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The Unheard Voices:
A Content Analysis of Male Victims’ Narratives on an Online Forum

By
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ABSTRACT


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The discourse surrounding sexual assault and rape has been predominantly centered on female victims. The lack of male representation in the discourse has created a deficiency in knowledge regarding the topic of male rape as well as a shortage of resources allocated to aiding these victims. This thesis brings the voices of male victims into the discussion surrounding sexual assault. 74 narratives were randomly selected from the internet forum, Male Survivors, which aims to support male victims. These narratives were posted by male victims of sexual assault and contained a narration of the assault, including but not limited to rape. I collected data about the victims, the perpetrators, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, the specified assault, disclosure, and the narrative characteristics. Through content analysis, I present quantitative data about the incidence of male sexual assault in addition to the unique voices of these male survivors to provide further insight into the male victims’ experience.
Most of the research and discourse on sexual violence has focused on the victimization of females, with little focus on the unique experiences of male victims. Research conducted on the topic of male rape has centered on the perceptions and beliefs people hold regarding male victimization. Some literature has focused on the gendered misconceptions held about rape, which result in a lack of understanding about the prevalence and impact of male assault. This research has addressed how gender role stereotypes and gendered misconceptions held by volunteers at assault support agencies have resulted in inadequate or hostile care that has led to the exclusion of male victims from such services (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Tsui, 2014; Javaid, 2016a; Javaid, 2016b; Javaid, 2016c; Javaid, 2017a; Javaid, 2017b). Javaid (2017b) used a combination of questionnaires and interviews to assess the adequacy of support given to male victims and found that agencies ignored the unique struggles of male victims by not allowing them to select the gender of their volunteer and by not requiring specialized training regarding male rape. Javaid (2016c) asserted that feminist theory, research, and volunteer agencies have neglected male survivors in large part because they do not align with the notions of an “ideal victim” which reinforces the gendered notion that women are victims and males are aggressors. Gendered notions of rape not only affect male victims’ access to support agencies, but also how they are perceived in comparison to their female counterparts.

The sexual assault research that has concentrated on the differences between perceptions of male versus female victims has found that the discourse surrounding victimization remains gendered. Studies have found that people minimize male suffering by failing to recognize the
signs of sexual abuse in males despite evidence suggesting increased violence in cases of male assault (Holmes, Offen, & Waller, 1997; Mclean, 2013). People have the tendency to view male victims as more deserving of the abuse (Espinoza & Warner, 2016). In addition, minimization occurs when people regard the suffering of male victims as less than that of female victims while simultaneously perceiving male perpetrators more negatively than females (Studzinska & Hilton, 2017). Research has also found that homophobic scripts are also held when assessing the degree of traumatization such that male college students blamed victims more if the perpetrator’s gender aligned with the victims’ sexual orientation (Davies, Pollard, & Archer, 2006). Thus, homosexual males were blamed more when assaulted by males than their heterosexual counterparts. Bullock and Beckson (2011) addressed the myths surrounding male rape, particularly of homosexuals, concluding that the minimization of male suffering and the belief that arousal equates to consent lead to underreporting. This in turn results in the fallacy that male rape is non-existent.

Male rape does in fact occur. However, the information about the incidence of male sexual abuse is inconsistent. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that one in 33 men in the United States have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime and one out of every 10 rape victims are male. A National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS) found that one in six men in the U.S. will have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, n.d.). This one in six statistic is the one that resources such as Planned Parenthood have advertised on their pamphlets and inspired the male victim resource website 1in6.org. In contrast, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that, according to the 2015 NIPSVS, nearly a
quarter of men in the U.S. experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime, nearly one in 14 men in the U.S have been made to penetrate someone else, and the majority of these men were victimized prior to the age of 25 (Smith, Zhang, Basile, Merrick, Wang, Kresnow, & Chen, n.d.). Some of the variability in male sexual assault statistics can be attributed to underreporting. The lack of male centered services and gendered notions of sexual assault that have excluded male victims may also play a role in the varying incidence rates.

While male rape has occurred throughout time, legal terminology has historically excluded male victims. Prior to the revision that occurred in 2013, the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) legal definition of forcible rape was “the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will.” This terminology was changed to rape and defined as “the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2018). The modification to the legal definition of rape allowed the judicial court to recognize male rape. However, while oral penetration is now considered rape, incidents of made to penetrate are not. The exclusion of made to penetrate suggests that the unique experience of male victims is still not completely incorporated into the definition of rape. The legal terminology also aids in misconceptions due to its historical dismissal of male victims and its current reluctance to consider the coerced or forced sex for males the same as forced sex for females (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). The result of inconsistent and unclear definitions is that males find difficulty in labelling and understanding their own experience.

Lack of self-identification results in underreporting and therefore produces inaccurate information pertaining to the incidences of male rape and assault. In comparison to females- who
have been the focus of sexual assault research, discourse, and subsequent policy—men are less likely to identify themselves as having been sexually abused (Widom & Morris, 1997). Being unable to label the occurrence as abuse could affect whether an individual seeks support in coping with their experience. Young, Pruett, and Colvin (2016) conducted a content analysis of telephone calls received by a regional sexual assault hotline and found males were less likely than females to use services due to limited knowledge about the support available. Males used the hotline to clarify assault terminology, further understand their experience, and to talk about their sexual assault and “tell their story” (Young, Pruett, & Colvin, 2016, p.9). Telling one's story can be beneficial to the victim. However, the lack of services equipped to support male victims, gendered misconceptions regarding sexual assault, and the difficulty men face in self-identifying their abuse, means males have difficulty disclosing their experiences.

Male victims remain relatively unheard. Research suggests that males who disclose have experiences that are more positive when they pursue support through informal networks such as family, partners, friends, and internet forums (Tsui, 2014; Douglas & Hines, 2011). Supportive experiences with disclosure are undoubtedly of more benefit to victims than the alternative. Due to the sensitive nature of assault in general, and more specifically the taboo of male rape, the anonymity and support provided by informal networks such as internet forums may be more appealing than formal networks. If this is true then perhaps forums catered to male victims may not only appeal to male victims, but also be the most inclusive community for them to tell share their experience. This reasoning, in combination with the lack of disclosure to formal networks, is responsible for this study’s decision to access victims’ stories through online forums.

The stories people share about themselves are of importance. Narrative Identity Theory
suggests that people create identity and a sense of self by constructing stories about their lives and their experiences. The narration of our experiences allows us the opportunity to reconstruct our past and evolve our life story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Studies using narrative analysis have found correlations between the ways in which people tell their life stories, specifically traumatic ones, and later outcomes. Recounts of traumatic or negative sequences of events are typically constructed in either a contaminated or a redemptive manner. Redemption narratives are marked by the development of positive outcomes out of a negatively charged event, whereas in stories of contamination, the reverse occurs and a negative affect remains. Redemptive narratives typically include higher degrees of agency, meaning making, and coherence, which have been correlated to increased psychological well-being, higher degrees of emotion regulation, more life satisfaction, and better sense of self (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Cox & McAdams, 2014; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). In contrast, contamination narratives show a lower degree of narrative coherence and correlate to disequilibrium, which is a result of an insufficient amount of the mental resources necessary to address the problem (Capella, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, narrative analysis has focused on the storying of traumatic incidents such as abuse, as it is a clear example of a negative sequence of events that has a lasting impact. Pals and McAdams (2004) assert that posttraumatic growth involves two steps: the acknowledgement and examination of the disequilibrating impact of the traumatic event, and the construction of a redemptive narrative. In comparison to other stressful events, narratives about sexual abuse tend to be less elaborate, structured, contextually embedded, and coherent (Mossige, Jensen, Gulbrandsen, Reichelt, & Tjersland, 2005). Considering that redemption
corresponds to positive psychological attributes, the stories of victims of trauma who have coped with their experience can be expected to include the characteristics that are associated with redemption narratives.

Narrative analysis not only provides insight into a person’s well-being, but can also be used to understand how the individual is impacted by the experience. Thus, a narrative approach is a practical method of understanding how incidents of sexual trauma affect victims. Studies have found that across memories of the abuse, disclosure and its outcome, and the journey to healing, victims maintain concerns pertaining to fear and safety (Foster & Hagedorn, 2014). Observing the linguistic characteristics present in narratives and interviews of sexual assault has revealed that victims partake in verbal defense, such as negation, erasure, smokescreen, double speaking, and silence in order to limit the impact of discussing the incident (Sorsoli, 2010). Knowing that victims of abuse employ such methods allows researchers to further understand how difficult discussing and opening up about the abuse if for the victim. Victims’ stories have also allowed researchers to gain insight into how incestuous relationships are terminated (Lorentzen, Nilsen, & Traeen, 2008). In their study, Lorentzen, Nilsen, and Traeen (2008) identified that the emotional effects of abuse, such as low self-worth and esteem, were from both a lack of support from the family and feelings of powerlessness that stemmed from a lack of control over the abuse itself and their reactions to the abuser. How victims talk about and give meaning to their abuse also provided insight into how they viewed themselves because of the abuse (Krayer, Seddon, Robinson, & Gwilym, 2015) and how their sense of self evolved following therapy (Saha, Chung, & Thorne, 2011). While narrative analysis has brought recognition regarding the victims’ experience, only a small amount of research has included
males in their sample.

Although the majority of all sexual trauma research either solely addresses the female experience or combines boys’ experiences and that of girls into the general topic of childhood abuse, some narrative studies have further incorporated males. Foster (2017) conducted a study that explored how boys describe their life prior to, during, and after sexual abuse and compared the feature of boys’ experiences to those of girls, which were identified in a previous study. There were 21 narratives in total, which were written by 19 males who had received treatment for abuse between the ages of 3 to 17. Their abuse occurred between the ages of 3-11. Foster (2017) found that the boys’ narratives ascribed to the same themes as those of girls; these were memories of the abuse and memories about disclosure and its outcomes. In addition to these similarities, boys also narrated experiences and perspectives that were unique to the male victimization. The differences were as follows: boys were younger both at the time of the treatment and abuse; boys tended to be abused by pre-adolescent perpetrators in comparison to females; and females tended to be re-victimized while males reported only one incident. In addition, they found that boys did not claim to have experienced medical examinations in response to their abuse; males described feelings of shock or surprise while females reported feelings of betrayal, and girls disclosed to more people than boys did. They also found the following difference: boys expressed feeling anger and fear, while girls were fearful and sad; and in the sample of boys, there had been a report of anxiety in regards to being perceived as homosexual due to the abuse (Foster, 2017). The differences found amongst the boys and girls narratives support the argument that male victims have a unique experience that varies due to their gender.
Considering that the male experience with sexual abuse is unparalleled, their victim narratives warrant specified attention. The research that exclusively explored male narratives have done so through interviews. Roos and Katz (2003) conducted a phenomenological study into how male rape victims’ pre-rape existence, their rape experience, and the long-term effects of the abuse. The sample consisted of two participants. The survivors reported being radically affected by their experience, experiencing long-term effects and discomfort from the assaults. Although this study had an incredibly small sample size, it provided an abundance of quotes from the interviews to support researchers’ analysis. A more substantial, but still incredibly small study interviewing the experience of male victims was found. Andersen’s (2008) sample consisted of 15 adult Norwegian males, all of whom were Caucasian. The interviews were semi-structured and some participants had additional interviews. The interviews identified the following themes: difficulty describing their experience as a phenomenon, issues of symbolic violence, a loss of agency, and a sense of powerlessness over both the abuse and physiological arousal. They also found common themes of feelings of worthlessness, experiences of permanence and long-lasting effects, difficulty with labels such as masculinity and victim, and difficulty coping with both memories and the experience. Some participants made statements of meaning making. Many of the men “expressed appreciation” for the interest into their experiences and claimed that the process aided them in “developing their story” (Andersen, 2008, p.26). While both studies suffered from modest sample sizes, they provided insight into the male experience of sexual assault. The lack of participants can be partly attributed to the underreporting of male rape to formal networks, such as crisis centers and psychological services.
The aim of the current research was to introduce the voices of male victims into sexual assault discourse through the theoretical approach of narrative analysis. In order to do so, I researched the existing literature about male abuse, with particular focus on the factors involved in the misconceptions about its prevalence and the effects of the experience. Considering the gendered notions of assault, the inadequate amount of services available, and the sensitive nature of assault, the voices of male victims remain largely unheard and so, I sought out their narratives on informal networks.

Procedure

For the purpose of this study, 74 male victim narratives were randomly selected from the recently updated online public forum, titled Male Survivor. The website aims to provide “hope, healing, and support” to male victims of sexual abuse and their loved ones (Male Survivor, n.d.). This site offers male survivors a place to openly and safely discuss their experiences with sexual assault and rape. The narratives chosen for this study can be found under the forum titled Survivor Stories, which is comprised of over a 1,200 posts from a myriad of individuals. The first post on this forum dates back to 2000 with the most recent in 2019. Posters are able to control whether their post can receive comments. The narratives in this forum range from a few sentences to more substantial lengths as threads are not limited by a word count. The only requirement for the sample of narratives was that they had to include an account of an experience involving sexual assault. If the randomly selected narrative failed to meet this requisite, I
proceeded to the subsequent narratives until I found one that included a description of a sexual assault incident.

Once the 74 narratives were collected, they were analyzed in regards to content and narrative characteristics. The narratives were coded according to the following: participant characteristics, information about the perpetrators, incident details, victims’ experience, victims’ response, and narrative attributes. Participant characteristics included the victims’ current age, sexual orientation, and their past sexual experiences. Information about the perpetrators consisted of their age and their relation to the victim. Incident details encompassed the number of incidents, the number of perpetrators, the victims’ age at the time of the first incident, and the specific acts that occurred. Victims’ experience included their bodily responses, thoughts, and affect at the time of the incidents. Victims’ response to the assault comprised of information about disclosure and the permanence of the effects. Narrative attributes contained information about the language used to describe the experience, narrative type, narrative coherence, and degree of meaning making, agency, resolution and detail. Most information was categorical. Degree of agency, meaning making, resolution, detail, and coherence were all rated on a five-point Likert scale where one signified an absence of the narrative trait while a value of five signified a strong presence of the attribute. Information collected from the narratives was not limited to only statistical data, but also included thematic analysis of male sexual assault.

In the process of statistical analysis, the human experience of the individuals are often lost in translation; the victims and their sexual assault become numbers. In order to preserve these male victims’ voices, I incorporated thematic analysis into my study. While reading the accounts, I compiled a list of notes about other aspects of their experiences. In doing so, I
became cognizant of similarities across the narratives. Themes relating to the victim were identified such as sexuality confusion, inappropriate sexual exploration with peers following the abuse, comorbidity of the sexual incident and abuse or volatile households, and comorbidity with pre-existing developmental disorders. Victims expressed difficulty labelling the assault, confusion about the incident, and difficulties with disclosure. Many narratives expressed appreciation for the site and mentioned feeling a sense of community with the other male victims. For the purpose of this paper, I further explore three themes. These are *Confusion at the Time of the Incident*, *Differences in Self-labelling*, and *Self-blame*.

**Results**

**Characteristics of Victims and Perpetrators**

The 74 male victims referenced 122 perpetrators in total. The majority (77.0%) of the victims experienced their first incident of abuse prior to adolescence ($n=74, f=57$). Of the 122 perpetrators referenced, 86.1% were males ($f=105$), 13.1% were female ($f=16$), and 0.8% were undisclosed ($f=1$). The majority (64.8%) of perpetrators were adults ($f=79$); 18.9% were adolescents ($f=23$), 6.6% were pre-adolescent ($f=8$), and 10% were unknown ($f=12$). The majority (33.6%) of abusers were family members ($f=41$) and were most commonly a father figure to their victims, either stepfather ($f=8, 6.6\%$) or biological father ($f=2, 1.6\%$).

**Characteristics of the abuse**

Characteristics of the abuse include details about the occurrence, location of the incident, type of abuse, means of persuasion, victims’ resistance, and termination. Most survivors were abused more than once; 48.6% were re-victimized by the same perpetrator ($f=36$), 33.8% were abused more than once by different perpetrators ($f=25$), and 17.6% of the victims were only
abused once \((f=13)\). There were 82 locations specified within the narratives. Of the locations mentioned, 40.5\% occurred in the victim’s home \((f=34)\), 35.7\% in the perpetrator’s residence \((f=30)\), and 21.4\% occurred in a public location.

The most common experience of abuse was one that involved both rape and some other form of sexual assault \((f=33, 44.6\%)\). There were 44 recounts of rape, the majority of which involved the victim being penetrated by a penis \((f=31, 41.9\%)\). Of the rapes, 20.5\% involved the victim being made to penetrate the perpetrator \((f=9)\), and 6.8\% included the use of an object \((f=3)\). Victims referenced 123 incidents of assault, the most common of which were instances where the victims received oral \((f=34, 27.6\%)\) or was made to perform oral \((f=34, 27.6\%)\).

Of the means of persuasion that were mentioned, the most common was the perpetrator verbally requesting sexual acts \((f=17, 28.3\%)\). The majority of survivors did not claim to resist the abuse \((f=49, 66.2\%)\), while 20.3\% only specified verbal resistance \((f=15)\), 9.5\% specified only physically resisting \((f=7)\), and 4.1\% claimed to have physically and verbally resisted the abuse \((f=3)\). The main cause for the termination of the abuse was cessation of the incident itself \((f=14, 18.9\%)\). There were 13 accounts where the victim terminated the abuse, which means they were the second most common reason the abuse stopped.

**Disclosure**

In regard to disclosure, 45.9\% of survivors had not disclosed their abuse prior to their post in the forum \((f=34)\). Of disclosures, most were to informal networks \((f=16, 21.6\%)\) and the informal disclosures were usually to a partner \((f=9, 34.6\%)\). Disclosure outcomes were positive overall with 23\% of disclosures being a positive encounter \((f=17)\), 10.8\% being a combination of a negative and positive experience \((f=8)\), and 14.9\% found it to be an overall negative ordeal
The majority of the victims expressed either little or no agency over their lives (f=18, 24.3% and f=31, 41.9% respectively). Only 18.9% conveyed a moderate amount of agency (f=14), 12.2% indicated more agency (f=9), and 2.7% expressed a high degree of agency (f=2).

In terms of degree of resolution, 29.7% demonstrated no resolution (f=22), 35.1% displayed little resolution (f=26), 20.3% contained a moderate degree (f=15), 12.2% showed more resolution (f=9), and only 2.7% revealed a high degree of resolution (f=2). Overall, the narratives were relatively coherent, with 32.4% being moderately coherent (f=24) and 39.2% being more coherent (f=29). The results showed that 77% of the sexual assault narratives were classified as contamination narratives (f=55), 10.8% were in transition (f=8), and 12.2% were coded as redemption narratives (f=9). Results also showed that there were significant positive correlations between degree of agency and the following: degree of meaning making ($r= 0.7, p< 0.01$), degree of resolution ($r= 0.8, p< 0.01$), degree of detail ($r= 0.4, p< 0.01$), and narrative coherence ($r=0.5, p< 0.01$). In addition, degree of meaning making is significantly correlated to degree of resolution ($r= 0.7, p< 0.01$), degree of detail($r= 0.3, p<0.05$), and narrative coherence ($r= 0.4, p=0.01$). Degree of resolution is also significantly correlated with degree of detail ($r= 0.3, p< 0.05$) and narrative coherence ($r= 0.4, p< 0.01$). The results also show a significant positive correlation between narrative coherence and degree of detail ($r= 0.7, p< 0.01$).

Discussion

Characteristics of Victims and Perpetrators
Findings suggest that the males in this sample tended to be re-victimized and were typically abused prior to adolescence. Their abusers also tended to be male, which aligns with gendered notions that males tend to be the perpetrators of sexual abuse. The majority of perpetrators were male, which could have further exacerbated the power difference between the perpetrators and their victim.

**Characteristics of the abuse**

Characteristics of the abuse further provide insight into the abuse endured by male victims. Findings suggest that the majority of males in this sample were victims of both rape and some other form of sexual assault. The most common means of persuasion was the perpetrator verbally requesting sexual activity, which does not align with the findings of past research that suggested male assault to involve higher degrees of violence (Mclean, 2013). The results regarding resisting are of particular interest as they suggest that the majority of the males did not resist the abuse in any way. This does not align with the gendered stereotypes that perpetuate males as aggressors rather than submissive individuals. However, the lack of resistance may be due to the age of the victims at the time of the abuse, as well as the age difference between the perpetrators and their victim.

**Disclosure**

Results of the narratives suggest that most of the males did not previously disclose their abuse, which aligns with previous research, which had found that males often failed to report their abuse (Navarro & Clevenger, 2017; Holmes, Offen, & Waller, 1997). The current study also found that the victims who reported previously disclosing their abuse had mainly done so to informal networks, which has been found to be the case in other studies (Douglas & Hines, 2011;
Navarro & Clevenger, 2017; Tsui, 2014). Overall, the males in this sample who had disclosed expressed that the outcome of their disclosure was mainly positive. Perhaps this positive experience with disclosure was correlated with disclosure to informal networks.

**Narrative Analysis**

The positive correlations between degrees of agency, resolution, meaning making and detail, and narrative coherence means that as one expresses more of one trait the more they display higher degrees of the others. Given that most of the narratives within this sample are contamination sequences, one could expect the majority of the current narratives to be correlated with lower degrees of narrative coherence, agency, and resolution (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Cox & McAdams, 2014; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001, Capella, 2017). Contamination narratives placed emphasis on the negative impacts of the abuse, some made mentions to being damaged or destroyed by the assault. One man expressed little resolution in his narrative that recounted two experience with sexual assault. In his post, he had hoped that his assaults could remain a secret and go away, but “Instead [the abuse] destroyed many aspects of [his] life” (Pete1973, 2014). Another contaminated narrative, showed present anger towards the perpetrator. Can_I_Do_This (2017) displays this anger when he proclaims, “I’m finally realizing I had my innocence and my rightful childhood ROBBED of me and I’m pissed off about it. How dare my OWN PARENTS fuck me over like this.” In contrast to these contamination narratives, the nine redemption narratives included reaching a feeling of self-understanding and philanthropy. ST13 was assaulted by his grandfather and had an emotionally incestuous dynamic with his mother. Despite these experiences, he concludes his story by claiming his identity as a multi-faceted individual and altruistic sentiments, such as “The past 10 or so months have
inspired me to try to make a change in the world. Instead of sitting on my laurels, complaining about how shitty it is that this happened to me, I am trying to generate more awareness and acknowledgment of male sexual abuse” (ST13, 2018). The large presence of contamination narratives within this sample suggests that the victims on the forum have yet to reconstruct their abuse experience to provide positive meaning to themselves; thus, they are still experiencing negative emotional and psychological states due to the abuse.

Limitations

A major limitation to the current study and, therefore, subsequent quantitative results was the small sample size consisting of 74 narratives. This insufficient sample size may have resulted in the abundance of non-significant findings. Another limitation to this study was that I failed to code the information that pertained to the short and long-term effects of the abuse in an effective manner. I also did not code in a manner that was conducive to analyzing the current thoughts and feelings about the abuse. However, the use of content analysis allowed me to gather some insight into themes across narratives, which incorporated information about the effects of the abuse to some degree.

Themes

Confusion at time of incident

One theme found across many narratives was confusion at the time of the incident. Confusion was a common reaction in individuals who had experienced their first incident of abuse prior to adolescence; this makes sense given the lack of understanding about sexual and biological functions at that point in life. An individual, who went by the username of House, was sexually assaulted at the age of six by a neighbor kid. House (2017) recounted that at the time of
his assault,

*My first reaction was to try and get away so I twisted away from him but then he grabbed me by my butt with both his hands and he pulled me in. I could not move and I could feel his hands squeezing my butt with his finger pressing my anus. I was very scared and I started to panic. It felt like I was going to urinate in his mouth and that scared me even more. I did not have an erection I was to young, I started to panic, I said I'm going to pee I'm going to pee and he said It was not pee and to let it come. I was so confused and scared, the feeling I was going to urinate got stronger and stronger, I could feel his breath on my stomach and I just wanted to scream. Even though he kept assuring me everything was ok my panic got the best of me as my voice got loud enough that he had to stop or someone may have heard me.*

In this section of his post, House expressed confusion in regards to his physiological response to the assault. At the time of the abuse, he was unaware that he was aroused and that the urination sensation was actually his body reaching a climax. This inability to discern ejaculation from urine was also found in another post. A user going by the name of BeautyforAshes recounted that his perpetrator forced him to perform oral. BeautyforAshes (2012) states

*I tried to cry out or scream but this just made me choke. It didn't occur to me to bite him. I thought I'd be punished if I tried anything, but I didn't know what the hell was going on. I didn't understand and rightfully so. He was in his early 20's and I was four. When he came, I thought he had pissed in my mouth. I gagged and spit it out and asked why he peed in my mouth. He thought this was funny and laughed.*

BeautyforAshes was pre-adolescent at the time of the incidents and expressed confusion about
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the physiology of male sexual organs. BeautyforAshes also expresses in post a lack of understanding about the incident itself and possible modes of resistance, such as biting his perpetrator. The inability to understand the difference between urine in semen was also present in Toad’s narrative. Despite multiple previous incidents of abuse, he remembers mistaking semen for urine when a peer assaulted him. He specifically states that despite previous experiences with assault, at the age of eight or nine, he still “didn’t have a clue [as to] how things worked” Toad (2018). Unlike House, both BeautyforAshes and Toad attribute their lack of comprehension directly to their age.

Despite confusion and a lack of understanding due to age, many of the men expressed knowledge that something was wrong. A poster by the name of Seikei (2012) explained that he “had this unnerving sense that something was wrong,” and that it led him to develop an “ability to compartmentalize and push traumatic events out of [his] mind,” which continues to occur. Seikei further explains that he had a similar sensation during another incident of abuse with a different abuser; this second perpetrator was his own brother. During this molestation, he was “…hit with the unnerving sense that something was not right. That this [his brother kissing and grinding into him] was not right” (Seikei, 2012). Another poster going by the name SilentNoLonger (2014) claimed that he felt guilty during his assault “the sensation of my penis being stroked felt good, but the situation felt very wrong.” The feeling that what was occurring was inappropriate was a consistent theme throughout narratives. The sense that the perpetrator was doing something wrong was present even when the individuals had difficulty understanding the situation.

Differences in claiming labels
Throughout the narratives, labels were found to be of importance to the victims. While some males avoided labels, neither claiming their experience as abuse nor referring to themselves as victims or survivors, others either actively embraced or rejected certain labels. Some males asserted the importance of accepting victimhood. BeautyforAshes (2012) claims that he starts with the label “…victim, because we were all victims at one time. What's important about that is to acknowledge this first stage, to understand it, to face it, and to move from that place of victimization, into the place of Survivor.” According to BeautyforAshes, claiming victimhood is a component of posttraumatic growth. In his piece, he does not reject notions of male victimization, but rather proclaims it as an essential stage in achieving the title of survivor. He further expands on the victim-survivor dichotomy, by introducing a third stage referred to as the “Overcomer stage” (BeautyforAshes, 2012). While BeautyforAshes calls for the embodiment of the victim and survivor labels, other males actively rejected the label of victim.

Some posters vehemently rejected the victim label in favor of survivor. Davee (2015) states after introducing himself that the “one thing [he] is trying not to be is a victim.” He later expands on this notion of not being a victim when he explains that the reason he has not disclosed his abuse is because he does not want people to think of him as “the abused” (Davee, 2015). In place of the victim label, he prefers that of survivor. Sailor John (2011) also rejects the label of victim and embraces that of survivor as he declares at the end of his narrative, “We are not victims. We are the survivors!” In contrast to those who rejected a label in favor another or embraced both survivor and victimhood, ANDREW63’s narrative contained an afterword that proclaimed, “Look at me now I am a survivor” (2011). He solely referred to himself as a survivor, with no reference to the possibility of being labelled a victim.
Despite the differences in label preferences, it is clear that terminology used for self-identification is of importance. The males find significance in the terms that they apply to themselves and their situations. The labels allow them to identify themselves in a certain way, whether that be as someone who endures, a member of a community of survivors, or as a person on a journey to coping and overcoming.

**Self-Blame**

Perhaps the most prevalent theme was that of Self-Blame. Many of the contamination narratives included feelings or expressions of current self-blame. In contrast, other individuals who had previously experienced self-blame no longer did. Narratives included various types and degrees of self-blame; individuals were remorseful for the role they believe they had played in their abuse, for their lack of disclosure, and for their maladaptive attempts at coping.

The poster with the highest degree of self-blame in regards to his role in the abuse was Eagle79. His assaulted occurred when he was 10, at a local pool’s public locker room. The perpetrator was an unfamiliar adult male. In his narrative, Eagle79 (2018) makes statements that exhibit self-reproach such as, “But it was that one day that changed everything. A day where I wish I just never showed up. A day where I wish HE was not around. A day where I wish I SCREAMED! Screaming is such an easy thing. You just SCREAM! It is that simple. I didn't SCREAM.” In this section of his narrative, Eagle79 expresses disappointment in his past response, or lack thereof. He later explains that there was a naked man in the locker room showers and he vividly remembers the hesitancy of other boys in the area. He further blames himself for not being as tentative as the other boys were. He states that, “for some odd reason, [he] just brushed it off and walked on in” and he did not understand why he “had the guts on doing this,” nor why
The naked man failed to worry him (Eagle79, 2018). He claims, “29 years later and I still ask myself why I was OKAY with just walking in with this NUDE guy. I will never understand it” (Eagle79, 2018). He still questions his past behavior 19 years after the fact. While his lack of a reaction leading up to the assault concerns him, Eagle79 says he is most haunted by his behavior following the incident. After he was made to perform oral on the man, he had vomited. He displays his disappointment in himself when he explains, “I ended up cleaning up the floor with the shower towel I had. Yep, I cleaned it up. I got my shower and I left” (Eagle79, 2018). While the entirety of his story involved instances of self-blame, Eagle79 was not the only individual to express resentment about behavior leading up to the abuse.

ANDREW63 (2011) proclaims that the child in him cries at night and questions, “Why? Why? Didn’t I tell, why didn’t I refuse to go with him?” His story shows that although one is overcoming and recovering from abuse, claiming the label of survivor, one can still experience self-blame. Despite being eight years old at the time and being abused by his own grandfather, who has passed away, he still questions his lack of disclosure and resistance. Feelings of shame and self-reproach are enduring despite knowledge regarding the differences in power dynamics. Although he was threatened with physical harm if he resisted, SilentNoLonger (2014) still expressed feeling “ashamed and stupid to have let all [of the abuse] happen.” These men demonstrate how deep-seated feelings of self-blame are in instances of sexual victimization. However, as exemplified by ANDREW63, feelings of self-reproach can also appear in the narratives of those who embrace the term Survivor; thus, self-blame is not confined to stories of contamination.

Yerac is an example of an individual who moved from a place of self-blame to one that
embodies a better emotional state. He explains that for two decades following his abuse, he felt responsible as “…no one ever held a gun to [his] head. [He] was never forced or even threatened in conjunction with the sexual abuse” (Yerac, 2012). Although, he had accepted that his abuse was not his fault years prior to writing his post, he says, “It is only within the past few months that I have begun to really feel that it wasn't my fault” (Yerac, 2012). In including this in his post, Yerac establishes that it is possible to reach a place where one does not blame oneself for their abuse. Yerac’s story shows that it is possible to transition from a contaminated narrative to that of a redemptive sequence. He concludes his post with the following: “I'm a grad student, working on my doctorate in forensic psychology and I decided to write my dissertation on the difficulties male survivors face with disclosure. My research has made me realize that I have to heal myself if I'm going to be any good to clients. That combined with the birth of my son have motivated me to face the demons” (Yerac, 2012). Thus, Yerac’s victim narrative culminates in a display of humanitarianism and purpose, which serves as evidence that redemption is possible for males who have experienced sexual abuse.

**Conclusion**

Gendered discourse about sexual assault has resulted in the exclusion of male victims from discourse, services, and research. In order to further the understanding of the unique experience of male victimization, it is important to incorporate their unfiltered voices into research about assault. To do so, the theoretical approach of narrative analysis should be conducted on males’ stories that are disclosed on informal networks, such as online forums. While the current research aimed to do so, it did not have a substantial sample size. Therefore, further research should incorporate more narratives into their sample. Narrative analysis could
provide further insight into how males are affected by sexual assault by specifically coding for effects mentioned within their stories. A comparison between the stories posted by males on sexual support forums and those posted by females on their respective forums could be performed to further assess gender differences in narrative construction and experience. Overall, future research into male sexual abuse should further incorporate the voices of male victims into the discourse and be used to aid psychologists, volunteer agencies, academic and judicial institutions, policy makers, the general populace, friends, and family in providing adequate support to males.
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