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The Role of Gender in the Relationship Between Negative Reactions to Sexual Abuse Disclosure and Masculinity Norm Adherence

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ABSTRACT

Although men and women generally receive positive and negative reactions to childhood sexual abuse (CSA) disclosure (Filipas & Ullman, 2001), negative reactions are more common (Gagnier & Collin-Vézina, 2016). Negative disclosure reactions – such as disbelieving, retaliating against, or distracting the survivor – are both prevalent and associated with poorer post-abuse recovery and well-being (Kennedy & Prock, 2018; Ullman, 2010). For male survivors in particular, the responses one receives from others following disclosure may complicate one's sense of masculinity. Thus, the present study explored the nature of the association between negative reactions to CSA disclosure and masculinity norm adherence between men and women who are CSA survivors. Participants ($N = 299$; $M_{age} = 35.9$; 52.8% women; 77.9% White) – who disclosed their CSA to at least one person – completed self-report measures pertaining to social reactions to CSA disclosure and adherence to various masculinity norms. Negative reactions to CSA disclosure were significantly, positively correlated with Winning ($r = .20$), Playboy ($r = .42$), Heterosexual Self-Presentation ($r = .42$), and Power over Women ($r = .71$) masculinity norms. Moderation analyses revealed that at low levels of negative reactions, men endorsed higher Power Over Women and Playboy adherence; at high levels of negative reactions, women endorsed these norms almost as much as men did. Findings highlight important differences in adherence that shed light on the impact of negative disclosures on masculine ideologies.

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Despite the variety of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) definitions, CSA can be broadly defined as an adult or person in a position of trust or authority forcing, coercing, or participating in sexual activity with a child that the child cannot consent to, violates the law, or is considered social taboo (World Health Organization, 1999). Including girls and boys ages 0–17 years who experienced either contact or non-contact sexual abuse that was perpetrated by an adult or someone with authority/power over the child, the estimated prevalence of CSA is about 1 in 10 children (Townsend & Rheingold, 2013), with

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higher prevalence among girls (12.2–26.6%) compared to boys (5.1–7.5%; Finkelhor et al., 2009, 2014). In addition to varying definitions of abuse (Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2019), another issue impacting accurate estimation of CSA prevalence is the issue of sexual abuse disclosure, or the communication of an abuse experience to friends, family, or authorities (Townsend, 2016). CSA disclosure rates in adulthood are estimated to range from 31–42%, and some CSA survivors delay or never engage in disclosure (Bottoms et al., 2007; London et al., 2008).

Sexual abuse disclosure reactions

Some studies have noted that men wait an average of 20 years or longer to disclose their sexual abuse experience (Easton, 2013; O’Leary & Barber, 2008) and report differences in characteristics of the disclosure process compared to women (O’Gorman et al., 2023). Some studies have begun to highlight helpful qualitative characteristics of the disclosure process for men, such as being believed, listened to, and validated (Easton & Parchment, 2021). Ungar et al. (2009) suggest that disclosure is best facilitated if a survivor is directly asked about the experience of abuse, tells someone who will listen and believe them, and has a sense of autonomy in self-identifying as a survivor and deciding who is told about the abuse. Other studies emphasize the role of a supportive parental relationship (Priebe & Svedin, 2008) and social support/peer influence (Bottoms et al., 2007; Ungar et al., 2009) in increasing the likelihood of disclosure.

One self-report measure that has been used to assess reactions to sexual abuse disclosure, primarily in women, is the Social Reactions Questionnaire (SRQ; Ullman, 2000). The SRQ was initially developed as a standardized measure to capture both positive and negative aspects of the disclosure process for women who were sexual assault survivors (Ullman, 1996). Studies utilizing the SRQ have found that women tend to receive more positive reactions to CSA disclosure compared to men (Hall et al., 2023; Ullman & Filipas, 2005). However, the literature (see Dworkin et al., 2019 for review) suggests that the SRQ has primarily been utilized with samples of women, highlighting the need to explore the role of social reactions in men’s psychological adjustment.

Masculinity norm adherence

One construct that is hypothesized to be related to disclosure among male CSA is masculinity norm adherence. Masculinity norms are culturally defined expectations and beliefs that delineate acceptable ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving for men (Borgogna & McDermott, 2022). Examples include exerting power over women via dominant behaviors, appearing heterosexual and avoiding feminine behaviors, and being physically and emotionally strong

(Borgogna & McDermott, 2022). According to gender schema theory, even children learn to organize their world into gender-appropriate categories and are motivated to act in ways that are consistent with their culture's definition of gender schemas (Bem, 1981). Within the United States sociocultural context, masculinity has been constructed in a manner that is elusive, tenuous, and requires continued demonstration and/or public action to re-assert one's status as sufficiently masculine (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). These socially constructed norms reward men for behaving in ways that are consistent with masculine ideologies, and such adherent behaviors maintain gender hierarchy (Iacoviello et al., 2022).

While men tend to endorse overall higher levels of masculine norms (Parent & Moradi, 2009) than women (Parent & Smiler, 2013), both men and women endorse and adhere to masculinity norms. Studies investigating masculinity norm adherence with men and women have found that measures of masculinity norm adherence adequately capture the intended constructs for both, but the adherence serves a different function and is associated with different consequences for men and women. Some studies have found that women who endorse masculinity norms are at greater risk for risky alcohol use (Kaya et al., 2016; Shrestha et al., 2023). Risk-taking has been linked to better body esteem in college women athletes but has been linked to heavy episodic drinking in men (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). In some contexts, it is imperative for women to appear strong and not ask for help (i.e., self-reliance masculinity norm) or suppress emotional expression to avoid feeling like a burden to others (i.e., emotional control masculinity norm) (Ishikawa et al., 2010; Watson & Hunter, 2015). However, men may demonstrate these same masculinity norms for different reasons, such as to appear capable and strong to others. It is plausible that masculinity norm adherence is differentially related to aspects of the CSA disclosure process for men versus women.

Masculinity norm adherence & sexual abuse disclosure

Although many survivors receive both positive and negative reactions to disclosure over their lifetime (Filipas & Ullman, 2001), negative disclosure reactions appear to be more common (Gagnier & Collin-Vézina, 2016). Negative reactions may be particularly impactful for men as the act of self-disclosure runs counter to masculinity expectations (Alaggia, 2005; Gagnier & Collin-Vézina, 2016). Thus, masculinity expectations may prevent men from self-identifying as a CSA survivor in the first place (Hlavka, 2017; Javaid, 2017), further decreasing the likelihood that men will engage in disclosure or help-seeking behavior. Studies have demonstrated that men's perceptions of their own masculinity and identity change after experiencing sexual abuse. In a sample of 15 male CSA survivors, Anderson (2011) found that men felt as though they had failed to be strong enough to stop the abuse, while Dorahy

and Clearwater (2012) noted that men isolated themselves to avoid being discovered as victims. Given this evidence, negative social reactions to CSA disclosure may function as punishment for the gender-incongruent behavior of men having been sexually victimized, thus encouraging men to adhere more to masculine ideologies.

Receiving negative reactions to abuse disclosure may be associated with adherence to masculinity norms as such reactions emphasize discrepancies between masculine expectations and identifying as a survivor of sexual abuse. Easton et al. (2014) conducted a content analysis of male CSA survivors' experiences to identify barriers to disclosure, including a sociopolitical domain that emphasized issues related to masculinity. Specifically, they found that men described their sexual abuse as emasculating to their self-identity and believed they needed to appear strong and able to protect themselves in the aftermath of the abuse. In relation to disclosure, men felt that disclosing the abuse would increase feelings of vulnerability and weakness (Easton et al., 2014). Not only do masculinity norms appear to inhibit CSA disclosure, but they may also impede adjustment following disclosure. For men who have already disclosed, traditional masculine characteristics such as stoicism and emotional control make it harder for men to identify as abuse survivors and discuss the abuse with others (Kia-Keating et al., 2005). Traditional masculinity norms are incompatible with identification as an abuse survivor for men, which leads some male survivors to compensate for masculinity threats with exaggerated traditionally masculine behaviors such as aggression and substance abuse (Javaid, 2015; Weiss, 2010). Masculinity norms may dissuade men from disclosing CSA and, further, receiving a negative reaction may only exacerbate expectations of stoicism and strength.

For male survivors of sexual violence, greater conformity to masculine norms may contribute to post-trauma difficulties as many features of traditional masculinity, such as self-reliance and beliefs surrounding sexual prowess, stand in juxtaposition with the sequelae of sexual violence (Easton, 2014). In a latent class analysis, Charak et al. (2019) found that men who experienced childhood maltreatment, including CSA, and men who experienced revictimization (i.e., men reporting experiences of childhood maltreatment and adult sexual assault) reported significantly greater adherence to masculine norms of power over women, playboy persona, self-reliance, and emotional control than men without victimization histories. Kia-Keating et al. (2005) describe an incongruence between sexual victimization and masculinity expectations that force men who are CSA survivors to renegotiate masculine roles to recover from sexual abuse. Thus, it is no surprise that masculinity norms are intimately intertwined with the sexual abuse disclosure process due to a) the masculine identity dissonance (a perceived forced choice between being a man *or* a sexual abuse survivor; Gruenfeld et al., 2017) faced by men who are CSA survivors and b) the possibility of negative reactions to CSA

disclosure evoking a hypermasculine response to counter identification as a victim.

Present study

The true prevalence of CSA is likely underestimated due to societal factors that discourage or delay disclosure. Socially constructed expectations of masculinity may be impacted by negative reactions to disclosure due to the survivors' perceptions of needing to compensate for the vulnerability associated with disclosure. However, literature to date has not examined how disclosure and masculinity norms may differentially impact men versus women. Thus, the present study seeks to examine how adherence to masculinity norms may be a sociocultural context related to negative reactions to CSA disclosure. The present study hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive association between negative social reactions to sexual abuse disclosure and endorsement of masculinity norms, including Winning, Power Over Women, Playboy, Heterosexual Self-Presentation, and Self-Reliance.

Hypothesis 2: The strength of the association between negative social reactions to sexual abuse disclosure and masculinity norm adherence will be stronger for men compared to women.

Method

Participants

Inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: current residence in the United States, at least 18 years of age, having at least one incidence of sexual abuse that occurred before the age of 18 years, and having told at least one other person about the abuse. Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing marketplace that researchers utilize to gather information from a large and diverse online population of participants. Data that included partial ($n = 25$), inattentive ($n = 15$), or invalid ($n = 97$) responding were removed from final analyses; studies suggest that samples recruited via MTurk demonstrate comparable patterns of problematic responding to that of community and college samples (Necka et al., 2016). Final analyses included 292 participants.

The final sample of participants ($M_{age} = 35.9$; $SD_{age} = 10.52$; 52.8% women) included majority White/European American (77.9%) individuals. Most (54.8%) had a bachelor's degree or higher (28.4%). Participants were

heterosexual/straight (79.9%) or bisexual (16.1%) and were married or had a domestic partner (70.2%). About 50% of participants indicated that they were abused by a family member. Many participants (29.8%) disclosed within one year of the first sexual abuse incident, while 28.8% disclosed within the first 5 years, 31.8% waited longer than 5 years (maximum of 39 years for one participant), and 9.7% did not answer the age of disclosure item. There was not a significant difference between men ($M = 5.92$ years, $SE = 8.21$) and women ($M = 5.36$ years, $SD = 6.91$) on time until disclosure, $t(265) = -.61$, $p = .26$.

Procedure

The study was visible on MTurk to users who had Human Intelligence Tasks approval ratings greater than or equal to 95% to reduce the risk of random or “bot” responses (Buhrmester et al., 2018). Participants answered four screener items prior to being directed to the full study. Validity checks and extensive data screening were conducted to eliminate nonsensical or false responders (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020). After completing the screener, participants were directed to a screen that included an IRB-approved letter of invitation, then to the full study items. Completion of study items took approximately 15–25 minutes. Upon completion, participants were provided with the phone number for a crisis text line and a website that allowed them to search for mental health resources in their locality. Participants were compensated \$1.75 for their participation. All study procedures were approved by the authors’ Institutional Review Board (Pro#: 00105231).

Measures

Screener

Participants were asked their age, country of residence, whether they experienced sexual abuse prior to age 18, and whether they had disclosed their sexual abuse to another person prior to being eligible for the study.

History and disclosure of CSA

To verify sexual abuse in childhood, participants completed the sexual abuse items from the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein & Fink, 1998), using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never true*) to 5 (*very often true*). The CTQ has demonstrated internal consistency ranging from .66 to .92 across a variety of samples (Bernstein & Fink, 1998) and convergent validity with childhood abuse interview responses (Fink et al., 1995). Cronbach’s alpha for the CTQ sexual abuse items in the present sample was good ($\alpha = .84$). To capture the sexual abuse disclosure process, participants were asked their age at first sexual abuse, relationship to disclosure recipients, and when they first disclosed. These items were developed based on items

utilized in other disclosure studies. Time until disclosure was calculated by subtracting age of first sexual abuse incident from age of first disclosure (in years).

Reactions to disclosure

The Social Reactions Questionnaire (SRQ; Ullman, 2000) is a 48-item, self-report measure of positive and negative social reactions to sexual abuse disclosure. Respondents were asked to report how often they experienced each type of disclosure reaction across all voluntary disclosure experiences using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). Some of the 48 items are categorized as the negative reactions scale, which includes items in the from the blame, stigma/treat differently, egocentric, distract, and control subscales (Relyea & Ullman, 2015). Higher average negative reaction scores indicate greater endorsement of negative reactions to disclosure. Ullman (2000) found good reliability and validity for the SRQ, such that alphas for the seven subscales ranged from .77 (Egocentric Reactions) to .93 (Emotional Support). Cronbach's alpha for all 48 SRQ items and the negative reactions items only in the present sample was excellent ($\alpha = .96$, $\alpha = .97$, respectively).

Masculinity norms

The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI-46; Parent & Moradi, 2009) is a 46-item, self-report measure of conformity to Western society masculine gender role norms. Participants (men and women) responded using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*) with higher scores indicating stronger adherence to various masculine norms. The CMNI-46 does not adequately capture overall masculine norm adherence with a single total score (Hammer et al., 2018); thus, an average for items in each subscale was used to represent higher conformity to each masculinity norm. Given the specific masculinity norms hypothesized to be associated with negative social reactions to sexual abuse disclosure, the following CMNI subscales were included in the current study: Winning (e.g., "In general, I will do anything to win"), Power Over Women (e.g., "Women should be subservient to men"), Playboy (e.g., "If I could, I would frequently change sexual partners"), Heterosexual Self-Presentation (e.g., "I would be furious if someone thought I was gay"), and Self-Reliance (e.g., "I hate asking for help"). Research suggests that the CMNI-46 correlates highly with the 94-item CMNI and has good subscale convergent and construct validity (Parent & Moradi, 2009). Cronbach's alpha for individual scale reliabilities ranged from acceptable to good: Winning ($\alpha = .70$), Power Over Women ($\alpha = .84$), Playboy ($\alpha = .66$), Heterosexual Self-Presentation ($\alpha = .76$), and Self-Reliance ($\alpha = .62$).

Results

Descriptive analyses

Independent samples *t* tests were used to examine mean differences in CMNI subscales between heterosexual/straight ($n = 236$) and non-heterosexual ($n = 59$) participants. Endorsement of masculinity norms generally did not differ between the two groups. However, there was a statistically significant difference in Heterosexual Self-Presentation between the two groups ($t = 3.40$, $p = .02$), with heterosexual/straight participants reporting a higher mean ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .64$) compared to non-heterosexual participants ($M = 1.12$, $SD = .73$). Thus, sexual orientation (0 = heterosexual/straight, 1 = non-heterosexual) was included as a covariate in the moderation model predicting Heterosexual Self-Presentation. There was not a significant difference in SRQ negative disclosure reactions between men ($M = 1.74$, $SD = .98$) and women ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.05$), $t(292) = .45$, $p = .66$.

Hypothesis one analyses

A correlation matrix was calculated to examine associations among negative social reactions to disclosure of sexual abuse (SRQ Negative Reactions) and masculinity norms hypothesized to be related to negative reactions to disclosure (CMNI subscales Winning, Power over Women, Playboy, Heterosexual Self-Presentation, and Self-Reliance). Four participants did not complete the CMNI (1.3% missingness), leaving 292 participants for subsequent analyses. See [Table 1](#) for correlation information.

Hypothesis two analyses

To test the hypothesis that the strength of the association between SRQ Negative Reactions and CMNI subscales would differ between men and women, we conducted moderation analyses using Hayes' PROCESS (Hayes, 2013; Model 1). There was no bivariate association between Negative Reactions and Self-Reliance, so moderation was not tested for this masculinity

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables.

	Women <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Men <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Negative Reactions	1.79 (1.05)	1.74 (.98)	–					
2. Winning	1.34 (.63)	1.49 (.54)	.20**	–				
3. WinningPower Over Women	1.30 (.90)	1.51 (.78)	.71**	.17**	–			
4. Playboy	1.15 (.77)	1.51 (.62)	.42**	.10	.56**	–		
5. Heterosexual Self-Presentation	1.32 (.72)	1.48 (.58)	.42**	.30**	.55**	.21**	–	
6. Self-Reliance	1.61 (.61)	1.57 (.53)	–.02	–.21**	.04	.03	–.22**	–

** $p < .01$; the present study analyses included only the Negative Reactions scale from the SRQ (Ullman, 2000) and the Winning, Power Over Women, Playboy, Heterosexual Self-Presentation, and Self-Reliance scales from the CMNI-46 (Parent & Moradi, 2009).

norm. Gender, the moderator variable, was categorized as “woman” (1) or “man” (2), with “woman” including cis-gender women as well as one participant identifying as a transgender woman. Continuous variables were mean centered prior to estimating moderation models. An a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) indicated a required sample size of at least 78 to achieve 80% power for detecting a medium effect.

The overall model predicting Winning was statistically significant ($R = .25$, $F(3, 288) = 6.59$, $p < .001$). Results showed that the conditional effects of SRQ Negative Reactions ($\beta = .27$, $SE = .10$, $p = .01$) and gender ($\beta = .34$, $SE = .14$, $p = .01$) on Winning were statistically significant. However, the interaction between SRQ Negative Reactions and gender on Winning was not statistically significant ($\beta = -.12$, $SE = .07$, $p = .11$). The strength of the association between SRQ Negative Reactions and Winning did not differ between men and women. The overall model predicting Heterosexual Self-Presentation was statistically significant ($R = .48$, $F(3, 288) = 21.99$, $p < .001$). The conditional effects of SRQ Negative Reactions ($\beta = .47$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$), gender ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .07$, $p = .01$), and sexual orientation ($\beta = -.29$, $SE = .09$, $p = .001$) on Heterosexual Self-Presentation were statistically significant. However, the interaction between SRQ Negative Reactions and gender on Heterosexual Self-Presentation was not statistically significant ($\beta = -.13$, $SE = .07$, $p = .06$).

The overall model predicting Power Over Women was statistically significant ($R = .73$, $F(3, 288) = 110.86$, $p < .001$). The conditional effects of SRQ Negative Reactions ($\beta = .86$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$) and gender ($\beta = .24$, $SE = .07$, $p = .001$) on Power Over Women were statistically significant. The interaction between SRQ Negative Reactions and gender was statistically significant ($\beta = -.18$, $SE = .07$, $p = .01$) and predicted an additional 1.2% of the variance in Power Over Women, supporting our hypothesis that the association between negative reactions to disclosure of sexual abuse and Power Over Women would differ between men and women. The association between SRQ Negative Reactions and Power Over Women was stronger for women ($\beta = .68$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$) compared to men ($\beta = .49$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$). See [Figure 1](#) for moderation depiction.

The overall model predicting Playboy was statistically significant ($R = .54$, $F(3, 288) = 39.08$, $p < .001$). The conditional effects of SRQ Negative Reactions ($\beta = .67$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$) and gender ($\beta = .37$, $SE = .07$, $p = .001$) on Playboy were statistically significant. The interaction between SRQ Negative Reactions and gender was statistically significant ($\beta = -.24$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$) and predicted an additional 2.9% of the variance in Playboy, supporting our hypothesis that the association between negative reactions to disclosure of sexual abuse and Playboy would differ between men and women. The association between SRQ Negative Reactions and Playboy was stronger for women ($\beta = .43$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$) compared to men ($b = .18$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$). See [Figure 2](#) for moderation depiction.

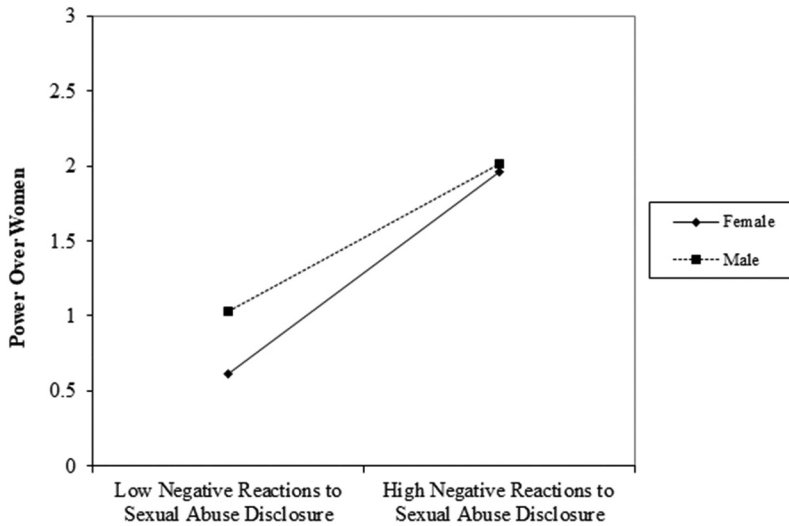


Figure 1. Gender moderates the association between SRQ negative disclosure reactions and power over women masculinity norm adherence.

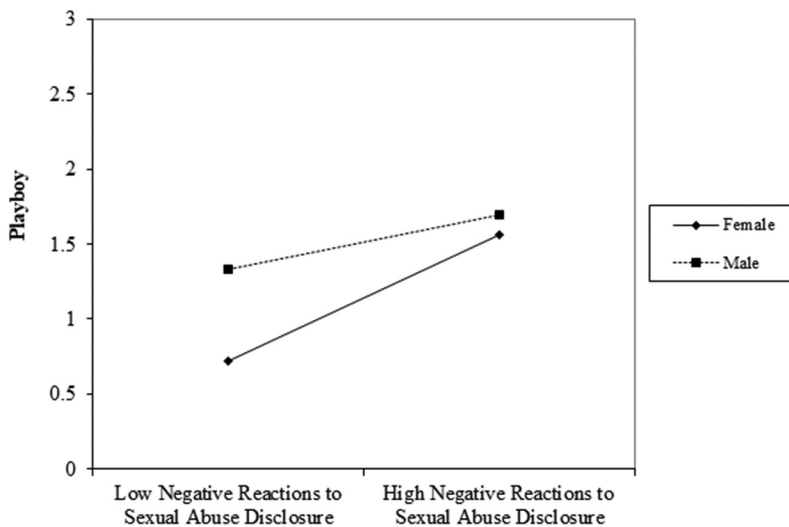


Figure 2. Gender moderates the association between SRQ negative disclosure reactions and playboy masculinity norm adherence.

Discussion

The present study sought to examine how gender is related to the relationship between negative reactions to CSA disclosure and adherence to masculinity norms. It was hypothesized that there would be a positive association between participants' perceptions of negative social reactions to their disclosure of sexual abuse (e.g., blaming, minimization, rejection) and their endorsement of masculinity norms, including Winning, Power Over Women, Playboy,

Heterosexual Self-Presentation, and Self-Reliance. Further, we expected that the strength of the associations between negative social reactions to sexual abuse disclosure and masculinity norm adherence would be stronger for men, compared to women.

First, descriptive analyses revealed that there was not a significant difference in negative disclosure reactions between men and women. This finding was unexpected, given that some studies show that women receive more positive disclosure reactions compared to men (Hall et al., 2023; Ullman & Filipas, 2005). This lack of a difference in negative reactions could be explained by other sexual abuse characteristics, such as age of abuse, whether force was used, and age of disclosure, that may have impacted the disclosure process and disclosure reactions in the present sample. Future work should consider these variables in understanding the interaction of abuse characteristics and the disclosure process.

Secondly – since the present study examined masculinity norm adherence in both men and women – it should be mentioned that although generally thought of as “gendered” traits, both men and women display adherence to masculinity norms. Although men tend to score higher than women on measures of adherence, masculinity constructs can be reliably measured in both groups (Parent & Smiler, 2013). Results of the present study are consistent with this, as men tended to report higher masculinity norm adherence compared to women on the majority of the CMNI-46 scales. This is to be expected, as gender norms are more prescribed and reinforced for men compared to women (Moss-Racusin, 2015).

The present study found support for positive associations between negative reactions to CSA disclosure and the CMNI masculinity norms Winning, Power over Women, Playboy, and Heterosexual Self-Presentation in a sample of women and men. These masculinity norms were significantly higher among men compared to women. The pattern of these associations revealed that as negative reactions to CSA disclosure increased, so did adherence to each masculinity norm examined (other than Self-Reliance). In other words, being disbelieved, blamed, dismissed, or otherwise receiving negative social reactions to one’s CSA disclosure was associated with having a strong drive to win, a desire for multiple or noncommitted sexual relationships, views that women should be controlled and dominated, and aversion to being perceived as gay later in life. There was no significant association between negative reactions and the CMNI masculinity norm Self-Reliance, which measures resistance to seeking external sources of help.

CSA, like many forms of violence, often involves coercion, abuse of power, and dominance over the victim (Townsend & Rheingold, 2013). According to the Traumagenic Dynamics Model of CSA (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985), children who have been sexually abused are subject to alterations in their cognitive and emotional orientation to themselves,

others, and the world. It is common for youth who are sexually abused to feel helpless and vulnerable, particularly if, in attempting to stop the abuse, their disclosures were met with disbelief or hostility. To regain agency and restore beliefs regarding capability and safety following sexual victimization, individuals may orient their values toward obtaining power. This is consistent with our findings that adult CSA survivors' perceptions of negative social reactions to CSA disclosure was associated with greater endorsement of importance of winning at all costs.

Negative social reactions to disclosure were also positively associated with the Playboy masculinity norm, reflecting positive attitudes toward having numerous sexual partners and openness to casual sex. This is consistent with prior research that CSA negatively influences satisfaction and trust in adult romantic relationships (Nielsen et al., 2018). A systematic literature review found evidence that some CSA survivors develop a fear of intimacy and distrust of others, a tendency to sexualize relationships, and a preference for transient, casual sexual encounters over stable relationships (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000). Returning to Finkelhor and Browne's (1985) Traumagenic Dynamics Model of CSA, one potential negative consequences of CSA is traumatic sexualization, in which one's sexual feelings and attitudes are shaped in an interpersonally dysfunctional manner. Adult CSA survivors may therefore prefer numerous casual sexual partners as a reaction to their childhood experiences.

Power Over Women had the strongest positive association with negative social reactions to CSA disclosure. A closer look at endorsement of items in the Power Over Women scale in the present sample suggested that men were significantly more likely than women to endorse beliefs that men should be in charge of women but were not more likely to endorse that they actually do dominate women in their own lives. Thus, the application of Finkelhor and Browne's (1985) model to our findings suggests a different interpretation for men versus women for the positive association between negative reactions and Power Over Women. The powerlessness dynamic of this models suggests that men with CSA histories struggle with feeling vulnerable, perhaps which may be exacerbated in moments of sexual abuse disclosure. Men may gain a sense of power or control by ascribing to patriarchal attitudes supporting their own dominance and women's subservience. Women, however, may cope with feelings of powerlessness by following the socially accepted dominance and control structure to sustain a sense of structure or normalcy. Further, also in line with the Traumagenic Dynamics Model, women CSA survivors may struggle with stigmatization. This negative self-concept of being flawed, bad, or less-than may be expressed by women in various ways, including by adopting a broader social lens that women should be controlled by men. It is also possible that women may use these norms to decrease their own perception that what they experienced was wrong or unacceptable.

Negative disclosure reactions were also positively associated with the Heterosexual Self-Presentation masculinity norm, though this relationship was not moderated by gender. Men in the present sample reported significantly higher endorsement of Heterosexual Self-Presentation compared to women. For men who are survivors of CSA, the fear of being labeled as gay can delay or inhibit CSA disclosure (Easton et al., 2014). These fears are not unfounded, as some studies have highlighted myths that are widespread in the legal and medical communities about CSA of boys and perceptions of gay men (e.g., Bullock & Beckson, 2011). CSA survivors may already feel stigmatized, shameful, or guilty due to being a sexual abuse survivor (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985), which could be further exacerbated by stigma related to perceptions of homosexuality, particularly if the perpetrator was male. As a result of these inaccurate ideologies, male CSA survivors may be vigilant to being perceived as gay and aim to uphold the appearance and behaviors deemed heterosexual to avoid further stigmatization. The results of our study indicate that receiving more rejecting, dismissing, and minimizing reactions to one's CSA disclosure was associated with both men's and women's sensitivity to being perceived as homosexual. Since women also endorsed this norm, women may generally also benefit from being perceived as heterosexual as this is more socially accepted and reinforced.

Results regarding the second aim indicate that negative reactions to disclosure are differentially related to some masculinity norms among men versus women. At low levels of negative reactions to CSA disclosure, men endorsed higher Power Over Women and Playboy norms compared to women. At high levels of negative reactions, women endorsed Power Over Women and Playboy to a similar degree as men. These results are a bit surprising, as existing literature would lead one to conclude that higher levels of negative social reactions to disclosure would be associated with significantly higher masculinity norm adherence for men, compared to women.

Results suggest that even at low levels of negative reactions, men adhere to masculinity norms. However, at high levels of negative reactions, men may feel that it is even more important to display behaviors and attitudes that are classified as masculine to counter or compensate for feelings of embarrassment or shame related to disclosure. Similarly, it is possible that women who receive high levels of negative reactions may compensate for this by more strongly adhering to internalized patriarchal beliefs as a self-fulfilling idea that if women aren't believed about sexual abuse, they should simply accept that men should have power over women. At high levels of negative reactions, for men, being viewed as a Playboy by peers may be praised, while for women this adherence could be seen as a strategy to take power back after experiencing sexual abuse.

Limitations, future directions, & implications

The present study has some strengths. While studies have shown that masculinity norm adherence is generally related to distress in men (Easton, 2014), fewer studies have considered such adherence in the context of sexual abuse, and particularly, how masculinity norm adherence may be maladaptively related to receiving a blaming, insensitive, or negative response to sexual abuse disclosure. Additionally, including women in the current study allowed us to examine the extent to which women who experienced CSA adhere to masculinity norms following disclosure. Previous research has found that women's adherence to some masculinity norms is associated with negative health behaviors, while adherence to others has more positive associations (e.g., Kaya et al., 2016). As such, understanding how women's experiences influence their adherence to feminine and masculine norms will give us a better understanding of the complicated and changing landscape of gender norms.

A limitation of the present study is that data were cross-sectional, thus causality cannot be assumed between negative disclosure reactions and masculinity norm adherence. A longitudinal approach could provide a better understanding of the sequencing of abuse, adherence, and perceptions of disclosure reactions and speak to the malleability of masculinity norm adherence. It is also possible that the community sample recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk does not accurately represent disclosure experiences in other populations. It should be noted that the demographic characteristics of MTurk samples (White, married, educated) limit the generalizability of the results to all sexual abuse survivors. Further, not everyone discloses sexual abuse, thus highlighting a potential missed population in the current study. Future research would thus benefit from capturing the experience of more diverse populations to more accurately capture how masculinity norms influence the disclosure process for all survivors of CSA.

The present study explored the nature of the association between negative reactions to CSA disclosure and masculinity norm adherence between men and women who are CSA survivors. First, results suggest that men, regardless of the type of reactions they receive to CSA disclosure, may feel pressure to adhere to socially constructed masculinity norms. However, women endorsed some masculinity norms almost as much as men did at high levels of negative reactions, suggesting that masculinity norms may function in adaptive ways for reasons that are different for men versus women. Results highlight: a) the need for people at the general public level, but also at the professional level (clinicians, legal system employees, etc.) to learn how to have a disclosure reaction that is perceived as supportive to the survivor and b) the need for clinicians in particular to explore ways in which social expectations may play a role in the recovery journey for people impacted by CSA.

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Ethical standards and informed consent

This manuscript and associated data collection adheres to all ethical guidelines specified in the APA Code of Conduct and was approved by the authors' Institutional Review Board. All participants accessed an electronic IRB-approved letter of invitation and provided consent before continuing to study items. Anonymity of participant identity was assured.

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