emotional, physical and interpersonal difficulties. Mathews (1996), reviewing research studies on the effects of sexual abuse on men, lists such emotional disturbances as “anxiety, low self-esteem, guilt and shame, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, withdrawal and isolation, flashbacks and multiple personality disorder, emotional numbing, anger and aggressiveness, hyper-vigilance, passivity and an anxious need to please others (p. 36).”

Research has also shown that male survivors of sexual abuse suffer from physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, eating disorders, self-mutilation, engaging in unsafe sexual practices, nightmares and phobias (Briere et al. 1988, as cited in Mathews, 1996). Male survivors of sexual abuse also suffer from difficulties establishing and maintaining intimate relationships. They may have few close friends,

be promiscuous, and have emotionally and sexually unfulfilling, often abusive, relationships. They may experience sexual dysfunction or engage in prostitution (Lew, 1986).

Mendel (1995) observes that Finkelhor and Browne's model of traumagenic (trauma-causing) dynamics for understanding the effects of sexual abuse is perhaps the most influential and comprehensive. The four dynamics are: traumatic sexualization, betrayal, powerlessness, and stigmatisation. "Stigmatisation... refers to the negative connotations – e.g., badness, shame, and guilt – that are communicated to the child around the experiences and that then become incorporated into the child's self-image (Finkelhor and Browne, as cited in Mendel, 1995, p. 76)." In 1990, Kelly and Gonzalez made a study of the symptomatology of sexually abused males (as cited in Mendel). They used Finkelhor and Browne's model and the psychiatric model for their conceptual framework for understanding the impact of sexual abuse. They found that with regard to symptoms of stigmatisation, 69% reported feelings of extreme guilt and shame, 88% reported feelings of isolation, 94% reported a sense of being different than others, and 100% reported feelings of isolation (p. 111).

The problems male survivors face are only made worse by the ignorance they often encounter in society. Although the sexual abuse of women has received a good deal of attention, both from the general public and the counselling profession, the experience of men who have been sexually abused has only begun to be documented and researched (Lew, 1986; Gartner, 1999).

Just as the subject of the sexual abuse of males is underrepresented in popular

and academic discourse, so too is the subject of shame. It is enlightening to look at the root of the word “shame”, probably the Indo-European base “kem”, which means “to cover” (Hollander, 2003). Shame is a subject covered over, or hidden, in our society. Cicero said that he was ashamed even to mention shame (as cited in Hollander). Donald Nathanson, a prominent analyst of shame, observed that colleagues were uncomfortable with his exploration of shame. He “learned that the very *idea* of shame is embarrassing to most people” (Nathanson, 1992, 15). This is because thinking of shame causes us to reflect on our own shame. And so, in popular society and in academia alike, the subject of shame is avoided.

According to a growing number of authors, felt shame is a significant factor behind much of the psychological distress afflicting North Americans. Shame is considered a major underlying cause for pervasive and serious psychological problems such as depression, bipolar disorder (Morrison, 1998), narcissism, personality disorder, displaced anger or rage (Lewis, 1992). Because of its very nature, felt shame is unlikely to come under the scrutiny of client or therapist alike: “Like our patients, we therapists have also suffered the pangs of shame and, when our patients’ painful experiences threaten to call forth similar ones in our own lives, we collude to avoid examining them” (Morrison, p. 9).

Strong shame can result from such trauma as child abuse and sexual abuse; it can result from a child’s neglect or rejection by his or her parents. Lewis (1992) makes the point that shame is no stranger to us; in fact, life is full of instances of “everyday shame”. Indeed, shame can be felt any time overwhelming feelings of inadequacy or

rejection are felt in an interpersonal relationship.

The feeling of shame causes one to seek to hide oneself and one's perceived defects from others. As such, it prevents disclosure, a cornerstone of the healing process. Its ubiquity, and the likelihood that it underlies many common presenting problems in counselling, makes it a significant problem of our day.

Both shame and the experience of men who have been sexually abused have been understudied and under-appreciated subjects in the field of psychotherapy and counselling. Some recent research has been made with a specific focus on the development of shame for sexual abuse survivors (Feiring, Taska and Chen, 2002; Feiring, Taska and Lewis, 1996). In addition, the presence and origin of shame has been discussed in most major studies of male survivors. However, to my knowledge, no published study has been made with the specific intention of researching the experience of shame for male survivors of sexual abuse.

What is the experience of shame for men who have been sexually abused as children? This is the research question asked in this study. The aim of this research is to better understand the experience of shame in childhood and adulthood in the lives of five male survivors. The aim is also to discover essential themes from their experience; themes which will hopefully resonate with most male survivors of sexual abuse. It is expected that these themes will help to inform us of the experience of shame for male survivors of sexual abuse.

Definition of terms

It is important to define certain terms for the purposes of this paper. To begin with, what is sexual abuse? I would like to make use of Gartner's (1995) cogent and inclusive description of the parameters of sexual abuse. He considers the age marker for childhood (as opposed to adult) sexual abuse to be the legal age of consent. (This is 17 where he lives in New York State. In Canada it is 14. I would consider 17 to be a more appropriate marker for the separation of childhood and adulthood). The age difference between the victim and the victimiser is a critical aspect to consider, as it indicates a power differential. The nature of the relationship is also critical. If the victimiser is in a position of trust and power, there is greater implicit coercion.

Gartner also refers to *contact* and *noncontact sexual abuse*. Contact sexual abuse, usually a chargeable crime, may involve the penetration or stimulation of any part of the boy's or the victimiser's body. It may also include forced unnecessary enemas, coercing a child to be sexual with animals or to engage in prostitution. Gartner's (1995) definition of noncontact sexual abuse (sometimes referred to as *sexuality abuse*), includes often overlooked, covert, behaviours. These include all kinds of acts which are harmful to the child's sexuality, such as being overly sexual or masturbating in front of a child, making derogatory references to the child's sexuality, encouraging the child to be sexual with others, discussing inappropriate sexual topics with the child, and other similar behaviours (p. 24 – 26).

I refer to boys, youths or men who have been sexually abused as male survivors of sexual abuse. Although I believe these individuals were all victims at the time of their

sexual abuse, I use the term survivor to describe them now, as it emphasises their resistance and strength in the face of extreme adversity. Only when I am referring to these individuals' experience at the time of their abuse do I call them victims. I also want to make it clear that I believe sexual abuse can take place at any age. Abusive relationships can continue into adulthood, and abusers can take advantage of another person's vulnerability no matter what that person's age. Therefore, I may include all of the developmental stages (boys, youths, and men) when referring to survivors, or I may highlight specific stages, depending on the context.

I have used the term "co-researcher" to describe the five men who participated in this study by taking part in an interview and sharing of themselves. The term "participant" is commonly used; I chose co-researcher to indicate the central importance these men had in the creation of this thesis. Like Fraeich (as cited in Moustakas, 1994) I wanted my co-researcher "to join with me as a truthful seeker of knowledge and understanding." I have learned a great deal from my co-researchers, and their insight and honesty inspired me to do my best.

I would like to make one further point with regard to my use of language. I do not wish to use sexist language, for example by using the pronouns "he" or "him" to refer to both sexes. Instead, I use the gender-neutral pronouns "they" and "them" when I want to refer to both sexes.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Spotlight on shame: Sylvan Tomkins

If distress is the affect of suffering, shame is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation. Though terror speaks to life and death and distress makes the world a vale of tears, yet shame strikes deepest into the heart of man. While terror and distress hurt, they are wounds inflicted from outside which penetrate the smooth surface of the ego; but shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks himself. In either event he feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth.

(Tomkins, 1995b, p. 133).

The subject of shame was central to the work of Silvan Tomkins, a theorist who laid the groundwork for subsequent research, beginning in the 1960's. Tomkins saw how shame struck through to the core of the person; it was a "sickness of the soul". No other psychologist had assigned such significance to shame.

Tomkins referred to shame not as an emotion but rather as an affect. An affect is comprised of a correlated set of physiological responses. Like Darwin, whose works he admired, Tomkins studied human biology to identify the affects. Tomkins believed that observing the cognitive elaborations of emotional experiences was not helpful, because these elaborations were potentially limitless (Demos, in Tomkins, 1995a). He identified a total of eight affects, each with a joint name which included the affect as experienced

at its lowest and highest intensity.¹ For example, shame-humiliation indicated that the most intense form of shame is humiliation.

Tomkins gave primacy to affects as a whole for their role in motivating people. This stood in marked contrast to the earlier belief of Freud that unconscious drives were the primary motivators, and the then current belief that cognitions were the primary motivators.

I view affect as the primary innate biological motivating mechanism, more urgent than drive deprivation and pleasure and more urgent even than physical pain. ... The affect system is therefore the primary motivational system because without its amplification, nothing else matters – and with its amplification, anything else *can* matter (Tomkins, 1995a, 86-87).

For Tomkins, affect is an *analogue amplifier* that takes any stimulus and makes one care about it, and possibly act on it. It is analogous to the stimulus in that it corresponds to it directly.

Tomkins (1995a) was led to this orientation when he reconsidered Freud's concept of the id and sexuality. The id appeared to be a "paper tiger since sexuality, as he [Freud] best knew, was the most finicky of drives, easily rendered impotent by shame or anxiety or boredom or rage. This insight gave me the necessary theoretical base to

¹ The eight affects are: *Positive* 1. Interest-Excitement: Eyebrows down, track, look, listen 2. Enjoyment-Joy: smile, lips widened up and out *Resetting* – 3. Surprise-Startle: eyebrows up, eye blink *Negative*: 4. Distress-Anguish: cry, arched eyebrow, mouth down, tears, rhythmic sobbing 5. Fear-Terror: eyes frozen open, pale, cold, sweaty, facial trembling, with hair erect 6. Shame-Humiliation: eyes down, head down 7. Contempt-Disgust: sneer, upper lip up 8. Anger-Rage: frown, clenched jaw, red face

pursue the nature of this system further (p.33).” As Tomkins noted, it was the co-assembly of the drive with appropriate affects that created urgency.

As noted above, Tomkins considered physiological response as well as emotion. Tomkins drew a picture of a person experiencing shame: the eyelids are lowered, the facial muscles lose all tone, and the head hangs down and is averted to the side (Tomkins, 1995a, 84-85). In this picture of bodily resignation defeat and low self-worth are clearly evident. Tomkins explains why shame is so powerful and damaging an affect:

Why are shame and pride such central motives? How can loss of face be more intolerable than loss of life? How can hanging one’s head in shame so mortify the spirit? In contrast to all other affects, shame is an experience of the self by the self. Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object of shame is lost. Why is shame so close to the experienced self? It is because the self lives in the face, and within the face the self burns brightest in the eyes. Shame turns the attention of the self and others away from other objects to this most visible residence of the self, increases its visibility, and thereby generates the torment of self-consciousness. (Tomkins, 1995b, 136).

Shame is a self-conscious emotion in which one becomes acutely aware of one’s deficiency, and acutely aware of being seen by others. One feels exposed. Shame is so self-conscious that one sees only oneself. There is no perspective, no separation between “subject and object”. And of course the self that fills one’s sight or experience in shame

is unworthy, unacceptable.

Tomkins grouped shame with other self-conscious emotions. These include guilt and shyness. Tomkins believed that although the conscious awareness of each of these experiences was quite different, they nonetheless belonged to the same overarching affect, that of shame-humiliation (Tomkins, 1995b). The activator of shame was “the incomplete reduction of interest or joy (134).” For Tomkins, this process was one in which an event interrupts one’s interest or joy, one feels shame, and one’s shame goes on to further inhibit one’s interest or joy.

Michael Lewis and attribution theory

Michael Lewis is a major theorist of shame who proposed that the phenomenological experience of shame has four features. First, it involves the desire to hide or to disappear. Second, there is intense pain, discomfort and anger. Third, one feels unworthy and inadequate. Fourth, the person experiencing shame is the object as well as the subject of shame. Lewis explains the ramifications of the subject and object becoming one. In this state, “the self system is caught in a bind in which the ability to act or to continue acting becomes extremely difficult. Shame disrupts ongoing activity as the self focuses completely on itself, and the result is confusion; inability to think clearly, inability to talk, and inability to act (Lewis, 1992, p. 34).”

Lewis differs from Tomkins on aspects of shame. Like Tomkins, Lewis observes that the distinction between subject and object is lost in shame. However, unlike Tomkins, he goes on to say how this feature distinguishes shame from guilt. In guilt, the

self's focus is outside of the self per se. Lewis (1992) refers to H.B. Lewis, who in 1971 pointed that whereas shame is about the self, guilt is primarily about the other. The focus in guilt is on a behaviour that fails to meet certain standards, and on the object that suffers from that behaviour.

According to Lewis (1992), "the function of shame and guilt is to interrupt any action that violates either internally or externally derived standards or rules (34)." There is a difference in how they carry out that function.

In guilt, the command is essentially 'Stop. What you are doing violates the standard or rule. Pay attention to what you did and alter your behaviour'.... In shame the command is much more severe: 'Stop. You are no good.' More important, it is about self, not about action; thus, rather than resetting the machine toward action, it stops the machine. Any action becomes impossible since the machine itself is wrong (35).

Lewis (1992) offers an intriguing example showing the difference between guilt and shame. In a study involving children playing with a toy designed to fall apart after a few minutes of play, several bodily and behavioural differences emerged between the children.

Some children show the typical shame response: they avert their gaze and their bodies appear to collapse. They stop moving and remain quite impassive. Their behaviour seems disrupted; their thought processes appear confused, or at least inhibited. Other children, at the moment the toy falls apart, avert their gaze and show tense facial expression, but their bodies do not collapse. Rather than

“disappearing,” these children try to fix the toy. For me, the attempt at reparation, the focus upon the toy rather than the self, constitutes the most important behavioural distinction between shame and guilt (pp. 25 – 26).

A good understanding of the difference between shame and guilt is important. Guilt is an acceptable emotion, commonly discussed and considered. Shame is not. In Lewis’ description it is easy to see how guilt can serve the individual in his or her learning. Guilt orients one towards action and reparation. With guilt there is a capacity for empathy. In most cases, shame does not evoke empathy for another or for oneself. With shame, the state of being stuck or frozen in self-blame is potentially crippling; it is a direct and serious threat to the individual’s well being.

Another critical area in which Lewis differs from Tomkins is in his concept of the activator of shame. Lewis (1992) states that Tomkins believed that an automatic elicitor causes shame. This elicitor does not require thought. “In all cases, however,” states Lewis, “it is the focus of the self on the self’s failure, and an evaluation of that failure, that leads to shame, not some automatic elicitor (p. 33).” Two elements are necessary for one to feel shame: the self must become aware of itself, and the self evaluates its failure against a certain standard. For Lewis, “emotional experience [self-reflective experience] occurs as a result of the interpretation and evaluation of states and experiences, and is therefore dependent upon cognitive processes (p. 28).”

Lewis’ (1992) follows on H.B. Lewis’ work in many respects, including the importance of the cognitive process in eliciting shame. Lewis differs on the point of the nature of the event which precipitates shame. A failure attributed to one’s self could be

precipitated by a private or public event. In a private failure, there is no external witness, but the shame is just as real. He offers as an illustration the entirely private action of a person who felt ashamed for not having given money to a charity (p.76).

Lewis elaborates on how the cognitive processes create shame in the individual. Key to this is the attribution style of the individual. Lewis (1992) considers internality (the self is the cause of a bad event), stability (the reason will remain the same) and globality (the reason affects and is a comment on the entire person) as factors most likely to lead to shame. To illustrate this attribution style let us take an example of someone borrowing their friend's sweater for the evening. The sweater gets ripped by a piece of furniture. If the friend has an internal, stable, global attribution style, they will reason as follows: I am responsible for ripping the sweater (internal - not external: i.e. the placement of the furniture is to blame); I will always be responsible for the rip (stable - I won't change my mind about that), and this rip just shows how I can't do anything right, and what a lousy friend I am (global - not specific: i.e. I wasn't careful enough).

Script Theory

Script theory, first set out by Tomkins, and further developed by Nathanson and Kaufman, offers another explanation for the creation of shame. Script theory can be seen as an explanation of how we organise and make meaning of personal events which occur in our lives (Tomkins, 1995a):

In my script theory, the scene, a happening with a perceived beginning and end,

is the basic unit of analysis. The whole connected set of scenes lived in sequence is called the *plot* of a life. The script, in contrast, does not deal with all the scenes or the plot of a life, but rather with the individual's rules for predicting, interpreting, responding to, and controlling a magnified set of scenes (p. 320).

Gershen Kaufman (1992) holds that there are four kinds of scenes that can be affected by shame: affect, drive, interpersonal need and purpose scenes. In an affect-shame bind, a boy might have been told not to cry, or have been shamed when he did cry, and he will then feel shame whenever he cries or comes close to crying. In a drive-shame bind, a boy might be shamed for the expression of sexual behaviour or urges. In the future, the boy will feel the onset of shame with any sexual feeling. In an interpersonal-shame bind a boy will be rejected or made to feel defective when in pursuit of an interpersonal need. These needs include the need for relationship, touching/holding, identification, differentiation, affirmation, power, and the need to nurture. The fourth set of scenes that can be bound by shame are purpose-shame scenes. An example of such a scene would be when a child is ridiculed by an adult for relating a daydream, fantasy or imagined vocation which communicates the child's sense of purpose (p.91).

Kaufman (1992) points to the critically important formation of the interpersonal bridge, which is the positive bond created by the parents in relation to their child. The child comes to know that he or she is loved and valued because of the interest, enjoyment and affection communicated to the child over time. If these conditions are

not met, if the child is rejected or held up to too high or impossible standards, shame will result for the child. (p. 68).

Any of the above shame binds can result in the “internalising” of shame. Kaufman (1992) states that internalised shame arises when the various binds become stored in memory. These shame-binds will link affective, cognitive and relational data from a scene into a stored memory. For example, if a girl’s mother calls her “stupid”, the girl will remember her mother’s angry face, the label “stupid”, and all of the people present. “The scene is imprinted with both affect and language” (p. 85).

All of the factors that make up the interactions in a scene become stored in an image. It is these images which develop the self’s inner relationship. If a boy is often blamed by his parents when something goes wrong, he will internalise this and grow up learning to blame himself when things go wrong. The internalised behaviour of another can come to form an “internalised other.” This internalised other is represented by a voice, no longer embodied (by father or mother, for example), and often confused with the self’s own voice. If the other person is negative enough, for long enough, with the same kinds of criticisms, their voice can be internalised, and this will cause shame.

In what he calls the *internal shame spiral*, Kaufman describes how someone enmeshed in shame can be overcome with it.

When an individual suddenly is enmeshed in shame, the focus turns inward and the experience becomes totally internal, frequently with visual imagery present. Shame feelings and their accompanying thoughts flow in a circle, endlessly triggering each other. The event that activated shame is typically relived over

and over internally through imagery, causing the sense of shame to deepen and to absorb other neutral experiences that happened before as well as those that may come later, until finally the self is engulfed. Shame becomes paralyzing. Phenomenologically, this internal shame spiral is experienced and described variously as “tail-spinning,” “spiralling downward,” or “snowballing.” Furthermore, each recurrence of the shame spiral is likely to be relived and fused together. This process inevitably entrenches shame within the personality, spreading shame throughout the self. Shame becomes malignant, growing like a cancer within the self (p. 93).”

The cumulative and self-perpetuating qualities of shame can be seen in this description of the internal shame spiral.

The experience of shame for boys and men

In order to better understand the impact of shame in men’s lives it is helpful to look briefly at some conceptions of masculine identity. There is a significant debate as to what if anything is innate masculinity and what is socially determined masculinity. This is not the place for such a debate. Several observers of masculinity have noted that although social conceptions of masculinity vary across cultures, there remain certain characteristics which remain more or less constant. The sociologist Gilmore (1990) remarks:

In particular, there is a constantly recurring notion that real manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness, that it is not a natural condition that comes

about spontaneously through biological maturation but rather is a precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds. This recurrent notion that manhood is problematic, a critical threshold that boys must pass through testing, is found at all levels of socio-cultural development regardless of what other alternative roles are recognised (p. 11).

Gilmore quotes the American poet Leonard Kriegel: "In every age, not just our own, manhood was something that had to be won (19)." Masculinity is something to be achieved by passing tests; it is the prize society offers to young and developing men.

How much of one's identity is bound up in one's gender role? It is difficult to imagine a man whose identity is not profoundly affected by how he sees himself as a man. Male identity is profoundly affected by the passing of tests, the meeting of standards. As noted above, Lewis (1992) highlighted the point that shame arises from one's perceived failure to meet certain "internally or externally derived standards" (34). If male identity is largely based on this quest to meet standards, to achieve membership in a kind of "male club", the potential for shame is clear. With such pressure on it, masculine identity seems fragile, and any perceived failure to "act like a man" could easily lead to shame.

Michael Kaufman (1993) believes that masculinity is entirely a social construct, indeed for him "There is no eternal masculinity, deep or otherwise (31)." However, there are characteristics of masculinity, which hold great social influence:

Although there is no one set of characteristics that defines masculinity, there are some enduring and pervasive features. In the eyes of many men and women,

masculinity means being in control, having mastery over yourself and the world around you (Kaufman, 1993, p. 28).

Again, in the masculine construct there is an emphasis on the ability to achieve “mastery”. Mastery implies a sense of being able to do something, to meet a certain standard. It is important to maintain control, to not flag or fail in exercising one’s mastery. Under such demanding circumstances, the potential for shame to take root is clear.

The literature on men’s experience of shame shows how a failure to achieve the masculine ideal causes shame. As Gershen Kaufman (1995) points out: “There are cultural injunctions in our society to compete, be successful, achieve, and perform. That’s especially true for men: We are supposed to be successful, and failure for men is tantamount to being cursed (p. 32 – 33).” This attempt to achieve through work and performance leads to shame. “The American dream – you can be anything you want if you only try hard enough – has really become a pathway into shame for us (p. 33).”

These expectations of mastery begin in boyhood. In early preparation for becoming the capable and relatively invulnerable competitor, the boy is taught what feelings it is acceptable to feel and express. Kaufman (1995) points out that for boys, the expression of certain emotions is shamed. Crying is shamed. Boys face injunctions like: “Don’t be a cry-baby”, “Take it like a man, with a stiff upper lip” and “Boys don’t cry”.

As Kaufman (1995) emphasises, we need to be able to cry and to feel and express sadness. This helps us to be psychologically healthy, and to navigate through losses of all kinds. When a boy or man is told or made to understand that he is not to cry

or express sadness, his shame becomes internalised. He feels shame about that feeling or expressing that emotion, and he seeks to hide that emotion. Kaufman also highlights the expression of fear, and shame itself, as emotions for which boys are shamed.

Male survivors of sexual abuse and shame

Mic Hunter (1990) regards shame as “the most powerful and damaging emotional effect resulting from sexual abuse (80 – 81).” As noted above, shame affects one’s whole self.

Since shame is related to a person’s ‘self’, and not merely to an experience, the shame becomes part of the victim’s identity. And it follows him into adulthood, affecting his view of himself and everything he does. He does not look on himself as someone who *had something horrible done to him* but rather as *someone horrible*. The shame becomes personalised so that it is a part of his identity (81, italics in the original).

Although it goes against adult common sense, the boy, youth or man who suffers sexual abuse usually feels shame for what has been done to him. The shame becomes part of the survivor; too often it does not remain where it belongs, with the abuser.

Shame for a male survivor of sexual abuse can come from a number of sources: shame for being forced or coerced to suffer sexual abuse, shame over betrayal by a trusted friend or authority figure, shame for believing that he is responsible for the abuse, shame for sexual disorientation, or believing that he is homosexual because of

the abuse and shame for believing that he has failed as a boy or man - that he was a victim, unable to defend himself.

Male survivors of sexual abuse feel shame for being forced into demeaning sexual activity. They are used for the abuser's pleasure, with little or no regard to their own well being. Boys that suffer sexual abuse feel very different from all the other boys they know, and indeed from all boys. These boys are isolated by their abusers and by our collective silence on the subject of the sexual abuse of boys and men.

Another important aspect of what occurs in the sexual abuse of boys is an abuse of trust, a betrayal. Gartner (1999) speaks of the "sexual betrayal" of boys, which may include sexual abuse, incest, or inappropriate sexual experiences. The common thread to these experiences is the violation of "implicit or explicit trust" (p. 13). Gartner cites Cheselka's definition of interpersonal betrayal as "a violation not only of trust and of the other, but of the sanctity of intimate relationships... *An implicit covenant has been broken or denied....* It changes something fundamental; a belief or a frame of reference from which to view the world of interpersonal relationships" (as cited in Gartner, 1999, p.11). This betrayal by trusted persons is demeaning and belittling; it is shaming.

The violation of trusted relationships will also be shaming if the child assumes responsibility for the betrayal, which they often do. If one who is trusted or loved betrays a boy, it may be necessary for the child to believe there is something wrong with himself. To imagine that there is something wrong with the other person can be at least disorienting, and at most, it can bring utter chaos into the boy's life. If the child feels responsible for the abuse, he will judge himself harshly for having brought it about. In

addition to the child's need to not lose the sense of order and safety provided by the belief that persons trusted and loved are indeed trustworthy, sexual offenders will also try to instil the belief in the abused that they are responsible for their abuse, in order to protect the abuser (Mendel, 1995).

Specific studies on the relationship between sexual abuse and shame reveal attribution style to be an important factor in mediating the effects of the abuse. As Lewis states, an internal or self-blaming attributional style predicts greater shame. Studies of women (Gold, 1986; Wyatt & Mickey, 1988; Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990, as cited in Feiring, Taska & Chen 2002), who were sexually abused as children have found that a self-blaming attributional style is related to the onset of more severe forms of abuse, depression and anxiety, as well as less disclosure. Feiring, Taska and Chen (2002) undertook a study of 137 boys and girls (aged 8 – 15) who had been sexually abused. They found that attributions that were internal (self-blaming) were related to higher symptom levels and poorer self-esteem both at the time of the abuse and one year later (p. 35).

For male survivors of sexual abuse, specific social norms contribute to their feeling shame. Male socialisation defines males as “powerful, active and competent, rather than passive, helpless and victimised” (Mendel, 1995, p. 17). Males avoid recognising weakness in themselves; they do not want to see themselves as victims. One could almost say that society does not allow them to be victims. Shame often results for the child because of his inability to prevent the sexual abuse. Another common stereotype that young and adult men perpetuate is to see themselves as always willing

sexual partners, at least if the other is female (p.17). Given that sexual abuse makes the abused question whether or not he measures up to most or all of these social norms, shame often results.

Another potentially shameful factor for boys abused by another boy or man is the belief that they may be homosexual, as they may believe that they invited the abuse, or that the abuser chose them because they are homosexual. If the abuse caused pleasure or arousal for the abused, their concern over being homosexual is heightened (Mendel, 1995, p. 19) Shame, arising from social messages which trumpet heterosexuality and omnipotence, is compounded by the silence surrounding the sexual abuse of boys and men.

The presence of shame, and the difficulty male survivors have in confronting it, can be seen in the widespread reluctance and refusal of survivors to consider themselves victims (Sepler, 1990, in Mendel, 1995) or discuss shame in their counselling (Tobin, 1999). The difficulty male survivors have in confronting their shame is evident in the therapist Tobin's work with male survivors, where he found that guilt and shame are unacceptable feelings for his clients. Because these emotions are not acceptable, Tobin will only use the term "embarrassment" in therapy, not "shame" or "guilt".

In contrast to Tobin's conclusions regarding discussing shame in therapy, Mendel (1995) states that many survivors are attracted to 12-step groups, and he speculates that this is largely because of this movement's attunement to shame dynamics (p. 211). Hunter (1990) is clear about the importance of healing shame: Since victims incorporate shame into their identity, if the issue is not addressed, the man

is likely to continue to self-abuse or to be vulnerable to others abusing and taking advantage of him. Therefore, the core emotion that needs to be addressed if the survivor is to recover fully is shame (p. 126).

CHAPTER III: METHOD

Qualitative Method

I have chosen to use a qualitative method because it is most suited to the enquiry of this study. This study involves an in-depth exploration of the felt experience of individuals. The purpose of this study is to get a rich description of this experience from the men who have lived it. Shame is something not easily disclosed or categorised. In order for the men to meaningfully share their experience, they needed an appropriate means for doing so. I consider qualitative interviewing to be the most appropriate method for sharing the intensely personal and complex experience of felt shame. Interviews, which create interpersonal connection and basic trust, are a fitting method for the facilitation of disclosure of felt experiences of shame.

The method is based on phenomenological theory. As the subject matter is highly personal and resistant to easy definition, it is imperative to have a method which seeks to evoke the lived experience of the co-researchers. In Van Manen's words, in phenomenological research we "...gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it" (Van Manen, 1990, p.9). To do phenomenological research is to maintain a strong, focused, committed orientation and not to "settle for preconceived opinions and notions (p. 33)."

Recruitment Procedures

The sample was a criterion sample. Co-researchers must have discussed in

therapy the shame they experienced as a result of their sexual abuse. Co-researchers were also approached on the basis of being reasonably articulate on this subject, and willing to share their experience and understanding. Co-researchers had to have a good command of oral English, and be 14 or older. The co-researchers were told that they would have to be able and willing to volunteer up to four hours of their time.

I made contact with potential co-researchers by first contacting counsellors at the B.C. Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse. I asked the counsellors if they might have current or former clients who might meet the recruitment criteria, and if so, to consider contacting them. I then contacted interested potential co-researchers.

The interview

I had semi-structured interviews with the five men who were the co-researchers. These interviews were up to two hours long. To begin with, my co-researcher briefly described his concept of shame. I then explored my co-researcher's experience of shame as a result of his sexual abuse, from the time of the first abuse until the present. I asked him to consider that experience on a number of different levels: emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural. I asked these orienting questions at the beginning of the interview, and then referred to them when necessary to help focus the co-researcher (see Appendix C).

I tried to let the co-researcher tell his story with as little direction as possible from me. To this end I tried mainly to ask questions that explored and clarified the meaning of what my co-researchers said. I did this to get a richer account of their

experience, and to limit the effect of my bias on their sharing of their experience.

Data collection and analysis

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. I proceeded to analyse the data in a grounded, inductive context. I analysed the language of my co-researchers to identify all the statements that referred to the phenomena under study. These statements were reformulated from the first into the third person, and the meaning of the statement was derived and recorded. Themes were developed by comparing the statement and meaning units and grouping them into clusters of meaning. I continued to work back and forth between the data and the themes to refine the meaning of the themes (Creswell, 1998).

I sought to determine shared themes that were essential to the experience of my co-researchers. This process is a “thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance (Van Manen, 1990, p. 32).” To facilitate this process I made use of the method known as “free imaginative variation” (p. 107). This method is one in which the researcher imagines the phenomenon without the theme under consideration, and considers if the phenomenon loses its fundamental meaning or not. The selection of themes was further enhanced by an internal validity check, as described below.

Descriptive Validity

One way in which the validity of this study was enhanced was my transcribing

the interviews myself. By being immersed in the words of my co-researchers I believe I was more aware of them, and more attuned to their meanings.

After the initial themes were developed, an internal validity check was done. This was done by having an independent judge familiar with the field of phenomenological research (the research supervisor) review a selection of meaning units and place them into the various themes. The majority of the placements were consistent with the researcher's original categorisation. There ensued a discussion of the inconsistencies, and a discussion as to what the most meaningful and comprehensive array of themes would be. From this discussion, by consensus, the themes were made more refined and compelling, and the meaning units were located in themes for which the fit seemed most accurate and meaningful.

Co-researchers helped to ensure the accuracy of my reporting of their insights and experiences in the member check. The member check involved the co-researchers reading over the summary of themes which related to their interview, as well as the essential themes taken from all the co-researchers' interviews. In the member check they were asked to consider if they had been accurately and meaningfully represented, and if the essential themes seemed meaningful to them, given their understanding of the subject. All co-researchers said that the themes resonated with them, and described the meaning of their experience of shame. There were some changes that co-researchers asked for in terms of more accurately describing their individual experience, and also in terms of protecting their identity. The member checks were audiotaped and reviewed, and as I agreed that the changes the co-researchers were requesting would make the

work more accurate and meaningful, I incorporated the changes into the work.

The researcher's relationship with the topic

In phenomenological research it is important to bracket oneself from the research. One way to do this is “to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories (Van Manen, 1990, p. 47).” I believe that the life experiences of a researcher will undoubtedly affect their research. And so they should. In fact, I believe the researcher should have a passion for their subject. This passion gives life and meaning to the researcher's work. The key is to be aware of one's convictions, feelings and opinions regarding the research subject, to question them, and to see how they are influencing what one sees. I will share a little about my relationship to the topic, to make clearer some of my perspectives regarding shame, male identity and sexuality.

I did not choose the topic of the experience of shame for male survivors for abstract or purely academic reasons. I am fortunate to never have suffered sexual abuse in my life. In my childhood I certainly faced challenges and setbacks, but I never experienced anything as damaging as being sexually abused. I have been shamed, and I have lived with shame in my life, from the time when I was a boy until this day. I believe that every person experiences shame in their life. It is not always crippling, but it certainly can be.

I have tried to explore and monitor my feelings regarding the topics of shame, masculinity and sexuality, as all three figure prominently in this study. Before I began

my interviews with my co-researchers, I interviewed myself on audio-tape, and transcribed it. I will draw on this self-interview and my thoughts and reflections to sketch my relationship to the research subject.

I believe that the single strongest shame-inducer in my life was when I was eight. My father separated from my mother and left the family. Because of unfortunate and bitter family inter-relationships I saw my father only for a short time after the break-up. I didn't see him again until I was 15. I know that I felt miserable for much of that time, and as an adult. I didn't know who I was or what I wanted. Nor did I feel entitled to know those things. It is only recently that I have begun to realise how much shame I have felt because of my father's leaving, and my mother's reaction to his leaving.

With regard to my sense of my own masculinity, I have felt bad about being a boy or a man for much of my life. I have felt that men were bad; that was what I learned growing up in my family. I have feared and attempted to control my sexuality for much of my life. My sexuality was of course male sexuality, and it was not welcome in my understanding of what was acceptable in the world. I believe these beliefs and feelings I have lived with for much of my life are akin to ones male survivors often live with. Of course, the intensity and exact nature of the feelings may differ greatly, but I believe there are some similarities.

I have held some ideas of what it means to be a man that I believe are consonant with what many other boys and men in our society hold. For example, I have believed that men should be tough and capable; they shouldn't show others their feelings. Men shouldn't feel depressed, or shamed, and we certainly shouldn't show it. Men should be

able to have lots of girlfriends and not care about them. A real man shouldn't need anyone else; he should be totally independent. Men should always be confident. I certainly realise that these beliefs are limiting, unrealistic and damaging. However, I would be lying if I said that these beliefs were all in the past for me. They are beliefs that I must grapple with, as I believe must many men in our society.

I have felt very little self-esteem for long periods of my life. I have been depressed as well, sometimes chronically. I attribute these states and feelings directly to the untouched reservoir of shame I carried with me for much of my life. I have hidden my feelings of shame for most of my life. As a man, and as a member of North American society, I did not feel comfortable sharing them, nor did I trust others to accept me and my shame.

I have been able to share some of my shame and the pain that is part of it, with close friends and my wife and family. My male-based shame I have shared with my father, also in therapy. My father's and my honest sharing of our experiences and shame has been a life-giving process that has greatly helped my well being and our relationship. Since that time, I have gone on to share intimate and shameful experiences with caring individuals and quite significantly, with communities of caring people. This has helped immensely, and I believe the way forward is to continue in this direction.

Transcription Key

The following is a key for symbols and terms used to make the transcriptions of the interviews with the co-researchers more exact and expressive.

<u>Symbol or Term</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
...	- brief pause, under five seconds long
(pause)	- pause of five seconds or longer
{ ... }	- text omitted
<i>italicised text</i>	- co-researcher emphasised this word
(laughs) (sigh)	- co-researcher laughed or sighed
[] clarify the context of the co-researcher's words.	- words of the researcher were inserted into the text to

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In this chapter I will provide a brief introduction to my co-researchers and the individual themes which characterise their experience of shame from suffering sexual abuse. I will then present the shared essential themes from the study.

Introduction to Co-researchers

Blair

Blair is a 32 year old self-employed professional in the communications industry. He was sexually abused when he was six or seven years old by a boy who lived on the same street as him. The older boy was a few years older than Blair, and the two had been friends. The abuse continued for two years and then the abuser moved away. Afterwards, Blair acted out sexually on other children in his neighbourhood, as well as with his sibling.

Blair said that he was withdrawn and introverted into his teenage years. In his late teens he developed a fun-loving outgoing persona, but was still quite miserable and isolated when away from others. He says that he has felt shame since the time of the abuse, and that his sexually acting out with other children caused him to feel even greater shame. He says that both his relationships and his “view on what sex is really about” have been drastically affected by the sexual abuse. He has been very wary of forming intimate relationships with others. Because of this, he has maintained strong defences to keep others from getting close to him.

He has tried to commit suicide twice by jumping off a breakwater. He recently began therapy to heal the effects of his sexual abuse.

Individual Themes: Blair

- He became isolated and depressed
- The shame created a kind of “fog” or confusion in his life: he didn’t know where he “was going to” because he “didn’t understand where [he] came from”.
- He felt socially and emotionally limited by his shame
- He channelled his shame into anger, which in his adult life led to sexual infidelity
- He feared disclosing his sexual abuse to others
- He tried to avoid the pain and shame of his sexual abuse by developing a very outgoing and entertaining persona

Darren

Darren is a 40 year-old professional man. He was seven years old at the time of his sexual abuse. The abuser was eight years older than him, a male babysitter from the family next-door. The abuse was rape, and it lasted until Darren was 14. Darren said that he was surprised that his parents never figured out what was happening, as he says his abuser was “rough” with him, and he felt sick to his stomach after the abuse.

Darren says that before the abuse he had been a very keen student. His kindergarten teacher had seen Darren as a creative boy. His life changed dramatically after the abuse.

As he said:

I was just fucking fell apart after that. That’s when I went to grade one and that’s

when all this started. And I was having trouble all the way through. They pushed me through elementary school, basically, and then I failed grade 8. I just couldn't concentrate.

Darren was terrified of his abuser. His abuser warned him not to tell anyone that he was abusing him, and threatened him. Darren feared his abuser would kill him. Later in life, Darren felt such a great deal of anger towards his abuser that he seriously contemplated killing him.

Darren says that he was isolated and very depressed as a boy. His depression turned to anger in his early teens, and at 14 he told his abuser to stop the abuse, and in his words, "decked him". He first got drunk when he was twelve. He relied on alcohol and work to keep his mind off his pain in his teenage years.

He says that he spent some of his adult life "a functioning drunk." Darren became very depressed again in his twenties and thirties. He says that shame had affected him from age eight until the time he engaged in therapy, three years ago. Although he had been able to avoid thinking about his abuse for much of his life, he began thinking about it a great deal in his early thirties, and this led him to seek therapy. He is now a social drinker, and he no longer suffers from depression.

In our interview, Darren said that he had been sad and angry that his parents had been largely absent from his life and had given him very little support. He also expressed the deep hurt his siblings had caused him when they teased him and called him names such as "faggot".

His family was secretive. Sex was never talked about. His parents were

unfaithful to each other, and secretive in their interactions regarding this. Darren only recently learned that his biological father was not the man he grew up with, the man who was married to his mother. His parents only recently found out about Darren's sexual abuse, and this was because of a police investigation into it. These secrets have, in Darren's words, "destroyed the family".

Individual Themes: Darren

- He felt dirty and inferior
- He became isolated and depressed
- He questioned his masculinity
- He channelled his shame into anger
- He feared disclosing his sexual abuse to others
- He tried to avoid the pain and shame of his sexual abuse by dedicating himself to his work and by drinking
- He helped himself overcome much of his shame by telling others about his sexual abuse and by building his self-confidence (for example, through public speaking)

Franklin

Franklin is a 37 year-old man living on a disability pension. He was five or six years old when he was first sexually abused by his uncle, and later by his cousin. At age eleven his uncle and his cousin encouraged him to act out sexually with another boy. Afterwards, Franklin felt horrible for having done something "that never should have been done." At age twelve Franklin's older brother began to sexually abuse him. From

age 13 until he was 27 he was abused by an adult family friend.

Franklin grew up very poor. He remembers looking for cans and bottles to make a little money. Franklin feels that he was made very vulnerable because of his poverty. His abusers took advantage of his situation by offering him money and other material rewards. As he says, he felt that “it didn’t matter what I had to do to bring money into the house.”

Franklin has been isolated and fearful of contact from the time of his abuse. He still is isolated. As he says: “I still feel lack of control to this day. Yeah. Yeah that's the reason I hide in my house.”

Franklin suffered from a poor family life. He received little support. Franklin would hide in a closet to escape people, most notably his abusers. He felt abandoned: “And people just people just didn't care. I go to the closet and sit. Nobody would even look for me nobody would even care to look for me.”

His mother and brother insulted Franklin and told him that he was like a little girl. Other people insulted him by calling him a “fairy.” His mother gave him virtually no support, and even told his stepfather that she believed Franklin was possessed.

Franklin has been very unhappy much of his life. He has attempted suicide many times and as he says, “I’m lucky I made it this far.”

Individual Themes: Franklin

- He felt dirty, inferior, evil
- He became isolated, depressed and suicidal

- He felt responsible for the abuse
- He questioned his masculinity
- He felt shame over experiencing arousal because of the abuse
- He feared disclosing his sexual abuse to others

Earl

Earl is a 56 year-old man living on a disability pension. He was put in an orphanage at age two. When Earl tries to remember his early life, it is hard for him because he was, as he says: "shuffled around so much between homes he didn't have time to think about it." He went to a total of ten different foster homes between the ages of two to nine. Earl was five years old when he was sexually abused by the son of his foster parents. The abuser was in his late teens.

Earl was later sexually abused by his female social worker at age nine. He says that this abuse has had the most damaging effect on him. The sight of a woman without her clothes on sends Earl into a "frenzy" of agitation and repulsion. He believes that the sexual abuse by his social worker has caused him to fear and avoid women.

Earl suffered further sexual abuse from his cousins of his foster home family from around age nine to twelve or thirteen. He suffered sexuality abuse from his foster mother from age nine to fifteen. This abuse consisted of his foster mother pulling down his pants to spank him, and to taunt him about his masculinity. He was raped in a tobacco field at age fourteen. He was also raped by an adult lover when he was out cold with sedatives after he had been to the dentist.

Earl has felt a strong sense of shame ever since he was sexually abused. He has led an isolated existence, and says that he suffers from self-hate. His abuse has affected his entire sex life: "I consider I've been raped all my life, like... at some, every time... I (sighs).... Every time I have sex, umm, I feel umm, raped...." Lately he has felt shame that he is a sex addict. He has tried to commit suicide twice in his life, first when he was ten and then when he was 25.

Individual Themes: Earl

- He felt abandoned and unloved
- He felt unworthy of others, inferior
- He became isolated, depressed and suicidal
- He felt responsible for the abuse
- He felt shame over enjoying the attention he received as a result of the abuse
- He questioned his masculinity
- He feared disclosing his sexual abuse to others
- He feels that the pattern of his shame experiences keeps repeating, feels destined to suffer abuse
- His relationships with women have been seriously damaged as a result of having been abused by a woman

David

David is a 33-year-old professional man. He has been married for three and a half years. David was born in the Far East, and came to an American boarding school

when he was 15. He was around 16 when he was sexually abused by his high school teacher. This continued for one to two years.

David felt unhappy and socially isolated from the time of his abuse until quite recently. He says that during his university freshman year his deep pain and sadness would only be revealed on the rare occasions when he was drunk. His roommate became alarmed at David's behaviour and told him: "Last night you were crying like a baby, and you were saying that you hate your parents, you hate everybody." It was also one time when drunk that David attempted suicide.

David grew up in a Christian home, and is a Christian today. He has been helped by his faith, his therapy and his connection with other people (most notably with other survivors). These resources have helped him to overcome much of the injury that was inflicted on him as a result of the sexual abuse.

Individual Themes: David

- He felt dirty, inferior, evil
- He became isolated, depressed and suicidal
- He felt responsible for the abuse
- He felt shame over experiencing arousal because of the abuse
- He questioned his masculinity
- He feared disclosing his sexual abuse to others
- He helped himself overcome much of his shame by telling God, friends and other survivors about his sexual abuse

Shared Essential Themes

Five shared essential themes were found in the analysis of the five interviews. The meaning of each theme is fleshed out with the words of the co-researchers, as selected from their interviews. In some interviews initials are used to signify who is speaking. For example, “F” stands for Franklin, and “P” stands for Paul. The words in italics are the researcher’s words, given to help in the understanding of the theme.

Theme I: The survivor sees himself as abnormal, dirty, bad, inferior to others, a ‘freak’ or ‘monster’ who must hide himself and his secret from the world

(All five reported)

The young survivors of sexual abuse often considered themselves and felt "different" from others when they first suffered abuse.

- “Is this normal? Is this what we’re supposed to do? How come my dad doesn’t do this to me? How come the guy down the street doesn’t do this to me?”

Darren

- “Just, I just felt different. I felt different because this all happened to me and I didn’t think anybody else went through this.”

Franklin

- “That was the word I think I kept thinking: I’m ‘weird’.”

David

- “Umm, and at one point I was struggling with it a lot you know and at one point he was telling me that ‘oh you see you’re enjoying it and your body is reacting to it’ and so then I felt like oh OK I’m not normal. Because to me this was not normal behaviour between a teacher and a student number one and number two between a male and another male.”

David

The survivors’ own perceived abnormality and deficiency became more damning with time.

- “...I was disgusting I was evil I was this monster...”

David

- “I always, I always felt that. I always felt like I’m this really bad, perverted dirty little kid.”

Franklin

- “... after doing something like that [sexually acting out with another boy] it just made it like everybody was everybody was right. I was this dirty evil little kid.”

Franklin

- “The shame was the dirt. I was a dirty person. Umm, I umm - I took the dirt as, in my head, as being all over my body. That I couldn’t get it off.”

Earl

- “I was a bad boy.”

Earl

The survivor is so afraid of others' negative reactions to disclosure or discovery of his sexual abuse that he often with great effort hid the fact of his abuse.

- “Well who wants to tell someone that somebody made you suck his dick?”

Darren

- “I think that's the shame; you're embarrassed about it. People might look at you like you're a freak.”

Darren

- “I had times where I would be like hiding in the closet. And I'd be like having problems breathing. I wouldn't come out because I was ashamed of people seeing me because they might see what I had done through looking at me.”

Franklin

- “I never thought of telling anybody. Especially after I had basically initiated [sexually acted out with] someone else. Into the little group. Cause I felt so bad and I felt like I was this terrible person. So I didn't tell anybody.”

Franklin

- “Well I I I know for a fact that I I started isolating myself from people. {...} I just constantly had a fear that if I talk - if they befriended me - they would know my secret per say.

David

- D: Yeah, oh yeah that was constantly a fear, uhh, that if they if they knew me if they knew what I'd done, umm, they would realize how, well at that time I was thinking how dirty I was how evil I was and how you know just not ...

P: So...

D: ...worthy to be their friends or...

David

- It was too shameful to tell anybody, that umm... she [his abuser] had taken advantage of a nine-year old."

Earl

Later in life the survivor often isolates himself from others, and avoids relational intimacy because of the feelings of shame it can bring about.

- "I'm ashamed that umm, my feelings, that... or afraid, or ashamed or afraid, two different things, that if I let them get too close to me... they'll find out my deep down secrets about shame; they won't want to have anything to do with me. And umm, sometimes I want to push them out of my life before they can find out that shame. I want to say I gotta leave Vancouver I gotta leave, cause you're gonna; you're gonna open the door and see my dirt."

Earl

- "... My assumptions are oh my God "you're you're a monster, get out of here."

Blair, on how people would react to him if he told them that he had been sexually abused.

- “... Shame is all these bricks that you can put up around yourself and make sure that other people don’t come in and that you’ve got, there’s no door; there’s these little holes that you can peek through and people may be able to peek in and look at you, but umm, as soon as you notice somebody is looking, jam a brick in that hole. Umm, so yeah so shame is is makes relationships very hard, makes them very hard. Because if they develop beyond the uhh, superficial level, then they [other people] have to start sort of walking through that maze of what I will allow and what I won’t.”

Blair

- I was interested in this girl and I started pursuing her I started dating her and and and and you know we we felt pretty close, umm, and but then she was constantly struggling with me and she would cry every night at home when she went home and it’s because she felt that I wasn’t open to her at all. A big part of me is shut, and she couldn’t understand it and that’s when this whole thing came up [his feelings of shame resurfaced].

David

- “I felt that if they knew, at least with her and with other people, I felt like if they knew, then they wouldn’t love me. If they knew this part of my life then they would see that I was a monster.

P: So you still had that feeling...

D: Oh, I still had that feeling that I was disgusted, I was disgusting I was evil I was this monster that...”

David, on not telling close friends about his sexual abuse, up to three years ago.

Theme II: The child and adult survivor's abuse-related shame persistently and powerfully attacks his feelings of self-worth

(All five reported)

- “Umm, it’s in my life every day.”

Earl, on his feelings of shame.

- “I’d say it’s the strongest feeling that I have.”

Earl

- B: Umm, I have a daily ritual in my head... {...} ...I tear myself down, uh... from the core. I kind of – what I am doing today? Why am I doing it? And this is why I suck, because of it you know. And I have these uh... mental sort of-

P: So you’re looking at what you do...

B: I look at... it’s kind of like looking in the mirror, and then punching the mirror and then putting the mirror back together. That’s sort of how I think about it. Umm, because it’s very umm, because I still, it’s kind of a process where umm the shame I’m going through is I’m kind of working forwards from the age of seven. Umm, to get through all of that because having to accept how shame has affected me... it’s such a large job....

Blair

- F: Yeah, I used to I used to I guess go beat myself up.

P: How would you do that?

F: Like just I was saying mentally or whatever saying that I'm a bad person, that I'm a dirty person... As I got older like when I was 13 or 14 that, I was like the perverted person...

Franklin

- D: Stomach problems. Mental problems. You don't function. You can barely get out of bed. So...

P: Is that the same as the feeling of shame for you?

D: Yeah. That that was depression. Absolutely. The shame is depression. But that's my own opinion, shame is depression. It all comes into that...shame.

Darren

- “Yeah, you go into a shell. I was living in a shell. I didn’t participate in sports or anything like that cause I missed - I had no self-worth. I had no self-worth.”

Darren

- “Well I know one common thought that I always had was that I don’t deserve to live, that it’s... (pause) well, I was... (pause) I was a bad boy, I was a terrible son I was a terrible...”

David

- “If I feel embarrassment about saying something stupid, or you know forgetting my keys in somebody’s house - that embarrassment, it’s kind of like an arm of the core shame. It’s like “ah ha you suck, but guess why?” And it pulls you back in, because

if I experience those emotions, uh, I suddenly start telling myself how I'm horrible for doing 'x' when I was ten years old.

P: Oh, it connects you back...

B: Oh yeah, it yanks you back from the reality you're living to the reality you lived you know twenty years ago.

Blair

Theme III: The survivor's male identity as a boy and later as a man is challenged as a result of the sexual abuse

(Four reported: Darren, David, Earl, Franklin)

- F: Yeah, I just felt I was, I wasn't a man anymore. I wasn't well I wasn't a man then but I mean I wasn't a male. I was something else. But I wasn't female either. I knew I wasn't female but so I was... that definitely put into a thing that there was something wrong with me.

P: That this was happening. And did that, was that a shameful kind of feeling?

F: Yeah, definitely. Very... I felt ashamed, very ashamed because I'm supposed to be a little boy. That's what I was born.

P: And and what...?

F: And I really didn't feel like this little boy that I was. I was told I was -- acted like a fairy, whatever that was at the time. Umm... and the -- what my brother [sexually abusing him] was doing to me, it just all fit that I wasn't... male I was whatever.

Whatever was in between. I was - at 13 I didn't really know what I was.

Franklin

- F: You can't rely on yourself because you don't even know who you are.

P: So that's a feeling that you have, that you don't really know who you are? Can you, is that in any way connected to a feeling of shame?

F: I believe it is. I believe it's a big thing. It's like... it's like a wall of shame behind it or, and I'm behind it.

P: You're behind it.

F: And I, but... the real me is behind it. And then there's the me that was created out of all this craziness and I can't get to the real me.

P: Because...

F: All of this shame that's there, all this, this, whatever the theory of what a man is supposed to be is all in this this wall. You aren't a man. You weren't a man then and you weren't... a guy wouldn't let this happen.

Franklin

- Oh it was very confusing [experiencing physical arousal from the sexual abuse]. I did not even know how to process it any more except to come to the conclusion that I am weird. That I am abnormal. All these words came in that I'm queer you know I'm a faggot and you know...

David

- D: Yeah, you just started growing up and your hormones are kicking in and you're thinking God this guy did this to you and you know I'm questioning my masculinity

and I'm questioning my sexuality. I'm questioning this, I'm questioning that, I'm questioning why I was failing school, and I'm pissed off. { ... } Yeah, this guy raped me and I'm gay.

P: And so you were thinking oh well is that why...?

D: Yes.

P: ... I'm gay.

D: Because this guy did that to me. Two men sleeping together, and he made me suck him off. Him screwing me and everything else...

P: That made you have...

D: Absolutely.

P: ...feelings of shame?

D: Yes it did. Yep, it did. I guess maybe I'm gay because he does these things to me and...

P: So it made you question your sexuality?

D: Yes it did. And my masculinity. I mean it all comes in to- it all ties in together.

Darren

- D: Well I worked in a restaurant. Is that is that masculinity? I was a waiter for years in high school.

P: Uh-huh. Yeah well what did you think, what did you think - I mean...?

D: They say that's a girl's job (laughs)...

Darren

- “Yeah, absolutely. I questioned my masculinity about things I did. Hung around with more girls and you know you're not supposed to clean the house.

P: And you think that that was related to...?

D: Absolutely.

P: To the abuse?

D: Absolutely. No ifs ands or buts. Yeah yeah and my mom expected me to do that. I was her fucking slave. Fucking built-in maid. Sorry I am using that language.

But yeah. She kind of turned me like into a girl.

P: You felt like...?

D: Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah I did. Next question? (Brief laugh)

Darren

- “Umm, for the longest time too I thought I was gay. I'm not sure to this day if I really know whether I am or not. Right now I take medication to make sure that I don't have the sexual interest.”

Franklin

- F: And being a guy... I would be thinking about some girls and stuff like that. And I caught myself many times thinking about guys. And that's just wrong. (Laughs)

P: It's wrong?

F: Yeah. And and it totally takes me right back to the abuse times because I was abused by a man. So, it was very difficult and it was very difficult to deal with.

Franklin

- “You know, not like today, we talk about it. And even today I would still say they’re not talking about male sexual abuse. If anything you just you see on campus you know if you’re a female who’s been sexually victimised but you don’t see males. But if you see that, like, oh you got victimised, shame on you, you’re a *man*; you should be able to protect yourself. {...} That’s how I felt that others would have said to me, that, umm... I think a big part of that, umm, is just the the image that we have as a society that puts on men, that you’re a macho that we’re supposed to be able to protect ourselves. And if you allow it to happen that’s because you wanted it to happen. And I think that’s the same with females – you know like date rape; if you get raped it’s because you wanted it. Because you were, you know, they put the blame back on you and I think I put a big part of the blame on myself.”

David

- E: Yeah, I felt more ashamed about umm... [a woman abusing him sexually] than a boy using me sexually. Umm, I was an, after all I was a male. Umm... how could, I was ashamed that umm, I was letting my body for a woman to control me. Males weren’t supposed to do that.

P: To allow to be controlled.

E: Yeah. Males were the dominant force, not the one that the woman took control of. And here I was, even though I was nine years old - that didn’t make a difference.

Earl

Theme IV: The survivor feels shame over having received physical pleasure, or the satisfaction of an emotional need, from the abuser or the abuse

(Four reported: Blair, David, Earl, Franklin)

- “I mean I’m in a sexual abuse group, and umm, everyone has been sexually abused and here I was being sexually abused from the age of five to thirteen and I didn’t look at it as abuse. And man I feel guilty. I feel ashamed that I enjoyed it. I felt shame that I enjoyed something that was abuse.”

Earl

- “I have felt that [shame] for many years. Cause I got physical pleasure out of the abuse. I got aroused or whatever that entails and. that’s just wrong. You’re not supposed to get aroused towards - it just doesn’t make sense. How is something that’s so wrong supposed to arouse you? It’s not.

Franklin

- “It was the best orgasm I’ve ever had, uhh, at least I have ever known and that to me was the point of no return. Then at that point I really felt like OK I can’t tell my parents I can’t tell anyone I can’t tell any of my friends I’m so ashamed that I wanted this. At that point it wasn’t that I allowed this anymore but that I had wanted this. And you know, in addition to that that I felt like oh maybe my friend was right, that maybe my friend was right, the one that I’d had that one encounter with, that maybe I did umm you know lure him into this because I had wanted it...”

David

- “But at that point of when he started performing oral sex on me and the first few times I really rejected the idea and I was so tense uh you know I really uh you know in my mind I just hated it. And then I don’t know what I hated more of what he was doing to me, that it felt so abnormal or that hated the fact that I am taking pleasure physically out of this and so in inside me it felt so twisted. Umm, and so all that made me feel even more shameful that at that point. It’s like crossing the point of no return now. You know before I - the analogy that I kind of felt – everything, fine, before maybe I just stole something from a store it’s no big deal right? I can return it or I have the idea that I can always return it or it’s not the end of the world. Whereas in this case I felt I had committed murder.”

David

- “So at that time that was my limited experience so I I didn’t masturbate a lot umm, but ever since that umm, orgasm I had by my teacher by my abuser umm, performing oral sex on me I mean somehow that just put in me longing for that same orgasm. Cause I honest – I think honestly before that point I’ve never experienced anything that to me that was powerful it’s like whoa I didn’t know I could feel this way. And, and so I remember I started masturbating a lot more umm... { ... } And a lot of times it was my my abuser, performing oral sex on me. He was sucking me and and I couldn’t get that picture out of my mind and so every time I replayed that umm, I would you know so when I ejaculated I would felt ohh... It was like I I abused myself again, or I I allowed him to abuse me again. Even though he was not

there. And every time I ejaculated I felt so ashamed because so I wanted it because you just fantasized about that.”

David

- “Umm but even though he was there I was angry but... aroused by his presence. And the shame that came of that I mean that well every time I think about that it’s one of those things that I hate to admit I mean I would never have admitted it. I didn’t admit it for the longest time.”

Blair, on seeing his abuser again, four or five years after his abuse

Theme V: The survivor feels shame for his understanding that he was responsible for the abuse, or unable to prevent it

(Three reported: David, Earl, Franklin)

- E: I felt shame because I was being taken away from the home, taken away from my friend. And the shame was that umm, if I hadn’t had my clothes off... and been with him... and umm, him doing something I had forced him to do. And in my mind I thought I’d forced him.

P: Mmmhmm. As a child that’s how you saw it.

E: Yeah. It’s strange to think that’s... when I think about it now. But umm, how could a five year old, umm... be responsible for somebody eighteen? But I really did.

Earl

- “And uh... so finally I saw somebody that liked me and umm... if I hadn't been a bad boy, then umm, he wouldn't have done something to me. I wouldn't have been taken; he wouldn't have been taken away from me. He was my friend. So that's the shame of it....”

Earl

- “I thought it was just me. And that I draw, had drawn this whatever was happening I had brought it on myself. Cause I couldn't think of anything any other reason for it. I just thought I was this dirty little kid.”

Franklin

- “I was a, like this dirty little kid with perverted thoughts... and I don't remember having any perverted thoughts. I always I always felt that. I always felt like I'm this really bad, perverted dirty little kid.”

Franklin

- D: So I think that partly was a lot of guilt and shame involved at that I had allowed this. And so in the beginning part it was not as bad in the beginning part when it started out it wasn't full exposure. My pants weren't down. He was just touching me and caressing me. And at that point I already felt OK this is not normal, to me this is I don't like this. And it just felt weird but I think he kept encouraging it oh you see you're getting an erection so you are enjoying it and he and he just kept saying that so every time I walked away feeling very shameful that I had allowed it and I felt...
P: You you felt that you had allowed it...

D: Yeah If felt like I had a big part, I felt like like if I really didn't want it I would have said no, and since I didn't stop him and I didn't say no therefore I was as guilty you know as he was.

David

- D: Oh yeah, every time that I walked home [after being abused] that I should have said no. I felt like I hated that; I should have said no. You know and in particular I often felt like I should have been stronger to fight against the erection that I had.

P: Mmm, mmm, should have been able to...

D: I should have been able to not respond to it. OK, so what, whatever he's doing to me I should have been stronger to not respond to it. You know...

David

- "...I almost felt like on my face was marked like "Come get me" or something.

P: Why, why did you feel like you had that, almost?

D: Umm, I don't know, just the way people looked at me, as if they saw right through me and they knew what I was...

P: "Come get me" meaning...

D: "Come get me" meaning I'm available sexually. If you want something, then come get it. { ... } ... I just felt like what is it about me that you know... you know is it written so I kept thinking that OK I'm not safe here; I don't belong because I'm a monster. Somehow I just send out these.- what's that - the hormones, the pheromones?

P: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

D: You know to attract, so I felt very unsafe in the dorms....

David

- "...I felt pretty bad. I felt like I was the the monster here, going around luring people into this path of destruction ... going around destroying people's lives."

David

- "I have this shame about sex, all the time. And umm, I have said, I have... this shame that umm, I feel like I've got it written on my forehead umm, "Abuse me". I feel shame about that. Because... once upon a time before I was five, then I was, I didn't have this label, and everything was wonderful. And then it started and umm... so I think of it as being on a freight train, you can't put the brakes on. You go past another station and somebody else wants to abuse me. And once again it's my fault..."

Earl

- "Cause I was 13, 12 or 13, my uncle abused me again and I thought I felt this is him doing this. I didn't, I didn't ask him. I didn't bring him over or whatever. But I did have a feeling like, it was like I was putting off some strange sense or whatever that was saying that this was OK. {...} Because I put that this strange whatever sense of that you can take advantage of me or you can do whatever you want. Figuring that everybody's going to do it, so... the less people that see me, the less people who are gonna do it. { ... } I felt, yeah I felt I felt ashamed because I felt like it was like it was like I was putting this feeling out there for people to do this to me but I was knowingly putting it out there.

Franklin

- “I keep wondering umm (pause) when I said I was talking about that five year old, umm, about the shame belief that... cause... I say it out loud and I try to convince myself, “it’s [the sexual abuse] not my fault, it’s not my fault” out loud. But I can’t get it through. The shame is still there; it’s my fault.

P: So the shame stops that voice...

E: Or, no the shame *is* the voice.

P: The shame is the voice.

E: Yeah. The reasonable voice is talking out loud, but the shame voice is in my head.

Earl

Theme VI: The survivor has experienced the healing of shame through disclosure to and acceptance by people in his life

(Two reported: Darren, David)

- “But they [friends] said, it's shameful what happened to you. { ... } It gives me a sense of relief now. It does. Of course it’s shameful. It should never have happened.

Darren

- D: [I thought] It’s just that he was twisted, but he cared. But through therapy I’ve

come to realise (laughs) ... that no, he abused me, he he took advantage of me because I was alone; I was vulnerable. I needed someone and he took advantage of me.

P: Mmmhmm.

D: And that realisation you know empowered me to call him my abuser. And so the shame partly got transferred. That it's not me, I shouldn't feel ashamed, *he* should be ashamed...

David

- “And that's why I really enjoyed hearing somebody else say that you know this is their experience. It's very powerful and it's very releasing of, don't be so ashamed. Don't be umm, umm and I think a big part of it is to realise that it is not my fault. Regardless of what happened I was a minor and I didn't know. I mean when I was when it started one of the first things I had the instinct to run.”

David

- D: ...At that point in my college days I met a group of Christians and I started reading the bible and and that in itself was also a therapy because I got a lot of assurance from from the bible from the word and and so in that time because of my situation with the abuse and it caused me to be open to God because I realised he was the only person I can talk to. At that point I still hadn't told anyone.

P: OK.

D: And so that in my in my I guess in my recovery, in my healing process that helped because I realised I was not alone anymore. At least I had God on my side.

So I opened up everything. You know I told Him everything that I felt. And a lot of times I would get the assurance from the bible from the word. So that really helped me...”

David

- D: And it's been very helpful to realise that I'm not the only one to feel this way. I think if anything that's the most powerful part of my therapy is that I came across this online site that you know is basically is for all for male survivors. And there is a lot of people sharing their stories and sharing their feelings and and it's very empowering to me to be connected with these people.

P: Mmhmm, mmhmm, that's something that's happened in counselling and it sounds like that's something that's had an effect on your on your feeling of shame as well.

D: Yeah, I don't feel so shameful that oh my goodness, I went through all this. I had all these thoughts online in the group. I openly share with some of them that hey I fantasise about male and so one guy replied and he said that “you know I feel the same way. I'm happily married and my sex life is OK. Ever since the abuse it has never been great.” But yet yeah, he is addicted to pornography, even sometimes male pornography because he doesn't understand but he has to see the image of his abuser, what the abuser did to him and so he is confused, but when he said that when I read that then I just felt (big sigh) ahh... { ... } I think the feeling of “ahh” you know is that... it's like letting go of the shame a little bit that hey, I'm not ashamed of it.

David

- D: And to hear that this is not your- like for me to say then to that person "this is not your fault." Even I'm only doing that online, you know, to that group, I feel empowered to tell them "hey, let go, it is not your fault." And I feel like when I'm saying that I fully empathise with that person. Because I know that's exactly how I felt, and every time I tell my story to these people, a part of my shame is - gone or going away.

P: Mmhmm.

D: To this point now, sometimes I feel like, so if I tell people that I was sexually abused, no big deal.

David

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The six themes that emerged from the interviews with my five co-researchers reflected much of what is known in the literature on shame and the experience of shame for male survivors of sexual abuse. This study revealed new insight into the depth of the severity of shame and its debilitating effects for male survivors. It also produced new insight into how survivors experience shame. Although the theme of shame related to sexual arousal experienced as a result of the abuse has been discussed in the literature, it has only received minimal attention. This study showed that minimising shame due to sexual arousal might mean that we neglect a key component of the survivor's experience of shame.

In this chapter I will explore and discuss the six essential shared themes from the results. I will also discuss what implications this research study has for counselling and what possible future research would seem fruitful in light of this study.

The male survivor as monster

The first theme indicated how male survivors experience shame, and what it caused them to do. Their self-perceptions ranged from feeling "abnormal" to considering themselves a "monster." This theme was voiced unanimously and in detail. None of the boys told anyone of their abuse at the time of the abuse. The boys were coerced into acts that only they suffered from, as far as they knew. For four of the co-researchers, the average age at which sexual abuse began was six. At this age, these boys were introduced to sexual behaviour which, developmentally speaking, was

disturbing and bizarre. The boys were used as sexual objects with near or complete disregard for their well being. Underlying this all was the belief that four out of five boys in our study had, that they were responsible for their abuse. These conditions provided fertile ground for the development of shame.

A negative self-opinion is characteristic of all shame. I will focus on the characteristic of being different or abnormal, which three of my co-researchers reported feeling. Two used the word “monster” to describe how they perceived themselves, or how they thought others perceived them. The self-image of the young victim of sexual abuse as a monster is a powerful image. A monster is something unknown and fearsome. Joseph Campbell defines a monster as “some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all of your standards for harmony, order, and ethical conduct (as cited in Gilmore, 2003, 7).”

The experiences of a sexually abused boy parallel those of a monster in significant ways. The abused boy is forced into a world of secrecy. He has no way of understanding what is happening to him, and he fears telling another person because he often has little reason to believe he will be met with caring or belief. Just as a monster is a social outcast, and feared, the boy, and often the man, will feel that he has no place in society. He may feel dangerous, as David did, because he has done something that he believes is very bad, and for which he feels responsible.

The point is that these boys had no way of understanding what was happening to them. It seems strange for an adult to imagine a young boy feeling responsible for being abused. As Earl says: “It’s strange to think that’s... when I think about it now. But

umm, how could a five year old, umm... be responsible for somebody eighteen? But I really did [believe he was responsible]." Franklin states it quite simply: "...whatever was happening I had brought it on myself. Cause I couldn't think of anything any other reason for it." He could not think of any other reason for it. Or to put it another way, to think of another reason for it would have been to court danger, to invite chaos into his life. If the child considers the abuser to be cruel and acting in a way that is wrong, he may consider denouncing the abuser. For a child, this is frightening and often dangerous, given that the abuser has power and may make threats, possibly of violence. In addition, victims often have a critical lack of support and may feel alone and uncared for. This lack of support was true to some degree for all of the co-researchers in this study. The feelings they experienced from family members ranged from disconnection to indifference to contempt. None of the co-researchers described warm caring support from their parents or siblings.

It is very important to point out that blaming the abuser would also threaten the very security and structure of the child's world as he sees it. As Cheselka (as cited in Gartner, 1999) puts it: "[sexual abuse by a trusted person] changes something fundamental; a belief or a frame of reference from which to view the world of interpersonal relationships." For a young boy, the importance of stability and security that is derived from significant relationships cannot be underestimated. This is particularly true for trusted adults or family members. It is not surprising that a child would choose to see himself as responsible if it prevents the abuser and all he or she represents from falling from grace.

For the three co-researchers who felt responsible for the abuse it was likely only a matter of time until they feared that they were trying to attract others, or that they might be capable of abusing others. This being dangerous to others – being a monster or pervert – happened in a way that was out of control for the survivors, just as the abuse had been out of their control. They had not actively sought out the abuse, yet they explained it that way to survive and make sense of their world. In light of this, it is meaningful that David explained his efforts to seduce as being the “sending out” of “pheromones” or “hormones”, and Franklin described it as “putting off some strange sense or whatever that was saying that this [the abuse] was OK.” Clearly, these are invented behaviours used to explain the way they believed “monsters” or “perverts” would act.

I believe this inability to hold the abuser responsible for his or her abuse is critical. It begins with the child, but persists to the adult. It happens not only because the child’s immediate world will be upset by blaming the abuser. As the child grows older and becomes more and more aware that virtually no one talks about the sexual abuse of boys, he realises that there is little support for him. He believes that he will face disbelief, rejection, scorn, disgust – so he maintains his secrecy. His fear is supported by society’s fear, and its unwillingness to face the problem of the sexual abuse of boys. His secrecy is supported by his belief that he is bad, or wrong, and by his fear of disclosing. He takes on the qualities of the monster, the freak, the outcast. If he is responsible for the abuse, then he must have those qualities in him. He takes on the abuser’s shame: In a sense he is not just the abused, he becomes his own abuser.

This happens despite the objective reality of what happened to him. Once he has begun, he will continue to ascribe qualities to himself that don't exist. Consequently, Earl feared himself thinking thoughts despite the fact that he didn't think those thoughts:

E: And I had a car and I used to drive [the neighbour's] son to nursery school or something – but I felt shame about driving him. I felt shame for being around children that umm... I had been molested by an adult and I was an adult. Could I do that? Could I do something to a child? I felt shame that, being around the child. And I had no inkling of doing, wanting to do anything, but I felt shame that I could.

P: Just the thought, because of what had happened to you...

E: I could do it to somebody else. So I didn't want to be around the child. But they kept on insisting and umm, so after I took the child out to wherever umm, nursery school, then I would go back home, just stay all day, think about what a... painful thing... to think about. That umm, I must be a pervert. Because I didn't think about doing sex with the child. I thought I'm a pervert for thinking that I ...

P: ...could even imagine it.

E: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So that's umm, part of the shame there...

Franklin felt similarly about himself, that he was a "pervert", despite the absence of perverted thoughts: "I was a, like this dirty little kid with perverted thoughts... and I don't remember having any perverted thoughts. I always I always felt that. I always felt

like I'm this really bad, perverted dirty little kid."

It is interesting to look at further descriptions of what makes a monster, especially with regard to the joining of alien and familiar qualities in the monster: Gilmore (2003) summarises the essential characteristics of monsters. They are distinguished not only by their size and malevolency, "but also by their morphological oddity and, especially, the joining of known organisms into weird, unnatural forms that shock" (p. 7). We may not wish to know monsters, yet they are made up of "known organisms" that are joined into "weird, unnatural forms that shock". It is this very familiarity that makes monsters so frightening, and so real. What we recognise in the sexual abuser are potentially dangerous needs such as the need to feel powerful, the need for sexual gratification, and also perhaps the need for human closeness. These are needs which all humans can relate to. The tragedy is that sexual abusers fulfil these human needs in reprehensible, extremely damaging ways. It is reassuring to make out of these abusers monsters, somewhat familiar yet ultimately inhuman. We can then condemn sexual abuse, and talk about it in hushed tones or not at all.

What happens to the abused, the victims? They are aware, even if unconsciously, of society's fear and loathing of the abuser, and of sexual abuse. They are aware that the subject is by and large taboo. If they feel responsible for the abuse, how are they to consider themselves? As monsters. Even if they do not feel responsible for the abuse, if they are unable to get out of the abuse because of fear or isolation, how are they to consider themselves? At the very least they will feel ashamed for being involved in a monstrous activity, an activity which must not be revealed. What is more courageous,

and more helpful, certainly for male survivors, is for all of us to speak about the sexual abuse of boys and men, even if this forces us to look at ourselves and the world differently.

Script theory: How shame “persistently and powerfully” attacks self-worth

The shame my co-researchers have felt “persistently and powerfully” attacked their “feelings of self-worth.” Theme II described the central, enduring and debilitating role that shame had in the survivors’ lives. Earl describes shame as the “strongest feeling I have” and says it is “in my life every day”. Blair describes the daily ritual he has of “tearing himself down” and Franklin says “I used to I guess go beat myself up”. It seems that shame and the inducement of shame are a central part of the male survivor’s life.

All five of my co-researchers have been depressed. At least four have been chronically depressed. Four of the five co-researchers suffered to the point where they were suicidal or attempted suicide. For Darren, “shame is depression.” It is interesting that analysts of shame believe shame to be the underlying cause of much of depression and other disorders, as noted above (Lewis, 1992, Morrison, 1998).

Script theory is one way to understand how one’s shame-related feelings and beliefs persist over time. This theory as to the creation and perpetuation of shame seems compelling in light of how several of my co-researchers described their experience. Franklin and David were convinced that they were enticing people to abuse them years after the abuse, because this is how they experienced and came to view shame-based

scenes from their earlier life, in which they were abused. Other feelings and beliefs typically caused by the abuse tend to persist, to the great detriment of the survivor. For example, David believed that he was only loveable for purposes of sex, and he continued to think so for some time. The persistence of a shame-related script is also clear in the lasting effect becoming sexually aroused had on Franklin and David. Their shame is an example of drive-shame bind, in this case the drive of sexuality. Their shame associated with sexual arousal persists to this day.

Blair says that his embarrassment over a little mistake such as forgetting his keys is “like an arm of the core shame, “which” pulls you back in.” As Blair says: “I suddenly start telling myself how horrible I am for doing ‘x’ when I was ten years old.” Blair is here experiencing an internal shame spiral, as described by Kaufman. The linking and fusion of scenes causes Blair to go back to a key early scene of shame.

Earl, in speaking of shame-related scenes, describes how they become fused together, and triggered by a sexual experience:

Then once I had an orgasm, then umm... what have I done? Unconsciously I think I felt umm, all the things in the past – the the priest, umm, punishing that boy for what he was doing. The being taken away at age five for what the other boy did. It all sort of scrambled into my head all at one time.

These images, which “scrambled into” Earl’s head at the same time, had the effect of making him feel shameful, like “a dirty person.” Earl’s description of various images being scrambled together is an example of internalised shame, in which shame-based scenes are fused together (Kaufman, 1993).

Earl has suffered greatly from the persistence of shame-based scripts in his life. One belief that Earl had was that he was completely responsible for enticing his abuser and causing him to abuse him. Earl's experience as a five-year-old still haunts him. "...When I'm talking on the net, I'm trying to get their [his correspondent's] approval, and I'm pretending in my mind, that I'm still that five year old boy, and I can get what I want. But now I can get what *I* want. Cause when I was five I wasn't getting what I wanted. But then I feel shame too, even now, but I feel shame... that I entice..."

Earl also sees earlier abuse-related scenes repeating in current sexual situations. "If I have sex with you, I feel shame, you won't like me any more, and like the five-year-old, like the nine-year-old, like when I was umm six years old, you'll leave me." Earl connected his enticing someone to have sex and then having sex as leading to abandonment. He suffered greatly from broken attachments to others, and his script that came out of this made him fear losing friends and lovers. Intimacy is a minefield for Earl: "If I become friends with somebody I don't want to have sex with them. Because if I have sex with them I'm gonna feel shitty, and, they're not going to like me. Because I'm a bad person."

Again and again my co-researchers described how shame-based scenes recalled earlier shame-based scenes from the time of their abuse. With Earl and Franklin I experienced at times a sense of despair and resignation in their attitude towards the healing of their shame. Earl explained how difficult it is for him to put the blame and shame back to the abuser, where it belongs:

I keep wondering umm (pause) when I said I was talking about that five-year-

old, umm, about the shame belief that... cause... I say it out loud and I try to convince myself,

P: So the shame stops that voice...

E: Or, no the shame is the voice.

P: The shame is the voice.

E: Yeah. The reasonable voice is talking out loud, but the shame voice is in my head.

When he feels ashamed, Earl cannot convince himself that the abuse is not his fault, despite repeating that message to himself out loud. There is another voice, an internal voice of shame, which overpowers the rational voice. This description clearly shows the power of shame-based scripts, and how resistant they can be to cognitive debate.

The effect of prolonged and intense feelings of shame brings about despair, and the near-total collapse of the individual. Franklin, near the end of his interview, described shame: "Just feels really like like somebody has grabbed a hold of my heart and just like...." At this point Franklin made squeezing sounds. When I asked him if this is what he meant, that his heart was being squeezed, he confirmed that. When Earl and I met to discuss the validity of the results, Earl was concerned that the depth of his suffering from his sexual abuse and his shame hadn't come through. As he said: "My soul was taken away. I didn't have a soul anymore." The theory of how shame-based scripts affect an individual helps us to understand how shame attacks the person's core identity, and how it can indeed be part of the stealing of a soul.

Shame attacks the survivor's male, sexual and personal identity

Four of my co-researchers spoke of how shame eroded their personal identity, particularly their identity as males. Consonant with the literature, my co-researchers experienced confusion and self-doubt with regard to their male identity. Their experiences illustrated a number of themes in the literature, such as that the survivor felt shame because as a male he should have prevented the abuse, because as a male he should always have been in control, because as a male he should have enjoyed sex with a woman, and because as a male he should have no doubts that he is heterosexual.

Three of my co-researchers felt that as males they should have prevented the abuse, and felt that others would expect that of them. David worried that others would mock him if he told them what had happened. He imagined they would say "oh, you got victimised, shame on you, you're a *man*; you should be able to protect yourself." Franklin said, "... a guy wouldn't let this happen." The logical extension of this is voiced by another survivor: "The abuse tells me that I'm not a man" (as cited in Mendel, 1995, p. 205).

Earl felt particularly ashamed that a woman had exercised control over him: "I was ashamed that umm, I was letting my body for a woman to control me. Males weren't supposed to do that." Earl said that he felt more shame as a male after being abused by a woman than after being abused by a boy. "Umm, because I was umm, ashamed that I was rejecting, refusing women's sexuality, and yet I was a man. So I was I was ashamed of myself for feeling that way." Earl experienced shame for rejecting a woman's sexuality, and he felt ashamed thereafter for feeling repelled and sick

whenever he thought of sex with women. He felt ashamed because he believed as a boy he “was supposed to be excited about it”.

Three of my co-researchers said that they had experienced confusion over their sexual orientation that was directly related to the sexual abuse. Darren wondered about his masculinity and his sexual orientation. Darren, who is gay, says that he thought: “Maybe I’m gay because he does these things to me....” Darren wondered if the sexual abuse made him choose jobs which he thought were more typically female, such as being a waiter and helping around the house. Darren said that having to question his masculinity, particularly in relation to how he thought he should behave, made him angry - “pissed off.” As Darren said that his shame “turned into anger” around this time, it is likely this was how he reacted to shame-based experiences.

Franklin says that he still doesn’t know if he is gay, and that he takes medication to stop him from having any sexual interest. Both Franklin and David have experienced sexual arousal over thoughts of men, and they attribute these thoughts mainly or completely to their sexual abuse. It is important to remember the oppressive role society has in terms of mocking homosexuality, or any behaviour that it considers to be unmasculine. Franklin’s mother and brother told him he was like a little girl; others called him “fairy”. Darren’s siblings called him “faggot”, and David imagined that others would call him a faggot or queer if he ever disclosed his abuse. Faced with this oppression it is not surprising that my co-researchers felt shame over their masculine and sexual identity.

Blair, who did not report feelings ashamed of his masculine self, did speak about

how his personal identity suffered because of shame related to the sexual abuse. He says that he lived in a “fog”, that [I] “didn’t really” [know] where I was going to go because I didn’t understand where I came from...” I think this is a very good way to phrase how shame robs one of one’s identity. My co-researchers felt shame over what they imagined themselves to be, and naturally they tried to push the feelings that caused them shame away from their consciousness. However, in so doing they lost access to who they really were, as they pushed away a good deal of their authentic experience, thoughts and feelings. So, Blair lost sight of who he was, and where he was going.

Franklin experienced a similar loss of identity that he clearly relates to his shame over being sexually abused. He says that he didn’t know who he was because there was a wall of shame between his real self and “the me that was created out of all this craziness...” Franklin says that in the wall is “the theory of what a man is supposed to be”. Franklin speaks of a false self, created because of the abuse. Blair also had this, as he created a fun-loving, outgoing persona to hide his inner despair. This creation of a false self or persona is common to survivors (Lew, 1990).

It may also be helpful to recall what Lewis said regarding the effect of shame on the individual. Shame is a massive inhibitor: it inhibits thinking, talking, acting. If we consider that in shame we desperately want to hide, it makes sense that we would not want to be active; we would want to be still, unseen. The male survivors who participated in this study experienced intense and prolonged shame. It makes sense that in their lives they would limit their expression and actions so as not to “give themselves away”. Unfortunately their identity is quashed in this process. If they do decide to create

a persona that will not betray the boy or man who has been abused, they acquire a false identity; their true identity still remains a mystery to themselves and others.

Shame over sexual arousal or enjoyment from the sexual abuse

I created a separate theme for the topic of shame felt for the survivors experiencing physical pleasure or other enjoyment as a result of the sexual abuse. The topic does share considerable common ground with the theme of survivor responsibility, and some also with the theme of how the survivor's male identity is challenged as a result of the abuse. Nonetheless, I created a separate theme because I sensed in the interviews that this topic was a powerfully shameful one. I sensed this both in what my co-researchers said and how they acted. When speaking of the physical pleasure or enjoyment of companionship they experienced their voices carried more feeling than usual. For three co-researchers there followed a discussion of the topic which communicated feelings of confusion, shame and despair.

It is interesting to note that although three of my co-researchers said they felt shame over experiencing some kind of physical pleasure from the sexual abuse, only one discussed the subject at length. Another co-researcher discussed it briefly, but only after being questioned about it. David, who spoke at some length regarding his feeling ashamed at his sexual arousal during his sexual abuse, noted in our follow-up interview his surprise at the brevity of the examples for this theme. He also expressed surprise that the shame seemed mostly a thing of the past for his fellow co-researchers. He told me that his shame over his arousal affects his sexual life today, to the extent that he feels

incapacitating shame whenever he experiences sexual arousal.

The shame survivors feel over having experienced sexual arousal during the sexual abuse is described in the literature on male survivors of sexual abuse. (Mendel, 1995, Lew, 1990). However, although other aspects of shame for male survivors of sexual abuse are well documented, such as the feelings of shame survivors feel regarding their masculine identity, the shame of having been sexually aroused is usually only mentioned, or discussed briefly. I imagine this may be because shame from sexual arousal is repressed, minimised or ignored by survivors, therapists and theorists. The reasons for dealing with shame in this way have already been discussed in this paper. We live in a society that tends to sanction and accept sexuality only in certain domains. Sexuality is generally accepted in male-female adult relationships. If the sexuality is between two males, or if a child experiences sexual feelings, our mainstream society becomes ill at ease, to put it mildly. Indeed, it would be surprising if survivors, therapists and theorists didn't avoid this issue, because it brings up subjects which are socially taboo, and challenging to conventional notions of sexuality.

Sexuality is very much a part of a child's life, in fact sexual responses such as male erection and female lubrication can occur in infants. Infants often fondle their genitals, and sexual curiosity and sexual play is a common part of childhood (DeLamater and Friedrich, 2002), as most parents (and adults with good memories) know. It is not surprising that children respond to direct sexual stimulation, in fact, it might be worrisome if they did not. Yet it is shame for this response which often persists into adulthood for male survivors of sexual abuse.

Research has also shown that it is possible to be sexually aroused even when coerced and frightened. In addition, abusers often bribe children to obtain sexual favours (Finkelhor, 1984). It should be pointed out that bribes need not only be money (as with Franklin) or gifts. A bribe may be the expressed or seeming offer of friendship or companionship (as with Earl and David). In addition, a threat may be of such force that the child does not need to be threatened or coerced with every instance of sexual abuse.

Experiencing sexual arousal is of great concern for male survivors for two reasons: they may take it to mean that they were "willing partners", or, that they are gay. These two reasons for shame arising from sexual arousal have significance for two other themes in this study: one regarding the assigning of responsibility, the other that of sexual orientation, and the effect it can have on one's perceived male identity. A study by Sarrels and Masters (as cited in Mendel, 1995) of men molested by women found that "concern surrounding the arousal added enormously to the trauma of the men in their study (p. 18)." These men felt guilty about their response, and worried that they had not been abused, as they had been aroused. A common worry for the men was that "a normal man would have been impotent" at such a time. The men felt that they were either abnormal or homosexual. If one considers that the offenders in this study were women, the confusion over sexual orientation would be even more pronounced if the offenders were male, as were most of the offenders in our study. This was indeed the case for David and Franklin, as both questioned their sexual identity at the time of the abuse, and Franklin still does. Both David and Franklin felt responsible for the abuse, and David only recently came to unequivocally label the abuse as abuse.

For survivors, sexual arousal is certainly likely to lead to their questioning their willingness, although it need not. It is possible to physically enjoy something even while mentally and psychologically abhorring that same thing. Offenders know how vulnerable their victims are to feeling confused over their sexual response, and taking this to mean they are responsible for the abuse. They exploit this weakness. Gerber (as cited in Mendel, 1995, p. 18) noticed in his work with male survivors that offenders often commented on the size of their victims' erections. David's abuser referred to David's erection as proof that he was enjoying it, in an apparent effort to garner David's co-operation. Gerber refers to the victim's belief that he is partly or completely responsible as the "myth of complicity", and says that this myth is more compelling either if the abuser is female or if the victim experiences arousal or pleasure (p. 19).

It should be stated unequivocally that even a child's complete enjoyment of something harmful to him does not make him responsible for the abuse. It is up to adults and people in positions of trust and authority to protect children and their sexuality. As Hunter (1990) says:

Offenders, victims and society in general use erection, ejaculation, and orgasm as proof that the victims must have wanted or enjoyed the sexual contact, so no actual abuse took place and therefore no treatment is needed. However, even if the child enjoyed all aspects of the relationship, physical and emotional, abuse still took place. The child's pleasure is incidental, a by-product. The goal of the relationship was the gratification of the adult, regardless of the impact on or cost to the child (p. 62).

It is tragic that a child's needs are taken advantage of, but the child should feel

no shame for having those needs.

Healing shame through disclosure

The opposite of keeping a shame-based secret is disclosing it. The potential benefits are clear: normalisation, finding support, healing. Only two of my co-researchers reported healing shame through disclosure. This may have been largely a result of where they were on their healing journey. Certainly, disclosure had been important in the healing quest of these two men. For Darren, it has been very important for him to hear from his friends that what his abuser did was “shameful” and that “it never should have happened”. Through hearing from another survivor, David realised that it wasn’t his fault, and his shame was diminished. He was empowered when he realised that it was his abuser who should be ashamed, not himself, and he felt that he “transferred” the shame back to him.

As my co-researchers discussed, telling others about the sexual abuse is a terrifying and potentially dangerous action, but it is one with huge possible rewards. The desire to disclose was evident in each of my co-researchers, despite the sometimes very negative responses they had received. This desire was evident even in the frustration they expressed over not feeling able to disclose.

As Blair said, there was a part of him “that’s ready to do that, that’s ready to scream out you know ‘this kind of crap happens, we need to deal with it’ and you know, it’s made my life a living hell because of - not because I... you know am some kind of weird psychotic or something” Blair’s anger that the sexual abuse of boys is ignored

is clearly expressed. Implied in his statement is his belief that if the sexual abuse of boys were truly recognised he wouldn't be marginalised as he is today, having to prove that he isn't a "psychotic".

Earl expressed ambivalent feelings about his desire to disclose; as he wasn't sure people would understand or accept him. Franklin expressed regret that he hadn't been able to tell someone: "That would have made it so much better. And I know that now and it's... as they say a little too little a little too late."

It is important to note that David felt that his greatest healing came from telling other survivors and communicating with them. Having his disclosures accepted, and having his feelings normalised by others' disclosures has been very important to him. These benefits of disclosure are noted in the literature (Lew, 1990; Gartner, 1999; Hunter, 1990).

Implications of the study for theory

One implication this study has for theory concerns its contribution to the validation of script theory, particularly as it applies to shame-based scripts (Tomkins, 1995, Nathanson, 1992; Kaufman, 1993). Script theory provided a very useful tool for the understanding of how shame arises and how it persists. Scripts were found to be central to the way the male survivors saw themselves. The scripts that the male survivors had for themselves seemed to lead to much of the shame they experienced in their lives.

This study also provided partial validation for the theory that shame results from attributions that are internal (self-blaming) (Lewis, 1992). Internal attributions were described as causing feelings of shame for three of the five co-researchers. Lewis says that an internal attributional style predicts greater shame. Certainly, for the three men who reported feeling responsible, their shame has been quite severe. This result makes a contribution to validating the attributional theory as set out by Lewis.

Implications of the study for the profession of counselling

This study has shown that counsellors might better serve their male survivor clients by doing the following:

- Becoming aware of their own shame, particularly as it has to do with male-identity, sexuality and betrayal by trusted adult figures
- Sensitively but openly enquiring regarding the survivor's experience of shame, with attention given to possible feelings of responsibility, gender-based shame and shame over sexual arousal
- Discussing masculine identity, and reframing the sharing of one's shame and needs as signs of strength
- Encouraging the survivor to explore and come to understand his feelings of responsibility for the abuse, and refraining from trying to convince the survivor that he is not responsible for the abuse
- Offering a holistic treatment approach which facilitates the survivor's cognitive, physical, and emotional expression

- Offering group therapy experiences to male survivors

Counsellors need to be aware of their own shame. As Morrison (1998) warns, therapists have been responsible for avoiding shame in therapy because of their reluctance to deal with their own shame. We cannot expect our clients to speak of their shame if we dread them voicing it. Survivors have had to live with scenes and memories of great shame. They have feared the response that others would give them if they disclose. Counsellors must provide a container in which the survivor's shame can safely and openly be expressed. This can only be done if the counsellors are able to accept and contain that shame. Particularly, counsellors need to have a good understanding and mastery of their shame as it concerns the sensitive areas of male-identity, sexuality and betrayal by trusted adult figures.

Counsellors would do well to approach the subject of shame in a direct but sensitive manner. Although it is true that men find it hard to talk about shame, it is critical that they at some point find the safety and acceptance to do so. The counsellor must provide safety and acceptance, as the client has kept his shame secret because in his life he has feared his disclosure would be met with rejection, mocking or even violence. As shame maintains itself through isolation, it is important that the counsellor make efforts to normalise the client's shame-based experiences. Psycho-educational information that makes clear that shame is felt by the vast majority of survivors would also be helpful, and may provide an opening for the survivor to express his own shame.

Shame for their perceived failings as boys and men was common and strong for

the co-researchers in this study. Survivors need to be able to discuss their shame. They need to be informed that the expectation that they should have been able to protect themselves is unreasonable and malicious. They need to be told that responding sexually to abuse is normal, and that they shouldn't feel ashamed of it. If they fear that they are homosexual because they were sexually abused, or because they became sexually aroused during the abuse, they need to be told this does not mean that they are homosexual.

It is important to discuss the feelings of shame the survivor may have for feeling responsible for the abuse. Although it is certainly the goal that the survivor will not blame himself for the abuse, the counsellor must be sensitive to not push this message to the survivor. This might cause the survivor to want to please the counsellor, and in so doing he might silence his deep feeling of responsibility. He may also feel ashamed of feeling responsible, even though it is a perfectly logical response to a horrific situation.

It is important to remember that the survivor did not simply make a mistake when he took responsibility for the abuse. It is quite possible to think this as an adult because we are looking at the survivor's abuse through adult eyes. As counsellors we may fail to hold in our consciousness the needs the boy had, and the dangers he faced, at the time of the abuse. In this case, we will not be able to understand why he took responsibility for the abuse. He did so to survive. His physical or emotional self was under attack, and the boy responded in the best way he knew how. Survivors need to be told this, and they need to have the chance to grieve that which their shame prevented them from grieving.

They need to grieve the loss caused when trusted adults betrayed them. They need to grieve the loss of a belief that the world was a safe and nurturing place, and that they would be protected. To change the perception of self-blame may be very difficult; the change will probably cause a revolution in the survivor's thinking and feeling, and in his identity. This is a serious and involved undertaking, one that will probably require much time, and much cognitive and emotional work.

Counselling for survivors should be holistic. Shaming which occurs from sexual abuse leaves deep wounds within the survivor. Shame is experienced emotionally, physically and cognitively. It is felt deeply, yet it is expressed but little. Attributions and cognitive processes have much to say about shame, and they should be addressed as they come up in the counselling. It would be a mistake to stay at this level however. If we recall Earl and his struggle to give up responsibility for the abuse, he was unable to convince himself by his thinking; his inner shame-based voice was more powerful. Shame is a clearly painful emotion to experience. No survivor is likely to disclose or experience shame easily.

Counselling processes that allow and encourage the client to gain greater emotional fluency and expression will also help him to access his shame. It may be that shame related to traumatic experiences is stored the way the experience of the trauma is, deep within. If this is the case, therapeutic modalities such as EMDR may be useful for accessing shame. Alternatively, methods which allow the client to access shame-based scenes in a holistic way may be useful. De Vries (1999) points out that psychodrama may be an effective method for bringing about reduction of long-term shame. As

psychodrama allows for the expression of deeply stored cognitive and body memories, it is likely to facilitate the expression of shame. Interventions typical of gestalt therapy may also be useful. Role-play and physicalisation may provide the necessary stimuli for accessing shame.

Group counselling with other male survivors would seem to be an ideal choice for helping survivors to deal with their shame. However, survivors must be ready for the challenges inherent in group counselling. Safety is critical in dealing with the disclosing of shame. Survivors should usually start with individual counselling so that they can experience a safe place in which they can share their story and gain greater self-knowledge. The survivor and his therapist should be assured that the survivor is ready to interact with a group of survivors, and to cope with other survivors' disclosures.

The benefits of group counselling in the alleviation of shame are many. Firstly, the survivor's shame experience is likely to be normalised by other's disclosures. This is validating, and it encourages the survivor to share his own shame. Secondly, it gives the survivor a chance to voice his shame to a group of peers, and see that he is accepted, and likely respected and loved for the courage he shows in disclosing. This is the exact opposite of what he has probably feared all his life. Being a part of a group can be a positive step in the letting go of shame, and a positive step towards social integration.

Implications for further research

This study looked at the male experience of shame from sexual abuse. There is very little information on how male survivors recover from shame, and to my

knowledge, no study has been done which focuses only on that. Such a study could tell us much that we don't know, and help us in the counselling profession to better serve in the alleviation of survivors' shame.

In the literature, and in this study, much of the shame of survivors arises from their understanding of their male identity. Social expectations, and the survivors' own expectations of the role they feel they are supposed to play as men (and as men in the making), is the source of a great deal of their shame.

The feminist movement has made great progress in exposing and condemning the sexual abuse of girls and women. In bringing this sexual abuse out in the open, feminism has helped alleviate the shame felt by female survivors. Theorists and practitioners have a longer history of understanding and healing the shame that results from the sexual abuse of girls and women than they do of boys and men. Girls and women also operate under very different social constraints than do boys and men. In light of this, a study comparing the male and female experience of shame resulting from sexual abuse could be very informative. In addition, it would be interesting to understand how female survivors understand the healing of their shame. Perhaps this could help male survivors in their healing quest.

Sexual arousal as a source of shame for male survivors deserves further attention in research. As I noted, this topic receives little attention in the literature, yet it seems to be one of the most persisting and unacceptable sources of shame for male survivors. It was noted in this study that it can be perplexing to adults that survivors experience shame for feeling responsible for their sexual abuse. Given that the taking on of

responsibility is a major cause of shame, we need to know more about how to aid survivors in understanding and letting go of this responsibility. A study which looked at how counsellors best serve their clients in this endeavour would be very helpful.

Limitations of the study

This study is a phenomenological exploration into the life experience of five men. It cannot describe all aspects of the experience of shame resulting from sexual abuse for male survivors. In addition, the interviews were semi-structured, which means that I played a part in facilitating the discussion. Although I endeavoured to be aware of my own biases or aversions to shame so that they would not interfere with the interview, I most likely was not always successful, and this would have affected how the men shared their experiences.

These men had all been in counselling for at least a year, and some for much longer than that. They were also willing to share their experience of shame with the knowledge that it would be published. It must be borne in mind that in this regard these men are typical of a very particular sub-section of the entire male survivor population.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore and better understand the experience of shame for five male survivors of sexual abuse. I discussed several conceptions of shame and its origins, and some of the typical causes of shame for male survivors. A phenomenological exploration with my co-researchers revealed six shared essential

themes. These themes showed that my co-researcher's shame as male survivors led them to think of themselves as abnormal, or even as a "monsters". This study also showed that my co-researchers have experienced shame as a very damaging emotion that tends to persist over time. Shame was found to arise directly from the sexual abuse and from three other sources. The second source of shame was the impact of sexual abuse on the survivor's male identity. The third source of shame were feelings of sexual arousal caused by the abuse, or the enjoyment which resulted from having emotional needs met in the relationship with the abuser. The fourth source of shame was the survivor's feeling of responsibility for the sexual abuse.

I found that the marginalisation of male survivors and their shame likely intensifies their shame, and leads them to have pronounced and at times extreme feelings of abnormality. Consonant with the literature, my co-researchers spoke of the difficulty they had reconciling their image of themselves as boys and men with the male ideal, and the shame this caused them. The topic of shame from survivors' sexual arousal at the time of the abuse has received very little attention in the literature. It was, however, particularly troublesome and confusing for several of my co-researchers. The study also showed that feeling responsible for the abuse was a powerful but complex source of shame. Disclosure of the abuse and shame-based feelings or thoughts was found to lead to diminished shame.

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Press, University of Western Ontario.



The University of British Columbia

Faculty of Education
Department of Educational and Counselling
Psychology, and Special Education

Dear potential participant,

Thank you for expressing interest in the research study: *Male survivors of sexual abuse: Shame and the healing quest*. The aim of this study is to better understand the experience of shame in men who have been sexually abused as children, in terms of their development in becoming an adult, and in terms of the role of shame in their quest for healing. This understanding can help to inform counsellors and others who work with men who have been sexually abused. Ultimately, your participation could help other male survivors in their healing processes. This research is being carried out to fulfill the requirements for the researcher's graduate degree in Educational and Counselling Psychology.

I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss with you your potential involvement in the study. If you agree, I would like to have an orientation interview with you, in which you and I can decide if the study is appropriate and agreeable to you. The interview will take at most half an hour.

In our first orientation interview (by telephone, or at a convenient place), I will answer any questions you might have regarding the study and your potential involvement in it. I will also ask you questions which will determine your availability for the next interviews, and also explore your willingness to talk about your experience of shame. Your further participation would involve an in-person interview focusing on the subject of the research study, in which you would be invited to share some of your life experience, and its meaning for you (maximum two hours).

I would later give you the thesis results drawn from yours and others' contributions. In the final in-person interview you would be invited to discuss my written presentation of your experiences, in terms of how they resonate with your understanding of those experiences, and also in terms of its accuracy (maximum one hour).

I want to make it clear that your involvement is entirely voluntary, and that you have the right to withdraw from the project at any point. Should you withdraw, it would be without consequence; in no way would you be disadvantaged or prejudiced by it. Your identity will remain confidential (you will be given a pseudonym), whether you participate in the study or not. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be given a consent form outlining and expanding upon the above matters.

Again, I want to thank you for your initial interest in this study. I believe it addresses an important topic, that of shame for male survivors of sexual abuse. The topic of shame is in part important because it is not something which we gladly address. In light of this, I want to thank you for considering the sharing of your thoughts and memories on this critical but difficult topic.

Respectfully,

Paul Slakov

Confidentiality:

You will be given a pseudonym, and details which might identify yourself will be removed from the thesis. All materials with information which might identify you will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. All computer files with information which might identify you will be password protected. It should be noted that a master's degree thesis is a public document.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Marv Westwood or Paul Slakov.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

The Interview Questions

1. I would like to understand what happened to you so that we can help others who have had similar experiences to you. I want to understand your experience of shame and how you came to feel ashamed, as a result of your abuse. Before we begin, I would like to discuss the concept of shame with you. This is a large concept, and different people have different understandings of what shame means. Can you tell me what shame means to you?
2. In order to understand better your situation at the time of your abuse, could you tell me how old you were, and the relationship of the abuser to you?
3. I would like to know about your experience of shame as a result of the abuse, around the time of the abuse. Can you tell me how you experienced the shame? What were you aware of?
4. What did you think when you experienced the feelings of shame? What kinds of things did you say to yourself?
5. How did you sense it in your body?
6. What did you do, in response to the shame?
7. Was there anything at this time that increased or decreased your feelings of shame? Did you do anything to try to lessen the feelings of shame? Did you want something to happen that would lessen your feelings of shame?
8. Is there anything else would you like to say about your experience of shame at and around the time of your abuse?

9. I also want to understand your experience of shame as you grew up and became an adult. Can you recall experiencing shame as you grew up? What do you remember being aware of?
10. What did you think when you experienced the feelings of shame? What kinds of things did you say to yourself?
11. How did you sense it in your body?
12. What did you do, in response to the shame?
13. Was there anything at this time that increased or decreased your feelings of shame?
Did you try to do anything to lessen the shame? Did you want something to happen that would lessen your feelings of shame?
14. How did it affect your identity as a man?
15. When did you first become aware that the feeling you felt was called shame?
16. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience of shame in becoming and being an adult?