

Working with Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Intersectional Approaches to Healing

Jeremy Sachs

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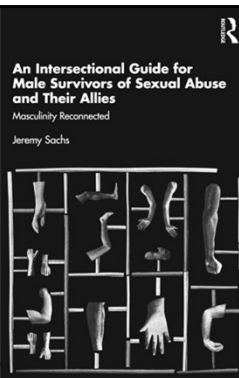
Introduction

Jeremy Sachs

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- NAOS Institute Course Director on the Trauma Diploma
- Author of *An Intersectional Guide for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse and their Allies: Masculinity Reconnected*

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What we will cover today

- Why is intersectionality important
- What is the Sexual Self
- The different developmental stages and how Sexual Abuse (SA) impacts them
- What are some challenges men face when trying to connect with the Sexual Self after sexual abuse?

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Why is intersectionality important

- Men across all socio-economic groups demonstrate unhealthier smoking practices, unhealthier dietary patterns, higher alcohol consumption levels and higher rates of injuries.
- In the UK one man in five (19 per cent) dies before they are eligible to collect their pension.
- Men are less likely than women to visit their doctor or a pharmacy. Women aged 20 to 40 see a general practitioner (GP) twice as often as men in the same age group. Additionally, men are less likely than women to acknowledge illness or seek help when sick.
- Men in the UK are more likely to experience poor health outcomes for a variety of conditions such as some cancers, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.
- Only 36 per cent of NHS referrals for psychological therapies are for men. Despite this, in England and Wales, males accounted for around three-quarters of suicides registered in 2022 (4,179 deaths; 74.1 per cent).
- In 2022, the rate of suicide mortality in males was 2.9 times higher than the rate for females. Suicide mortality in the most deprived areas of Scotland was 2.6 times higher than that in the least deprived areas in Scotland.

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Why is intersectionality important

Men's experiences of sexual abuse seldom happen in a vacuum. There are often different circumstances surrounding men that impact the experience of sexual abuse. Intersectionality can help us understand this.

- **Contextual protective factors.** These are positive circumstances that allow a person to process and recover from trauma. They can be practical things like access to healthcare – both living somewhere with specialised services or therapy and being able to travel to and afford such services. Other protective circumstances can include a lack of previous stressful or traumatic experiences prior to the sexual abuse or having family or friends that are open to talking about the abuse without risk of disbelief or further complicating the situation.

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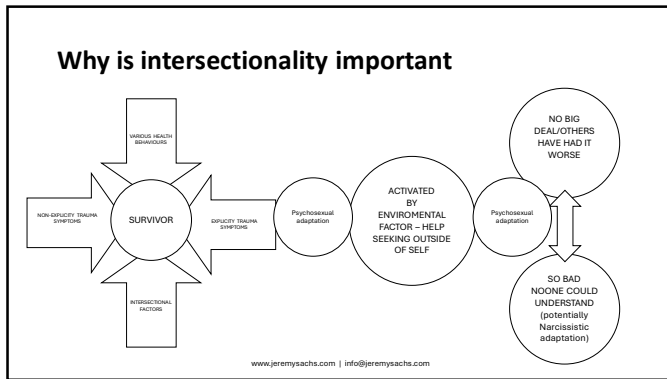
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- **Exacerbating factors.** These are negative circumstances that can make recovering from sexual abuse more challenging. Examples include health inequalities, such as a lack of a specialised services or barriers to accessing them, including poor public transport, disability or lack of finances. A history of negative experiences with healthcare organisations can also create barriers. This can include personal experiences, like previous types of abuse from healthcare or belonging to a community that has been disproportionately let down or harmed by healthcare services. In some cases, men don't seek out support because of societal expectations on them. Many men do not want to waste a doctor's time or do not reveal the severity of their pain. Others simply feel they ought to be able to deal with it by themselves. Additional exacerbating factors can include complicated relationships with family, growing up around further abuses, poverty or stressful environments.

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What is the Sexual Self?



Avodah Offit, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, has written extensively about sexuality and the human psyche

Integration of Sexuality and Identity:
Sexuality is not a separate compartment of the psyche; it is intertwined with the totality of the individual's sense of self

Psychosexual Development:
Our sexual self is shaped not only by biology but by our experiences, fears, desires, and the meanings we attach to them

Sexuality and the Unconscious:
The unconscious plays a profound role in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviors. By understanding our deeper drives, we can achieve greater sexual fulfillment and personal understanding

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The different developmental stages and how SA impacts them

Childhood 0 – 12 years old
(including neonate & toddler)

Adolescents 12-18 years old
Young adult 18 – 26 years old

Adulthood 26 years old upward

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Childhood

- Children make no sense of sexual abuse - the child's emergent sexuality is impacted from the very beginning
- No ability to sense make, either through comprehension or language (either preverbal or conceptual language and vocab)
- Inability to understand harm done – particularly from primary care givers
- Early development of shame
- Sexualized behavior (either in childhood or adolescence)



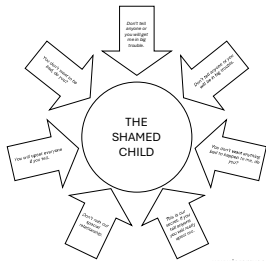
Petrus & Martin
Series 1, Ep 2
Trauma Talks: Male sexual abuse in
childhood
2:49 – 5:04

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Childhood



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Adolescence

- Many boys assumed lucky (especially if perpetrator is female)
- Adultification 'mature for their age' defense – different groups of young men
- Grooming and power
- Legally abusive relationships may not be considered abusive



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Adolescence

"Adultification is when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. When adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias.

There are various definitions of adultification all relate to a child's personal characteristics, socio-economic influences and/or lived experiences. Regardless of the context in which adultification takes place, the impact results in children's rights being either diminished or not upheld".

- J. Davis and N. Marsh, 'Boys to men: the cost of "adultification" in safeguarding responses to Black boys', *Critical and Radical Social Work* 8, no. 2(2020): 255–259.

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A part of me knew it was wrong, but I don't think that's how I thought of it then. I knew it was a secret, and I felt part excitement and part awfulness about it. I was in year 11 (ages 15–16) and was really quiet, especially for a boy in my school. I was stressed about exams when the geography teacher, Mr. Adams, asked me to stay behind to look at my course work. I didn't mind because I had nowhere else to be. This became a regular thing. Every Tuesday I could go to his classroom, and he'd help me, or ask me about my future. I really liked someone taking an interest.

One day, the abuse started. He touched me on top of my trousers and was touching himself at the same time underneath his trousers. I didn't like it very much. I was scared of someone walking in and scared he would reject me if I moved or said no, so I froze. I just let him do it. I went back next Tuesday, hoping it was a one-off, but he did it again, and the pattern started. He did more things, and it all escalated each time until I left school.

A few years after college, he found me on social media and sent me a message. We started chatting, and after a month or so of chat, he invited me to go stay with him at a national park for the weekend. I got the train, and he picked me up and took me to a hotel room. When we went inside... I started to panic. It came out of nowhere. I felt trapped in the room with him, like I couldn't escape. I froze again. I had to stay the night. It was horrible; I was in pain but he didn't notice. I eventually felt asleep.

The next morning, I cried. I think I was having a panic attack. He was telling me he hadn't done anything wrong, and I should just calm down. He refused to drive me to the train station, telling me I was being overly sensitive, and [he] told me I was an adult and could make my own way if I wanted to leave. I had to wait for two buses to go back to the train station. I hadn't showered and was still shaken up. I feel so much shame about the time at school, but it's crazy I went to meet him. I thought, *What's wrong with me? I must have wanted to do this, and it wasn't really abuse because I let it happen. I got on that train to meet him!*

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—Jules, 38, straight, white

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Adolescence

The erasure of grooming teenage boys

Tactics that are missed or misunderstood:

- **Targeting:** many teens who are targeted are vulnerable ex. neuro-diverse, lonely, immature or socially awkward
- **Gaining teen & caregivers trust:** friendly, position of power or trust
- **Filling a need:** gift giving or meeting unmet emotional needs
- **Isolating:** getting teen away from appropriate network
- **Pressuring victim:** to go along with something they do not want to
- **Exposing:** Drink, drugs, pornography or nudity
- **Sexualizing:** Talking about, or behaving sexually

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Adolescence

No Hard Feelings: a film about a Maddie (Jennifer Lawrence), a 32-year-old Uber driver on the brink of financial ruin who answers a Craigslist advert from the helicopter parents of 19-year-old Percy. They want her to 'deflower' their introverted and immature son before he leaves home for college, in exchange for a secondhand car.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P15S6ND8kbQ>

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Adolescence

1. Touch your wiener - Sexualizing @ 00:02
2. "Date his brains out" - Targeting @ 00:51
3. Touch your wiener - Sexualizing @ 01:13
4. Kidnap - Isolating / Sexualizing @ 1:26
5. Alcohol - Exposing @ 1:40
6. Dance 'party' - Exposing @ 1:47
7. Skinny dipping – pressuring victim @ 1:59
8. We should go – isolating @ 2:30

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Adulthood

- Not believed or assumed to be up to no good or partly responsible
- Used for humor
- Come up against difficult or problematic views about abuse



Alex & Steve
Series 2, Ep 1
Trauma Talks: Male sexual abuse in adulthood

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I was abused by 3 different men between the ages of 6 and 17. Firstly by a man who lived in the flat beneath ours, then a teacher, and lastly by a family relative. The relative was a one-off, while the others happened more times than I remember. Back when I was a boy, men had to be tough, I grew up in a certain part of East London where you couldn't show any weakness and yet, I was walking around with the shame of being a victim to these men. I know now I tried to overcompensate. I would fight anyone who looked at me the wrong way, which is why the abuse felt extra shameful... if I could handle myself in the streets, why did I just let the abuse happen to me?

Looking back now, I realise I couldn't be mates with men. Or if I could, fighting or drugs or drink had to be involved. To me, men were either a threat or something I needed to dominate. Since I retired from the post office I'm starting to understand I'm uncomfortable around men because of the abuse, but also I feel attracted to them. I can't bring myself to label it yet. I know it's called bisexual, but I have never ever said that word. I flinched the first time a therapist said it to me, I felt physically sick. I know the world has changed and I guess it's my job to try and change with it. I joined a support group and met gay men. I really get on with them, but after, I beat myself up because I also still feel disgust at myself. I'm old now, so I don't know what to do with this, I don't know whether I'll ever want to express this side of my sexual self. At the moment, I'm working on just being sober and being friends with other men – they don't have to be a threat. Maybe one day I'll meet someone but who knows, I'm taking it day by day.

- George, aged 68, working class

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What are some challenges men face when trying to connect with the Sexual Self after sexual abuse?

- Compulsive sexual behaviour (and not sex addiction): Online digital sex
- Chemsex
- risky or dangerous sex



Glenn
Series 1, Ep 5
Trauma Talks: Chemsex

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What are some challenges men face when trying to connect with the Sexual Self after sexual abuse?

- Stereotypes and racism
- Lack of support services
- Pathologising sexual practices



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What are some challenges men face when trying to connect with the Sexual Self after sexual abuse?

Interpersonal barriers – Petrus & Martin

Societal barriers – Grace & Jason

Systematic barriers – Claire Waxman

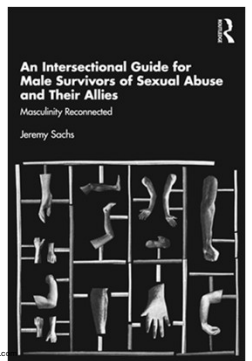
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An Intersectional Guide for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse and their Allies: Masculinity Reconnected

Order the book at
Waterstones & Amazon

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