Living with the Aftermath of Male Child Sexual Abuse

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Abstract

Child sexual abuse (CSA) in boys has been shown to have long lasting and devastating effects on men's lives. Negative health outcomes such as anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, poor social skills, destructive lifestyles, and mistrust towards others are only a few of the reported after-effects. Research of CSA is largely focused on girls and women, leaving a relative shortage on men. This qualitative study attempts to add to the dearth of literature in this field by reporting findings from narrative interviews with men who were sexually abused as children. The aim was to investigate how men reconciled their early experiences of CSA with everyday life and their relationships with others. Seven participants of New Zealand European and one participant of Māori descent participated in a loosely structured conversational interview. The study was guided by narrative theory and social constructionist epistemology using thematic narrative analysis to interpret the data. The findings are discussed within seven overarching themes: *Shame, guilt, and lost self-identities* illustrates how survivors of CSA can become very isolated due to their internalised feelings of inferiority and self-blame. The participants' inability to share their experiences alienated them from others as much as themselves, which ultimately affected their sense of belonging. CSA instilled feelings of self-loathing and inadequacy as well as it fostered low self-esteem and led to the loss of their self-identity. *Anger and hurt - a kind of death/an empty shell* highlights the expression of heightened anger resulting from their experiences and isolation. Participants appeared confused, lost and empty without aspirations or hopes for the future. It describes a long process of regaining meaning in life, which some men found in fatherhood despite its challenges. *Escaping the pain* describes the men's emotional and physical turmoil, which triggered attempts to forget past events. Many participants engaged in violence and substance use, tried to become someone else, or end their life. *Damage boils over* talks about the participants' memories of their CSA experiences and the associated effects on their daily lives. It demonstrates how CSA can affect men's emotional stability and reactions when situations become too distressing. *Mistrust - a place of safety* summarises participants' feelings of mistrust towards others and their difficulty to accept forms of authority. It highlights CSA's potential aftermath in regards to interpersonal and romantic relationships as well as over protectiveness towards children. *Social norms and barriers to disclosure* discusses the difficulties surrounding disclosure of CSA,

spanning both childhood and adulthood. Further, it shows how social norms such as hegemonic masculinity can influence outcomes. *From missed opportunities to healing* describes regrets about perceived undeveloped talents, educational opportunities, or loss of family. The theme shows how coping mechanisms helped to navigate life and describes the benefits of counselling.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of child sexual abuse and its particular implications for boys and men. I draw on the limited existing literature in this area and give a broad overview of some recent qualitative studies relevant to this research. I chose this topic because I believe that men are often invisible within many Western societies in regards to emotional needs and suffering. I aim to raise awareness for a sensitive topic, which often appears to be viewed through a gender biased lens. Therefore, I hope I can give men a voice within society and advocate for a change in perception. If men are met with the same compassion as women in regards to their trauma experiences, they may be given a chance to live healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Sexual abuse of children is defined by pressurised sexual behaviour in which an adult or notably older person engages a child in sexual activities without his or her consent. Perpetrators can be of the same or opposite sex and behaviours include touching genitals, breasts, and buttocks no matter if the child is dressed or undressed (Sadock, Sadock, & Ruiz, 2015). Further, it includes exhibitionism, the oral stimulation of a male's penis or a female's genitalia, and the penetration of the vagina or anus with a man's penis or objects (Sadock et al., 2015). The definition of child sexual abuse (CSA) is not tied to a specific timeframe and can occur as a single event as well as multiple times over several years. Also, activities that involve pornography or prostitution of children are regarded as sexual abuse of children (Sadock et al., 2015).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) one in five girls and one in thirteen boys experience sexual abuse during childhood (WHO, 2016). The documented prevalence of CSA is continuously higher in girls (Moore et al., 2010; Stoltenborgh, van Ijzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). Also, most of the research in the past has focused on sexual abuse in girls and respective outcomes for women (Easton, Coohey, Rhodes, & Moorthy, 2013; Easton, 2014; Spataro, Moss, & Wells, 2001). However, considering that many boys tend to be silent about their experiences of sexual abuse the numbers reported by the WHO do not appear very accurate. (Dorais & Meyer, 2002; Easton, 2014; O'Leary & Barber, 2008)? Surveys from the United States and Canada as well as several more recent studies portray a much more dire picture of

boys being sexually violated in childhood (Dorais & Meyer, 2002; Kia-Keating, Sorsoli, & Grossman, 2010; Price-Robertson, 2012; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011; Ray, 2001). It has been said that the estimated prevalence of sexual abuse in boys only increase with more recent research as men more often find the courage to break their silence (Dorais & Meyer, 2002). Nevertheless, males are still said to report their experiences of sexual abuse far less than women (O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Valerio, 2011). Men's reasons for underreporting is said to be connected to an underlying taboo of this topic among males, and perceived conflicts in regards to masculinity norms (Dorais & Meyer, 2002; Homma et al., 2012; Kia-Keating, Sorsoli, & Grossman, 2010). This is even more so when the perpetrator was a women (Denov, 2003). David Lisak (1995) explained men's dilemma of masculine norms in the context of biological roots and a process of socialisation. While there is a general acceptance of multiple masculinities, there also seem to exit particular qualities across cultures that are seen as essential elements of manhood (Chan, 2014; Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000). For example, Bhana and Mayeza (2016) explored how power and violence underpinned the concept of masculinity in teenage boys in South African schools. Findings revealed that violence as an expression of power was role modelled by society and adopted by the young as an essential part of real boyhood. Language was used to assert a masculine stance of power and to inflict fear and disgust for any perceived homophobic notions. Bullying and physical violence was the overt extension of a fear to be otherwise not seen as a real man and an attached label of gayness (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016). Zoomed in, these male characteristics are defined by qualities that symbolise strengths such as independence, social power, or being assertive, decisive, physically strong, in control, and aggressive (Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000; Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Lisak, 1995). From a macro level perspective the perception of masculinity often seems to boil down to anything that does not tick the feminine box including showing vulnerability, being dependent, nurturing, and submissive (Courtenay, 2000; Lisak, 1995). This universal description of masculine traits is often referred to as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000). While such norms evolve through social interactions and cultural beliefs, they are often modelled and adopted from parents, and reinforced by media, celebrities, and sports idols (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Connell, 2005). It has been said that men feel even greater social pressure to conform to the stereotyped gender norms of being a male than the pressure

women feel to conform to feminine norms (Courtenay, 2000). It would therefore not surprise if this social and cultural construction of such gender roles inflicted on men's admission and expression of physical and emotional pain.

It should be noted, that sexual interactions between adult men and young boys have sometimes been seen as a common and natural occurrence. Greeks, Italians, Dutch as well as English cultures show records of socially accepted sexual interrelations with boys before 1700 (Trumbach, 2012). However, it is also a fact that boys and girls matured at an earlier age in those days, which makes straight comparisons with contemporary youth in regards to sexual relationships with adult men difficult (Trumbach, 2012). According to Davies (1982), the change in cultural acceptance changed due to religious, ethnic, and institutional forces, which tried to establish a certain order within society. It illustrates, how societies are guided by their own socially and culturally constructed rules (Gergen, 2009; Moghaddam, 2005).

Today, Western societies mostly perceive child sexual abuse as a severe form of maltreatment and it appears for good reason. Research suggests that children who experience sexual abuse present with serious symptoms of anxiety and depression (Goodyear-Brown, Fath, & Myers, 2011; Kendall-Tackett, Meyer Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Lev-Wiesel, 2008). They are also reported to have difficulties with regulating their emotions and they often display behavioural problems such as anger, aggression, decrease in academic performance, and posttraumatic stress (Goodyear-Brown et al., 2011; McClain et al., 2000; O'Keefe, 2004; Rowan, 2006; Wells, McCann, Adams, Voris, & Dahl, 1997). The debilitating nature of such childhood trauma has been said to carry into adulthood with lifelong psychological effects, negative health outcomes, and overall decreased satisfaction in life (Corso, Edwards, Fang, & Mercy, 2008; Fergusson, Mcleod, & Horwood, 2013; Price-Robertson, 2012; Ray, 2001). A review by Maniglio (2009) revealed that CSA can lead to medical issues such as chronic pelvic pain in females and non-epileptic seizures in both genders (Latthe, Mignini, Gray, Hills, & Khan, 2006; Sharpe & Faye, 2006). Some studies discussed that impaired self-image, persistent feelings of shame, guilt, uselessness and helplessness are commonly reported by survivors of child sexual abuse (Rowan, 2006). Other outcomes have been noted to be fear, alcohol and substance abuse, self harm, suicide, violence against others, and problems in sexual and romantic relationships (Dorais & Meyer, 2002). Depression and anxiety are

amongst the most commonly reported psychological outcomes after childhood trauma such as CSA (Bedi et al., 2011; Dorais & Meyer, 2002; Maniglio, 2010; Spataro, Mullen, Burgess, Wells, & Moss, 2004; Young, Harford, Kinder, & Savell, 2007;).

Depression comes in milder and more severe forms, but its repercussions are generally understood to be dreadful with notable influence on a person's functioning (Barlow & Durand, 2015; Kring, Johnson, Davison & Neale, 2012; Sadock, et al., 2015). Symptoms include sadness, tiredness, weight change, sleep disturbances, lack of concentration, loss of interest in pleasure activities, feelings of worthlessness and suicidal ideation as well as physical aches and pains (APA, 2013). Even milder forms include states of irritability, restlessness, decreased self-esteem, cognitive impairment, and less severe symptoms that were previously mentioned (APA, 2013; Sadock et al., 2015). For many people with depression activities such as preparing a meal, performing successfully at work, or even just getting out of bed in the morning can turn into impossible tasks (Ainsworth, 2000; Barlow & Durand, 2015; Kring et al., 2012). On top of the psychological consequences depression has also been linked to physical health problems such as the development of coronary heart disease and cardiovascular disease (Chavez, Ski, & Thompson, 2012; Hare, Toukhsati, Johansson, & Jaarsma, 2014; Hemingway, & Marmot, 1999; Lee, Lin, & Tsai, 2008). Depression is therefore described as one of the most draining and incapacitating disorders leaving suffering individuals empty and isolated (Ainsworth, 2000; Durbin, 2014; Karsten, Hartman, Ormel, Nolen, & Penninx, 2010).

Anxiety is described as an ugly beast in itself, but it often appears side by side with depression (Fichter, Quadflieg, Fischer, & Kohlboeck, 2010). Similar to depression, anxiety is said to present in several different types and forms with more and less severe symptoms that can impair one's functional ability (APA, 2013; Barlow & Durand, 2015; Sadock et al., 2015). Symptoms can be of physical nature such as palpitations, breathing problems, sweating, muscle tension, or sleep disturbances (APA, 2013, Sadock et al., 2015). More so, they are said to be able to cause restlessness, irritability, confusion, fatigue, problems with concentration, fear, and associated avoidance of particular situations (Sadock et al., 2015). This list of described symptoms could go on for much longer. However, from the description above it becomes clear what major impact anxiety can have on an individual's life. In comparison to people at ease with their daily activities and

experiences, for anxious individuals the world becomes a fearful place full of concerns and worries (Barlow & Durand, 2015; Sadock et al., 2015). Most people without any particular psychological disorder, physical illness, or trauma experience find it challenging enough to live satisfying and fulfilling lives. It seems that survivors of CSA, who reportedly suffer from depression and anxiety as a consequence of their trauma, have significant obstacles added to this challenge (Karsten et al., 2010).

Research suggests that people who experienced sexual abuse in childhood are at significant risk of taking their own life later on (Bedi et al., 2011; Dube et al., 2005). According to Molnar, Berkman, & Buka (2001) the suicide attempts for males who were raped or molested during childhood was 4 to 11 times higher than for men without a sexual trauma history. Unfortunately, the factors contributing to suicide attempts for male victims of CSA are still not fully understood. Most research in the past either focused on female survivors or compared participants with and without CSA history (Daray et al., 2016; Dhaliwal, Gauzas, Antonowicz, & Ross, 1996; Spataro et al., 2001). However, Easton, Renner, and O'Leary (2013) concluded that the following five factors posed an increased risk of suicide in males with a history of CSA: 1. The regularity of the sexual abuse; 2. the use of force; 3. conformity to hegemonic masculinity; 4. the level of depression; and 5. suicidal ideation. The severity and violence involved in CSA may therefore have significant influence on the mental and psychological state of male survivors. Also, rigidly adopted gender norms may play a role in the ongoing pain in men contributing to a life in isolation and silence, and of attempts of suicide (Easton et al., 2013).

Ongoing child sexual abuse has been acknowledged as a situation in which a child is left helpless by violence that can have long term harming effects including symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Rowan, 2006; Sanderson, 2006). The symptoms described for a diagnosis of PTSD make up a long list including dissociative reactions such as flashbacks, avoidance behaviours, and negative self-beliefs, beliefs about others, or the world (APA, 2013). Apparently, individuals could also experience negative emotions. These may include anger, guilt, fear or shame, they may react impulsively, be hyper vigilant, have an exaggerated startle response, sleeping problems, and lack of concentration (APA, 2013; Sadock et al., 2015). Recurring sexual abuse in childhood has also been associated with additional psychological difficulties

including a fractured sense of self, persistently feeling useless, helpless and overall in despair (Rowan, 2006).

From a developmental point of view sexually abused children are said to face a tough challenge. While children seem to try to process the trauma experiences, they often do not know how to make sense of what is happening to them (Wenar & Kerig, 2011). Sexual abuse is believed to leave children confused and the experiences seem to interfere with their growing schemata about the world, themselves, and relationships with others (Wenar & Kerig, 2011). Consequently, research reports that these children often perform poorly academically (Wenar & Kerig, 2011). Emotional and social development are also said to be affected in negative ways. CSA is described to affect children's internalising processes leaving them anxious, fearful, and often withdrawn (Wenar & Kerig, 2011). Commonly, CSA leads to inappropriate sexual behaviours early on in life and many survivors appear to develop low sexual self-esteem (Krahé & Berger, 2017). Risky sexual behaviours, promiscuity during adolescence and adulthood, sexual revictimisation as well as sexual aggression and perpetration are reported consequential outcomes (Homma, Wang, Saewyc, & Kishor, 2012; Krahé & Berger, 2017; Senn, Carey, & Vanable, 2008; Wenar & Kerig, 2011). For example, according to Tharp et al. (2013) early exposure to sex, engaging with multiple partners, and casual sex increase the risk for sexual violence perpetration. Evidence suggests that CSA interferes significantly with the cognitive, emotional, and social development and has consequences on a person's sexual self-esteem. Therefore, people with a sexual trauma history would be left vulnerable and exposed to multiple risk factors right from the beginning.

The disclosure of trauma experiences such as CSA has been described as a catalyst for healing (Easton, 2014; Valerio, 2011). Talking about the traumatic events is said to relieve feelings of guilt and shame as much as it seems to break the isolation and burden of long held secrets (Easton, 2014). Nevertheless, delay of disclosure of CSA is well documented and an ongoing problem. The barriers of disclosure seem to exist in childhood at the time of the trauma as well as later on in adulthood (Collin-Vézina, De la Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer, & Milne, 2015). At any stage of a person's life, the reasons for silence seem complex. According to Collin-Vézina et al. (2015) children often do not know how to interpret what is happening to them. Also, perpetrators are reported to induce great fear. Other victims report strong feelings of denial at the time causing them to forget what

happened to a great extent. Unfortunately most survivors seem to experience flashbacks later on, which bring the memories back and make it necessary to deal with the experienced trauma (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015). Hunter (2011) described that girls in particular worried that telling anyone could cause more harm to themselves or someone close to them. For boys, feelings of shame have been described as a significant barrier to disclosure, which may be related to the previously discussed gender norms (Hunter, 2011). For example, Hunter (2011) stated that many boys felt shame about the homosexual interaction due to the abuse and feared to be labelled as gay. Other barriers included the breakdown of family and home environments, fractured relationships with loved ones, and self-blame as children felt responsible for the abuse (Hunter, 2011; Paine & Hansen, 2002). However, as positive as disclosure may be from a healing perspective, for many children, it is a risky process with unknown outcomes (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Jonzon & Lindbald, 2004). According to Ullman (2007) negative reactions to disclosure and harmful outcomes are more likely experienced at a younger age. Sadly, research showed that children were often not believed when they said they were sexually abused and for many the trauma intensified after they told someone (Barter, 2005; Paine & Hansen, 2002). Later disclosure has been associated with greater mental and psychological problems such as PTSD (Easton, 2014; Ullman, 2007). However, for men the barriers to talk about their sexual abuse experience do not seem to become less daunting as they grow older due to internalised norms of masculinity (Easton, 2014).

Research into child sexual abuse in males has started to increase over the last decade or at least started to include questions of differences in genders. Dube et al. (2005) looked at the long-term effects of CSA for men and women in regards to overall health and social functioning. Their findings suggested not only that CSA was a common occurrence in both genders, it also revealed very similar negative outcomes in terms of increased substance use, suicide attempts, and relationship difficulties (Dube et al., 2005). Even more revealing was the finding that a great number of perpetrators were female (40 % in the case of men and 6 % in women). According to such research, it is crucial to acknowledge boys' vulnerability to sexual abuse during childhood. A qualitative study undertaken by Chan (2014) aimed to address the dearth of literature focused on male sexual abuse. The research was further intended to provide social workers helping survivors of male sexual abuse with more insight. According to Chan's (2014)

findings, men with a history of CSA are faced with serious inner conflicts in regards to their own sexuality. Their experiences often resulted in increased libido, confusion around the difference between sex and love, a general mistrust towards romantic partners, and associated adulterous behaviours. The men in Chan's (2014) study also described tremendous feelings of guilt and shame in regards to their involuntary arousal from their experiences of sexual abuse. Not only did it lower their self-esteem, it also created a need to exercise control in their sexual interactions with women. Consequently, it affected the men's interpersonal relationships and to some extent even their sexual orientation (Chan, 2014). Similarly, Alaggia and Millington (2008) wanted to gain a better understanding of the effects of CSA on men and women's lives and their ways of disclosing the abuse. Their qualitative findings gave a descriptive impression of the complexity of problems men were faced with due to their experiences of sexual abuse. For example, all men in their study described how the sexual abuse created a need or even urge to be sexually active before entering their teenage years. According to these participant's accounts, their libido was driven by a confusion of bodily reactions to the abuse and a lack of feeling loved and cared for (Alaggia & Millington, 2008). Another prominent theme emerging amongst male participants was the high level of anger resulting from the sexual abuse. The findings described men's aggressive behaviours that were driven by sheer rage. It expressed itself in violence and controlling behaviours towards others and within relationships as well as it caused internal blame resulting in depression and suicidal ideation (Alaggia & Millington, 2008). Another qualitative study by Dorahy and Clearwater (2012) investigated the lived experiences of men with a history of CSA with a primary focus on feelings of shame and guilt. The men in the study described how being sexually abused at an early age robbed them from a free development of their self. The associated feelings of shame and guilt were so strong that they felt worthless and lost the sense for any previously held values. However, not only did they see themselves as utter failures, they also perceived others to see them in the same way as they saw themselves (Dorahy & Clearwater, 2012). Similarly, these men developed feelings of guilt, because they felt responsible for what happened to them even though they could not make sense of it. It affected their disclosure out of fear of unknown consequences and created uncontrollable emotions such as intense rage. The men in Dorahy and Millington's (2008) study carried their pain into adulthood and consequently experienced

mental health difficulties as well as interpersonal problems. O'Leary, Easton, and Gould (2017) aimed to develop a measure of the effects of CSA on men. Interviews with twenty men lead to the development of a 30-item instrument, which was tested on a 147 men affected by sexual abuse during childhood. The findings exposed men's difficulties within relationships and the interaction with others, their complex problems around sexuality and self-identity as well as psychological problems affecting their overall well-being. The qualitative data helped to construct a final 17-item scale, which promises a structured assessment of men's mental and physical status due to their CSA experiences (O'Leary et al., 2017). Other qualitative studies have added to the literature to date and looked at specific aspects that relate to men who experienced sexual abuse as boys. Investigations looked at barriers of healing, focused on masculinity, relational difficulties, fatherhood, perspectives on incest, the lasting effects of CSA, and survivors' ways of making sense of their experiences (Kia-Keating, Grossman, Sorsoli, & Epstein, 2005; Kia-Keating et al., 2010; Price-Robertson, 2012; Ray, 2001; Grossman, Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, 2006; Willis et al., 2014). However, the impact on men of child sexual abuse is still poorly understood and not enough known about how certain dynamics interlink and affect these men's identities and lives (Chan, 2014; Dorais & Meyer, 2002; O'Leary et al., 2017). I believe that research has truly awakened to the existence of sexual abuse in boys. Nevertheless, it needs a lot more work to catch up on the depth of issues men are affected by due to their experiences of sexual abuse as children. Socially constructed concepts such as gender norms can be challenged and changed over time if society is made aware of existing and consequential problems. I would therefore like to add to this process of change by being the voice for some of these men, who lived through childhood experiences of sexual abuse.

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of how men with a history of child sexual abuse reconciled their early experiences with everyday life and their relationships with others. Increased understanding of the impact on men of such trauma may help in living meaningful lives and reduce the taboos associated with this topic.

Chapter 2: Methods

In this chapter I outline the theoretical and epistemological basis for this research. Further, I explain applied methods and procedures as well as ethical considerations, the process of participant recruitment, and the course of analysis.

This is a qualitative study guided by narrative theory and social constructionist epistemology using thematic narrative analysis (TNA) to interpret the data. Social constructionism is built on the idea that knowledge is created through multiple realities that are socially created and shaped by the people living in a particular society (Moghaddam, 2005). The commonly learned and shared understandings within a particular community vary across different cultures and change over time (Gergen, 1985). Systems of beliefs, behaviour and values are the product of socially constructed ideals within a particular social context. The way people live, interact and behave is therefore not guided by a single existing truth, but by multiple realities that are dependent on experiences, social relationships and cultural understandings (Gergen, 2009; Moghaddam, 2005). This was particularly important to remember when I analysed the data, because being Swiss brought another layer of different cultural perspective to the research. I needed to reflect critically on my personal values and beliefs in order to avoid a distortion of the participants' shared and individual realities within a New Zealand context (Parker, 2005).

A qualitative study enables the researcher to look more deeply into a particular phenomenon by penetrating beyond the surface of a particular set of data (Cozby, 2009). It therefore allows the researcher to investigate and interpret a person's subjective experience more in-depth. Applying narrative theory to the investigation of individual experiences is particularly suitable for this study as it has been recognised that people make sense of their lives through stories (Andrews, Sclater, Rustin, Squire, & Treacher, 2000; Bamberg, 2012). Narratives reflect personal experiences and realities from a particular social and cultural perspective. At the same time they reveal a person's self-identity and describe how they connect and interact with others. The individual stories are a reflection of one's values and beliefs and what is meaningful in an individual's life (Andrews et al., 2000; Denzin, 2000; Smith & Sparkes, 2006). Riessman (1993) explained how narratives not only reveal an individual's strengths and weaknesses, they also

highlight a person's nature and qualities. By facilitating an interview environment using open ended questions that provide only a very loose structure of topics, an individual is allowed to tell his or her personal story (Riessman, 1993). The researcher ends up with a rich account of a person's particular experiences or life story developed in conversation and from a specific perspective.

The approach of grouping experiences into themes in order to formulate a theory or making sense of a data set is well established in research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, thematic analysis can be applied in many different ways according to underlying theory and hypotheses. The researcher's particular assumptions and goal play a crucial role for interpretation of the data and the presentation of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the current study I was guided by the participants' stories and did not look for themes that might confirm a particular research question. The narratives therefore determined the themes that emerged. Thematic analysis traditionally looks for similar codes within a small set of data. However, TNA adds an advantage to the search for themes by highlighting certain trends within units of data and revealing meaning without disconnecting it from its context (Riessman, 2008). TNA keeps its focus on long extracts of narrative or the story as a whole, which emphasises a more case-centred approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis relies on a number of excerpts that give evidence for the grouping of a particular theme. TNA on the other hand allows the researcher to interpret a theme by acknowledging the depth of meaning within a single story (Riessman, 2008). Therefore, TNA values the meaning within a narrative over the way a story may have unfolded or what language was used. The researcher's interpretation of a participant's words is guided by the underlying or covert significance of the person's story as a whole (Riessman, 2008). As noted by Riessman (2008), TNA is not rigid in its method. A researcher investigating a topic through single case studies might find it useful as it may serve to find themes across a number of narratives. It is therefore important to look at a project's theoretical and epistemological approach, the research question, and a study's aim in order to decide if TNA is an appropriate fit (Riessman, 2008).

The findings of the current study portrays individual experiences connected to personal values and beliefs within a New Zealand perspective. At the same time, they will discuss accounts of meaning in the context of life after experiencing sexual abuse as a boy. Particular excerpts across all narratives might

justify the grouping into themes, while they will not lose their individual depth and meaning. As a particular strength of TNA, a thread across stories may therefore be possible even though I might interpret a participant's accounts within its specific context (Riessman, 2008). The individual excerpts taken together will paint a picture of the obstacles faced by men whose world has been turned upside down due to their childhood experiences. At the heart of interpreting the narratives lies, therefore, the aim to understand from shared themes what it is like for men to live with the aftermath of CSA.

Participants

Participants were recruited through Male Support Services in Hamilton. Eight men between 36 and 50 years of age and who grew up in New Zealand were chosen for this particular study. The age criteria ensured that the men had reached a level of maturity in their lives sufficient to allow reflection back to their childhood experience of sexual abuse. Research has shown that retrospective accounts of CSA are accurate and valid as children are capable of remembering specific memories as they get older, which carries on into adulthood (Fergusson et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2015;). The age criteria also limited experiences to one specific generation. This aspect is believed to be significant in terms of social understandings and acceptance of masculinity and other social and cultural values and beliefs that change over time (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 2009).

All potential participants received an information sheet from Mike Holloway, manager of Male Support Services, outlining the aims and purpose of this research. The information sheet provided a brief background on the topic, described the procedures to be used, and gave information on time commitments the study will require. The information included details of the methods used as well as it described participants' rights throughout the project. Further, it asked permission for me to contact interested clients to confirm their willingness and eligibility to participate in the study. An example of the information sheet can be found in Appendix A.

Mike Holloway informed me of nine interested clients who I then phoned. The phone conversation allowed me to introduce myself and to confirm eligibility. I explained briefly the aim of the study and asked if they were aware of all the details of participation. I offered to send another copy of the information sheet via mail if required, and two participants wished to receive one as they had misplaced their first copy. Eight of the men I contacted agreed to participate in the study and

I was able to arrange individual interview dates and times during the first phone conversation. One participant wished to think about it again and decided in the end not to participate. All interviews were conducted at Male Support Services in Hamilton either at a convenient time during the day or in the evening.

Procedure

The narrative approach was chosen under the assumption that people reflect their identity, social behaviour and interaction, and create meaning by telling their personal story (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). Unstructured conversational interviews were used to generate narrative dialogue and data. This method has been said to be appropriate for exploring an individual's belief systems, realities, and their understanding of a particular life experience (Dibley, 2011; Riessman, 1993). A loose structure provided a platform for free story telling as memories unfolded in a participant's mind. I therefore provided a starting point, but kept the potential scope wide and essentially handed over the control and direction of the interview content to each participant (Riessman, 1993). By doing so I acknowledged that each narrative should be guided by its story teller in order to generate a personally meaningful narrative. It still allowed me as the researcher to clarify particular statements or ask probing questions ensuring a joint process (Riessman, 1993). I asked the following open ended and broad question in order to introduce the topic and start a flowing conversation: "How do you believe your experience of sexual abuse as a child affected you as a person and your life in general?". As suggested by Riessman, (1993), eight additionally prepared open questions assisted me when the conversation stopped flowing naturally. My prompts revolved around self identity, personal development and perceived restrictions, coping mechanisms, outlook on and goals in life, relationships with others, dynamics in romance, and social impact. The prepared questions can be found in the interview protocol in Appendix B.

Each participant was invited to bring a support person along to the interview if they wished, but all eight came alone. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher and were between 60 and 120 minutes long. I informed each participant that I would call them one day post interview in order to make sure they were emotionally supported. All participants said they were fine after the interview and did not require a phone call the following day. Each participant had the opportunity to review and make changes to their transcribed data. They were also given choices on how to review their transcripts (e.g. sent

file via email, mail, or meeting with the researcher in person). Two participants chose to receive their transcript via email, one via mail, and three participants met up with me at Male Support services to review their transcribed data. Two participants decided not to review their transcripts and declared that they accepted my transcription as accurate. None of the six participants who read their transcripts requested any changes.

All participants were given a pseudonym and were identified by this throughout the project.

Ethics

This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Waikato Research and Ethics Committee. Throughout the interview process it was ensured that all participants had access to professional support if needed. Their overall well-being was a priority at all times and breaks were offered at any time during the interviews. None of the participants required professional support. I emphasised that participants can decline answering any questions and that they have the right to ask further questions throughout the whole research project. I clarified that all personal details of the participants would be stored securely for five years and made this adequately transparent on the information sheet. Participants were also informed that they had access to findings and publications. All participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time up to two weeks after they had time to review and comment on their transcripts.

Data Analysis

Transcribing each interview personally gave me the opportunity to gain a first impression of each story's significance, difference, and potentially common themes across narratives. Afterwards I took the time to read through each story once in full in order to get more familiar with each individual story and the data overall. In the third stage I re-read each narrative and highlighted excerpts that appeared significant in regards to particular experiences, behaviours, interactions with others, depth of emotions, and meaning making. This process allowed for themes to emerge within each story as well as across narratives. It became apparent that each participant had a very different story to tell. At the same time all men shared experiences associated with certain conflicts that often seemed to be of a subconscious nature. Reactions and decisions were therefore often reflexes

to situations instead of well thought out actions, which had consequences and changed each individual's pathways differently within a common context. In my interpretations I focused on the meaning of the words and not the language itself. Hence, each participant's personal explanation of events and their understanding of emotions, reactions, and life changes were at the forefront. What did participants find defining in their later life outcomes? What drove expressed emotions, and how did they explain their actions in relation to their environments and support networks? It was important to me to listen to each story within a one generational New Zealand context in order to interpret feelings and reactions about masculinity, social roles, and interpersonal relationships. I started labelling and highlighting significant and similar sections, which created 25 colour coded subthemes.

In the last stage of the analysis I read through each subtheme and thought of its overt and underlying meaning synthesising the 25 subthemes into themes with shared meaning. This process allowed me to determine seven overarching themes covering topics such as emotional burden, changed and lost identities, anger, conflict, broken trust, battles with social norms, and healing. I wrote summary notes for each theme, which helped me define and understand the most important aspects of each subtheme and how they relate to each other. Finding common ground through several subthemes allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of each theme's meaning and its interrelation to each participant's story. It is important to note that I did not regard the number of excerpts per subtheme as a definition of its importance. I treated each subtheme as equally significant and meaningful in its depth and contribution to the overarching theme. This is one of the explained advantages of TNA as it allows to interpret a story in its single context as well as across narratives. I was therefore able to focus on the data's richness as a whole without compromising specific attributes of a single story.

Writing the summary notes for each main theme enabled me to take a step back and to penetrate deeper into the under layers of each subtheme. For example, I conceptualised expressions of shame, fears, guilt, or changed self-identity by asking myself what these comments truly meant for the particular participant. Experiencing shame and consequential behaviours is only one aspect of a person's experience. I was interested to find out what it meant for this man's personal development, what it did to his inner self, and how and why it affected particular decisions. From there I was able to build connections between participants and

their personal experiences of similar emotions, conflicts, and paths they chose for themselves. From each overarching theme I wanted to learn how the sexual abuse in childhood affected these men on subconscious levels interfering with their lives up to this day. Riessman's (2008) theory of keeping a single story alive while putting particular elements of the narrative into context with other stories can appear challenging. However, the deeper engagement with the overall data makes it possible to see each narrative in its unique experience as well as its connection to other stories. Therefore, one man's story does not become more important than another's. At the same time the grouping of statements across narratives does not take anything away from each man's individual experience. I believe it is important to emphasise the words 'individual experience' at this point as every participant's story was highly exclusive. However, the men's experiences were also very similar on a deeper level, which made it possible to conceptualise the meaning of child sexual abuse in boys through a shared lens. I interpreted these shared experiences as follows: *Shame, guilt, and lost self-identities, Anger and hurt - a kind of death/an empty shell, Escaping the pain, Damage boils over, Mistrust - a place of safety, Social norms and barriers to disclosure,* and *From missed opportunities to healing*. The findings will be discussed in the next chapter within the context of these seven overarching themes. However, before I start on the findings I give a short description of each participant's particular context. I believe this will help the reader to connect to the meaning of the excerpts chosen for each theme.

Chapter 3: Findings

This chapter presents my analysis of the men's talk. I do this by examining in turn each of the main themes to emerge from my analysis. However, in order to help readers put the men's comments into context, I begin with a brief pen portrait of each participant.

Brief Participant Background and Context

Steve, 50 years old, New Zealand European

Steve grew up in a catholic family with one sister and two brothers. Both his parents died when he was young and a priest became the person he trusted most and he regarded him as his second father figure. Steve had strong catholic values and wanted to become a priest himself. Sexuality was one of the topics the family did not talk about according to their religious values. Steve was sexually abused as a boy after his parents died by the person he trusted most in his life - the priest who became his idol and father figure. The abuse lasted for a good year and a half and affected Steve's life ever since. Steve started to rebel very strongly as a consequence of the abuse and lost his belief and trust in his religion. What followed was a destructive path filled with mistrust, anger, physical fighting, time in prison, lost self-belief, and to an extent economic underachievement. Steve is still haunted by memories of the sexual abuse as a boy, which affects his decisions as well as his behaviour. He has children of his own who are his main focus and pride.

Colin, 40 years old, New Zealand European

Colin comes from a wealthy farming background and experienced sexual abuse as a boy at boarding school by other students. The worst for Colin was the constant name calling and bullying that followed for five more years after the sexual abuse. Even though the head of the school was aware of the events no action was taken at the time and Colin's story was not taken seriously. Colin, by his own description, grew into a man unable to trust anyone, who deceives others, and learned how to get away with unlawful behaviour. However, he faced several dishonesty charges at the time of the interview. Colin's experiences of child sexual abuse led to an unsettled and isolated life focused on material gain without inner satisfaction or being able to form meaningful relationships with others.

Tom, 36 years old, New Zealand European

Tom grew up in a rural town in New Zealand in a stable family home with two younger sisters. From a very young age Tom was interested in the outdoors and activities such as fishing and hunting. He was sexually abused by a close family friend from the age of nine until he was nearly thirteen years old. The events therefore happened within a previously established trust relationship and occurred in several different settings. Tom is still haunted by memories and flashbacks from the sexual abuse, which affected his ability to connect with others and trust in people in general. Tom has several good friends, but it took many years before he was able to form a meaningful intimate relationship. The outdoors are still a major part of his life and provide a place of safety and recovery. Tom is successful in his job and has a daughter he loves dearly. In the course of Tom's recovery he faced social judgement and injustice, which affected his outlook on life and interactions with others. Fatherhood brought up new challenges associated with his experiences as a boy, but it also made him determined to fight for change for men with a history of sexual abuse.

Brian, 36 years old, New Zealand European and part Māori

Brian is the oldest of four siblings and experienced physical abuse from as young as 2 1/2 years old. His biological father left when he was only three months old and he was raised by his mother and two different step fathers, who both were his abusers. His second step father abused Brian sexually from the age of four until he was almost twelve years old. Brian's world was therefore filled with fear and insecurity around male figures from the very beginning of his life, which he tried to offset by being adventurous and brave. Brian rebelled at home and at school and often tried to run away. When he finally spoke up as a twelve year old he faced barriers of judgment and disbelief. Fortunately he was surrounded by loving grandparents, who became his carers and advocates. As an adult, Brian lived life fearlessly and often dangerously carrying a lot of anger, hurt, and insecurities from his childhood. He tried to end his life several times, engaged in unhealthy behaviours and rather destructive relationships. Brian's past is affecting his life daily and he is still working on his full recovery. However, he tries to stay positive and has two children who mean a lot to him and have become a major focus in his life.

Dean, 44 years old, Māori

Dean is the youngest of ten siblings and was adopted into the family. He never knew his biological parents. He was sexually abused by two uncles and a priest from the age of six until he was around 14 years old. Dean felt abandoned by his parents and his siblings and often questioned his very existence within the family unit. At fourteen he ran away from home for good, lived on the streets hiding within the gay community and got heavily involved in drugs. Dean is gay, but was never able to enter a loving relationship with a partner due to his memories of the sexual abuse as a boy. While the drugs masked some of his pain and helped him survive on the streets, they also robbed him of a life filled with opportunities and self-fulfilment. It took many years for Dean to work through his anger, reunite with his family, and get free of drugs. Dean made peace with his past and is living a drug free and quiet life these days. Nevertheless, he still carries hopes of working through some of his remaining difficulties and barriers caused by his experience of sexual abuse as a boy.

Leo, 43 years old, New Zealand European

Leo described his family life as rather destructive and unsupportive. He experienced sexual abuse as a six or seven year old from an older boy who was the son of a family friend. The mother of his perpetrator witnessed the abuse and swore him to silence, beating him and threatening him that his family would be destroyed if he ever told anyone. This experience was the beginning of Leo not ever wanting to talk about the events. At the age of about eleven Leo was again sexually abused by an older boy in the neighbourhood, who befriended him and also got him involved in bestiality. It was these events that Leo described as the most damaging and shameful. He withdrew into himself even more and expressed his anger through fighting and violence at any given opportunity. In order to mask his pain he also engaged heavily in alcohol and drug use. By the time he was 14 he believes he was an alcoholic and by the age of 19 heavily addicted to heroin, methamphetamine, and opiates. Leo was very promiscuous from as early as 13 years old, but was never able to engage in a close, meaningful relationship with a woman. He suffered from flashbacks, depression and lacked self-esteem. Similar to the other participants, there is no area in Leo's life that has not been affected by his experience of sexual abuse as a child. Leo does not engage in substance use

any longer, but to this day he prefers to be mainly on his own and lives a quiet and somewhat isolated life.

Ben, 49 years old, New Zealand European

Ben grew up in a foster home with caring foster parents. However, Ben suffered sexual abuse from as early as 6 months old until he was seven and his perpetrators were both male and female. Ben had an incredibly high number of different abusers, who were associated with the family, friends of the family, relatives, or neighbours. His early childhood was filled with uncertainty, fear, violence, and destruction, which turned him into a very angry and violent boy. Ben adopted an attitude of self-preservation, which he carried into adulthood and became a competition fighter in order to channel some of his anger and practice some discipline. He also joined a gang for several years, but left his destructive path behind when his first daughter was born. Throughout his life Ben suffered from flashbacks, anxiety, and panic attacks associated with his early childhood experiences and maintained a general mistrust towards people. The bush and nature have always been his solace and place where he was able to find inner peace. Over the years Ben was able to develop two successful businesses despite health issues due to his previous lifestyle. Ben had several relationships, which did not last, but he loves his children dearly and is very devoted in his role as a father.

Kevin, 44 years old, New Zealand European

Kevin had a sheltered upbringing in a good Christian family home and grew up with the strong belief that homosexual activity should be condemned. His first sexual abuse occurred when he was twelve at a friend's house where he slept over. The traumatic experience was further fuelled by shame and guilt due to his family values and upbringing. Consequently Kevin never talked about the event and managed to erase it from his memory for many years. However, subconsciously the memories lived on and affected Kevin's mood and behaviour greatly over the years. At 18 Kevin experienced a second incident of sexual abuse under the influence of alcohol and drugs at the hand of a bisexual individual who took advantage of his state. Kevin became even more destructive and violent after this event and carried his anger and growing violence into adulthood. He was unable to hold down jobs or relationships, had uncontrolled violent outbursts, and was

always on the lookout for dangerous situations. Kevin also developed a relentless appetite for sexual activity to the point where he believed he was addicted to sex. It took many years until he was able to make sense of his behaviours and turn around his life with the help of his supportive and loving family. Today, Kevin is a successful business man and has a family of his own. He is very devoted to his children and wife and maintains a positive attitude towards life. He described the experience of sexual abuse as a child as a life ending experience, but also believes that his experiences made him stronger after all.

The findings are discussed within seven overarching themes:

Shame, guilt, and lost self-identities

Shame and guilt

All participants in this study carried more or less profound feelings of guilt, shame, fear, and self-blame associated with their childhood experience of sexual abuse. Guilt and self-blame showed in many shapes and forms and were inflicted for example by non-action at the time or others' reactions that created an additional burden. For example, Tom was unable to tell anyone at the time for reasons I will discuss in more detail a bit later. His sexual abuse was ongoing for several years and when it finally stopped things did not instantly make sense. It took him a long time to gain a better understanding of his emotions and behaviours due to his CSA. Apart from the shame, fear, emotional pain, and the questions he had about himself he said:

> *Tom:* The guilt I carry, because I believe that my inaction has probably, well I know my inaction has exposed others. Whereas I could have been the final stop if I had the balls. So I do carry a lot of guilt.

The wondering about who might have been next after him was a rational thought that came with time. Initially, he was left with chaos within himself, which was driven by feelings of dishonour, indignity, and fear of potential consequences as well as confusion about what this all said about him. Similarly, Brian discussed how his story was met with negative judgement disbelief by a health professional, which affected his confidence and initiated feelings of self-doubt and self-loathing that followed him through his whole life.

> *Brian:* I actually tried counselling twice. My granddad took me once. I've just started college and we tried counselling back then. Went into the room and wasn't even five minutes and granddad punched him over. He asked me one question and that was 'what did you do for him to do that to you?' kind of thing, and I was just devastated by that, and that was when granddad stood up and said 'you don't have the right to ask the boy something like that when it's not his fault. When something like that has happened to him.' So, I still carry that through my life as well, you know, maybe I deserved it. That kind of thinking. It took me a long time to try and...it wasn't my fault. That's probably the hardest thing as well, cos you blame yourself.

Even though Brian's granddad stood up for him, the psychologist's lack of validation of his physical and emotional trauma played into his already low self-esteem. Brian's abuse started when he was very little and over the years he had silently questioned himself about why this happened to him. He felt it was wrong, but he still did not fully understand what was going on and why. Instead of putting the blame solely on his perpetrator he had started to believe that something was wrong with him in order to receive such treatment. Consequently he blamed himself for his experiences, which only increased feelings of shame and diminished his own view of himself. Brian was left with a lifelong feeling of being responsible for his CSA experiences including the fear that others might see it as his fault. Self-blame was therefore added to the already existing shame, confusion, pain, and anger, which has been reported in previous research as a common part of CSA (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Hunter, 2011; Ullman, 2007). Shame became such a strong emotion for all participants in this study that it seemed as if the abuse had left a physical mark that could be seen by others. As the men grew older there was a vivid perception that people could see what had happened to them and that they would judge them negatively for it. Even though it was clear on a rational basis that no one could know about the events without being told about them, the shame of their hidden secrets seemed to overshadow their persona into the outside world:

> *Steve*: It just, when I, in fact there was a point of I felt disgusted with myself, I felt let down by myself, because I shouldn't have let this guy do this to me, mate... And that's where I get to the point, is it, you get people looking at me and you feel dirty, because you think, hey...you know for a fact they don't know, but then you think: well, what do they think about me? Is it the way I walk, is it

> the way I do things, do they know I've been sexually abused? I know for a fact that they don't, but that's going through my head, you know.

Steve's words emphasised how wrong it had felt to him to have a sexual encounter with another man. Having grown up with religious values forbidding homosexuality, Steve's conflict within himself was overwhelming and left him with feelings of being used and marked. Consequently he carried a lot of self-blame as well as feelings of being tarnished and unworthy. He projected his developed lack of self-worth onto people around him as he blamed himself for letting the abuse happen to him, feelings he carried into adulthood. Previous research found similar reactions to men's CSA experiences. For example, in Dorahy and Clearwater's (2012) study participants feared others would judge them and their families negatively if they knew about what happened. The men therefore tried to avoid any type of exposure in order to escape potential embarrassment. It was the uncertainty of people's responses that participants worried about, which left them unsettled and with no other choice than to bury the secret as deep as possible (Dorahy & Clearwater, 2012). The current study revealed a more complex layer to the fear of exposing experiences of child sexual abuse. Secrets were kept not only because peoples' reactions were unpredictable and potentially judgemental. Disclosing their experiences of sexual interaction with another male placed a threat to their very being. As described by Baumeister (2011), the self is a complicated concept one holds about her- or himself. Self-awareness begins early in childhood when toddlers start to be able to separate themselves from others, which forms the base of developing a self-identity (Wenar & Kerig, 2011). However, a person's identification of a self does not occur in isolation. It relies on the social interaction with others in order to define itself (Baumeister, 2011). By socialising with others a person measures their individual values, beliefs, likes and dislikes, and becomes aware of their individual being in comparison to people around them. In other words, people appear to grow their knowledge about themselves through interaction with others, which gives them their sense of self (Baumeister, 2011). At the same time a developing self is also strongly guided by cultural norms created by society, which form part of the measure everyone compares themselves to (Moghaddam, 2005). One can see why the men in this study lost their sense of self from the perspective of Western culture at a time in which hegemonic masculinity

dominated male gender norms. Their whole personality was suddenly stripped away from developed worldviews and their built up foundation of themselves was reduced to a shaky rubble of self-doubt and mistrust towards others:

> *Tom:* There was nothing more demeaning, demoralising than being sodomised by another man. I say that loudly. There is nothing more, I can't take anything more from you, you know. There is nothing more derogatory, more....I mean guys do it willingly, that's their M.O., but when you're a kid you don't know. You know it's wrong, but you don't know how to make it right, and you don't know how to make it go away and you don't know how to stand up for yourself. All the skills you find after the fact.

Tom did not only feel humiliated by his perpetrator; the sexual act with another men penetrated very deeply into his innermost corner of his values, beliefs, and personality. He was able to accept homosexuality even though he could not understand it. However, he was forced to engage in sexual activities with a man, which was against everything he believed in. It destroyed his self-image as much as it robbed him from what he knew about himself and perceived as his personality. Tom emphasised that he tried to make it right, but he did not even know anymore who he was. The confusion was too great and for many years he lived within a shadow of the person he thought he might have been.

For the men who experienced the abuse from an even younger age, the development of the self would have been slightly different. Nevertheless, Baumeister's (2011) theories still connect. The men who had experienced CSA from infant and toddler age onward developed a self already loaded with shame, self-doubt, and feelings of inferiority as their underlying belief system. They felt the imbalance within themselves, but they had no skills yet to make sense of it all. It was still the interaction with others that formed the base of how they felt about themselves, even though it was negative, destructive, and unhelpful for moving forward. These men grew up in the shadow of their memories, which masked their personal make-up that was still deep within. It influenced their decisions as they grew older, and it affected their self-esteem as well as their interpersonal connections. Brian endured sexual abuse from toddler age until his early teens. This was the only life he knew as much as he recognised that it was all wrong. After he finally spoke up, he loathed himself even more as he felt a huge sense of false guilt and responsibility. As he grew older this negative view of himself guided him towards people he perceived to be on his level. Brian explained:

> *Brian:* I think I attracted more bad people than I did good. I think I just hung out with the wrong crowd, cos I just wanted to forget about things. I didn't love myself; not at all. Hated myself. All that I thought it was me that tore up my brothers and sisters and tore up my family, because of me speaking out, so I carried...still to this day I carry that.

It has been asserted that children who experience abuse develop an incorrect view of themselves (Wenar & Kerig, 2011). Brian's self-image was so low that he tended to socialise with peers who lived destructive lifestyles in order to feel a sense of belonging. Research asserted that CSA increases feelings of worthlessness and mistrust towards others if parents are unsupportive (Godbout et al., 2014). Similarly, such children are said to grow up with greater worries about being abandoned, are more anxious within romantic relationships, and feel generally more uneasy with closeness (Godbout et al., 2014). Brian's perpetrators were two of his stepfathers and his mother was unsupportive. Taking Godbout et al.'s (2014) findings into consideration, Brian's leaning towards antisocial peers does not appear so surprising. His self-hatred likely fuelled his interaction with others in which he sought self-validation as much as he tried to protect himself from getting hurt. Unfortunately this only emphasised Brian's lost compass in regards to his own self, which was hidden under years of sexual abuse and added to his emotional pain.

The memories of the participants who were exposed to CSA very early in life guided not only their behaviours; the demons of their past also showed up in the form of anxieties associated with PTSD:

> *Ben:* Yeah. Ahm...anxiety of just freaking out over something simple, you know. Classic example: I shifted my niece up to Auckland. Now she moved into a place that was right at the end of a long driveway. I went out to my vehicle to get me a cigarette and a motorbike backfired up on the road. Sent me into full blown body shakes, freaking out, everything, and that was just a motorbike backfiring. Something simple.

Ben's reflexes took over whenever he felt a sense of potential threat. CSA was part of his life since he was a baby, which made him hyper alert, but also anxious. Even though he learnt to protect himself as an adult, his early experiences stayed with him in the form of frequent memories, panic attacks, and physical reactions. As described earlier, PTSD is well documented in connection with sexual abuse.

The symptoms can be quite severe and debilitating, and certainly affect interpersonal relationships due to reoccurring flashbacks and certain associated behaviours such as startle responses, expressed anger, or impulsive reactions (APA, 2013; Sadock et al., 2015; Ullman, 2007). Further, PTSD can also include feelings of guilt, fear, and shame, which was expressed in multiple forms by all participants. Brian described:

> *Brian:* The shame's almost like hiding in yourself. It's thinking that everyone's against you. Everybody knows about me, I'm looked at different, I'm looked at like am I gonna do this to other kids or my own kids? Just having that burden. Having that stuff in your life just carries a certain amount of shame with it and it's an ugly shame. It's like you got a mask on or a few layers of a mask. I don't know quite how to put it. I guess just carrying that around with you is quite shameful, cos it's like you're looked down on or looked at totally different in a way by everyone around who don't even know the story. So this shame part is probably a big thing. That's another hurdle or barrier that survivors have got to work on as well, cos it is a big one, shame.

What stands out from Brian's words is his association with hiding in himself and wearing masks in order to disguise feelings of shame. It emphasises Brian's fear of being judged, but also symbolises his anxiety to be himself in front of others. Brian's trauma experiences led him to believe that he is unacceptable and unworthy through which he only further diminished and denied his already fragile self. In the current study most men's identification with themselves suffered after the sexual abuse experience at an early age. They lost their foundations that had given them some grounding in who they are. Consequently they felt confused, lost self-respect and trust in others as well as it shook their confidence and locked part of their self away for good. As Leo described:

> *Leo:* The abuse itself....one was only one particular night. The other was maybe over six months. Yeah the second one involved him getting me involved in bestiality and stuff and I think that was probably the most damaging as shame was. That's the one that ate me up inside for the rest of my life.... It far outweighed what he did to me or what they did demand to do to themselves. I guess from that day forward I always knew a part of me I couldn't tell, I couldn't share with anyone. So, that didn't help to be cutting off, to be withdrawn, yeah.

Leo's sexual abuse was devastating enough, but being forced to engage in bestiality was the ultimate act of humiliation and indignity. It was difficult for him to come to terms with the fact that he was forced to have sexual interactions with another male. However, sexual interactions with an animal went beyond anything he could even imagine. It affected him so deeply that he drowned himself in drugs in order to be able to forget, but more so in an attempt to escape from himself. He was so mortified and dishonoured by what he was forced to do that any self-respect vanished in the event.

Lost self identities

Similar to the developing self, one's self-identity also needs the interaction with other people in order to find its place. It is therefore an individual's social contact within a specific cultural environment that leads to an understanding of who they are in relation to others (Baumeister, 2011). As explained by Baumeister (2011), identity is defined by a person's achievements and roles in regards to others, and is meant to represent a stable existence over time. Self-identity therefore surpasses the living self as it forms already in the womb of a mother and still exists after one's death. In other words, social status, specific talents or abilities as well as personality traits become as much outward characteristics as they are internal identifiers. Others' perception of an individual could be seen as an extension of a person's understanding of themselves (Baumeister, 2011). Therefore, one's achievements, a head stone, or simply others' memories carry a person's identity beyond their lives (Baumeister, 2011). Hence, it seems fair to say that the way people identify with themselves is crucial in terms of establishing self-esteem, acquiring personal values, and making connections as well as decisions. Sexual abuse experiences in childhood seem to rob men from this vital development and in Leo's case it even destroyed his notion of human identity. Most men in this study struggled to find their identity after their CSA experiences and some, including Leo, simply wanted to reject who they thought they were altogether. As Brian and Tom explained, their trauma experience damaged and clouded their understanding of themselves. It affected and obscured their interaction with others and their own perception of who they wanted to be or become:

> *Brian:* I think it's actually changed...it pretty much wrecked me as a person as in....trying to figure out who you are, who I am, what my purpose is, what was taken away, what's not there. Not being able

> to really have interaction with my own children and stuff from the start, and certain ways, doing certain things. Just socialising, ahm, it's a lot of stuff that kind of works in your psyche. Schooling, tempering anger and all that kind of stuff it's just, it's more dominant through my life.
>
> *Tom:* As a kid you grow up and I wanted to be like Dad, because Dad's a mechanic and we can make fast cars or you wanna be an electrician..., I wanted to be a gangster. I wanted to be someone that didn't get terrorised, that wasn't necessarily angry or hard but, got respected, that could go to and from and not be questioned, like that's what I wanted, because I felt the spotlight was always on me, you know.

It was not only a question of being confused about themselves or ashamed of what their abuse experience might say about them. CSA deprived these men of the fundamental sense of belonging. The need to know where one stands in life, which provides not only boundaries, but more importantly creates a sense of togetherness and strength. Tom said:

> *Tom:* ...I mean people deal with it differently, I dealt with it by not speaking about it initially and then just, yeah, to explain how I dealt with it later and how it affected me now...you, mate, I was born Tom and I've become Jim. I've become Jim to my friends, you know. You go looking for a sense of belonging.

Tom could not live with himself as the person who was forced to engage in something he rejected with every cell in his body and mind. The only way out for him was to become a different person through which he was able to let go of some of his burdens and feel the same as others around him. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995) it is a normal human reaction to seek belonging with others. In fact, it appears that the sense of fitting in with a group strengthens physical and psychological well-being as much as it influences a person's thought process and feelings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Kia-Keating et al., 2010; Valerio, 2011).

Sexual abuse in childhood appears to tap into a very deep corner of men's psychological make-up. It leaves them abandoned within layers of confusion and pain and searching for their true personal identities without opportunity to share it with anyone. Ben described how he denies his true self not only to others, but also to himself. Over the years he tried to be sociable and function within society, which required him to put on a face that was not a true reflection of himself.

However, it seems that Ben is still trying to find out who his real self is as pain, fear, mistrust, and shame dominated most of his life. In his own words he said:

> *Ben:* Yeah. I've gone from hiding behind one mask, stopping people from seeing the real me, to what they can see now...but that doesn't mean it's still the real me. It's someone that's there, I'm out there in the public eye, doing business, doing my job, you know, being a nice fellow, dadadada....whereas the whole time I could be, on the inside, I could still feel like Frankenstein. It's just something that's gonna be worked on.

CSA seems a strong force into isolation, which Valerio (2011) emphasised to be the most traumatic aspect about the painful experiences themselves. Other studies have confirmed feelings of shame, guilt, and a lost sense of identity in survivors of CSA (Dorahy & Clearwater, 2012; Ray, 2001). However, not being able to share with anyone what had happened to these boys alienated them not only from others, but more importantly from themselves. Consequently, growing up with the silent memories of their traumatic experiences left all participants deprived of their true being and without sense of belonging. It created forms of self-hatred, fostered low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy as well as it changed or completely robbed these men of their self-identity. Considering how important it seems for humans to be part of a group, it is not surprising that all participants felt lost, confused, and lacked direction after their experiences. The shame, guilt, and self-blame left them with such heavy burdens to carry, which ultimately drove them into seclusion. For all the men in the current study it was the beginning of finding and redefining themselves along the way into adulthood.

Anger and hurt - a kind of death/an empty shell

Anger and hurt

Related to shame, guilt, and a lost self were feelings of extreme and uncontrollable anger that surfaced at any given time without warning. Participants described it as an almost involuntary reaction to situations they interpreted as hostile or potentially threatening. The anger served as a purpose in the sense of self-protection, but it was also an outlet of built up pain and emotions they could not express in any other way:

> *Brian:* The anger comes from being that child. Not being able to talk or express the anger. The thought of the hurt and the pain of

> what he's done....and to my brothers and sisters....a lot of it is just what he's done. All that fear and that shame and helplessness that I've had to carry just boiled to one point I think. A lot of it is frustration of not being able to say anything as a child. Being an adult and having a voice it's probably made the anger more dominant. A lot of the anger is just for the hurt. All the hurt and the pain of what that one particular person has done. You try not to bring it out in other ways, but unfortunately anger does come out and when you're angry you're like that, cos you have so much of those feelings and emotions under it, anyone of them gets triggered and it's just an instance of reaction. Plus it could be a defence mechanism; protects yourself from things. I find when I get angry it's not to show fear it's more I didn't know how to express it in any other way or voice. It did always come out in anger. From child to teenage through my twenties into my thirties.
>
> *Ben:* I just woke up one morning and I was as angry as fuck anybody. My anger took over. Anybody come near me I'll grab a knife, whatever I could find, and that's how it all stopped. It was because as soon as anybody came near me or within a very short distance to me I would be reaching for chairs and all sorts, you know.

Brian and Ben both described their anger as something they could not control and did not even fully understand. However, it was the only way they could express their fear and agony as much as it served as a coping and defence mechanism. Anger became Ben and Brian's voice, because they felt they could not talk about it to anyone. For all men in the current study anger dominated a big part of their upbringing and carried into adulthood on their journey to find themselves. Anger is regarded as a negative, but common, emotional response to a trauma experience, which has been well documented in the literature about CSA (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Dorais, 2002; Goodyear-Brown et. al., 2011; Rowan, 2006). According to Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2012) aggression is also in the cultural blueprint of hegemonic masculinity, which becomes a normalised gendered response to hostile situations. The men in the current study grew up in a generation in which masculinity was seen as being tough, stoic, and fearless. The expression of anger and violence was therefore an extended and accepted physical expression of gendered masculine norms. As emphasised by Mc an Ghaill and Haywood (2012) the balance lies in how much is too much or not enough for it to be seen as weakness. It is not surprising that men growing up within a model of hegemonic masculinity struggle to monitor their aggressive responses in situations

that trigger emotions connected to their CSA experience. Cultural expectations of what constitutes to be a real man would have condemned heartfelt reactions that could be interpreted as weakness such as expressed fear, panic, or even tears (Kia-Keating et al., 2005). One participant described how his anger took on nearly supernatural strengths, which on reflection he found hard to grasp himself:

> *Kevin:* Ahm, yeah it's all good. Now that they know, cause there was a lot of violence between me and my brothers. I remember my younger brother come up to me and going at me, going at me, and I said to him: 'bro, you need to get the fuck out of my face or you're gonna get hurt', and he just kept coming at me and coming at me. I just spun around one day and I just pushed him and no kidding he went flying backwards, legs up in the air, so he was actually airborne, flying backwards, hit the fridge, and slipped down onto the floor. I mean that was the sort of strength that I had, and it was all adrenalin. So ahm, yeah it's scary. I actually scare myself now when I think about it.

Kevin did not recognise himself in such violent behaviour. His reactions were more like reflexes initiated by the perception of threat. Kevin had no intention to physically hurt his brother. However, the need to be in control of the situation and to protect himself triggered enough adrenalin for him to act on his overpowering emotions. The underlying enormousness of Kevin's feelings surfaced in the form of unknown physical strength. It was also a common thread, however, that although aggression may have been an acceptable male response, the men in this study did not feel entirely comfortable with it. There was an implicit feeling that their behaviour was not what it should be. That their responses to situations may be incorrect, and that their reactions stemmed from underlying feelings they did not fully understand. Nevertheless, many looked for explanations and tried to control their anger as they grew older. Steve explained:

> *Steve:* yeah, yeah, yeah, I was angry, I had so much anger in me because of the abuse. I rebelled and then what happened I wanted to fight better, so I started kick boxing, cos it wasn't every fight I used to win. Sometimes I'd get beaten up myself. So, thought better sort something out and started kick boxing, but then it taught me self-discipline and keep my hands to myself, which is cool. So, I was actually wrapped about that, yeah.

Steve found an outlet through kick boxing, which helped him channel his anger as well as it taught him something crucial about himself. He did not want to be

defined by his aggression and found pride and strength by being able to control his actions. This was likely an important aspect of gaining back some self-respect. The anger participants felt was for many an expression of their confused feelings within themselves. They lived with conscious and subconscious memories of traumatic events they tried to understand, but could not put in any context. Kevin, for example, described how anger developed with time after his CSA. Initially he was mainly filled with fear and uncertainty about what it all meant and what he was supposed to do:

> *Kevin:* After the abuse I became very withdrawn, and very angry. Anger took a while to come. I think to start with I was very scared, very unsure. I didn't know where to go. I didn't know what to do, I didn't know.

Similarly, Dean desperately tried to make sense of what had happened to him as he hoped his feelings of being lost, confused, and hurt would ease once he could understand it:

> *Dean:* Ahm,....yeah, it was just why me, you know. That was the biggest thing for me why did they do it to me? Is it the way I looked at them? What did I do? I used to analyse, analyse, analyse. Trying to figure out....to me it was like if I could make sense of it, then it would be ok. It would go away.

Unfortunately these experiences never made any more sense and systematically decreased Dean's feelings of self-worth as well as it drove him deeper and further into anguish and isolation. He developed a sense of being abandoned as much as he lost his grounding within himself. For some participants CSA was particularly confusing as sexuality was not spoken about at home. Due to their religious background sexual interaction with two males was clearly framed as something forbidden and abnormal. Others, like Dean, simply did not know how to make sense of their experiences apart from the fact that they knew it was wrong. It left these boys confused about their environment, about themselves, and their sexuality. Kevin said:

> *Kevin:* You look at it a bit differently. Our anatomies are different obviously, so you don't necessarily have to be aroused to have sex as a woman. As a guy we do. So when you get an erection and it's a guy abusing you that becomes a very big conflict, because mentally you're associating your erection with arousal.

As described by Kia-Keating et al. (2005) it is an important aspect for boys to cultivate their personal sexual identity in regards to their overall well-being. At the same time cultural norms place expectations on men on how their maleness should be expressed (Kia-Keating et al., 2005). Within hegemonic masculinity, manhood is symbolised by everything that is not feminine. This includes rational instead of emotional behaviour, being tough, dominant, and overly interested in sex (Kia-Keating et al., 2005; Stern, Cooper, & Greenbaum, 2015). All participants in the current study grew up with Western ideologies of heterosexual values and a sense of homophobia. Being sexually abused by an older male was, therefore, a huge challenge for these boys and their innate feeling of masculinity. The conflict with their sexual identity was made worse by the fact that their bodies reacted to the sexual abuse in ways they connected with arousal. Even though they did not enjoy the sexual interaction with another male, they still had an erection, which made them question their whole masculinity. Kevin further explained:

> *Kevin:* Yeah; and even though there wasn't any [desire] you still got an erection, so...ahm...that really spits it out 'hang on, why am I getting a hard on? This isn't something I want. This isn't something that I was after, or sought, but I'm still getting an erection; what's going on?' So it creates this big false belief in your head that you're, you're actually...and then the gay community seem to focus in on it: You'd be amazed how many men are gay: 'It's because you're gay, man.'

Experiencing bodily reactions that symbolise elements of pleasure and the fact that the sexual encounter was involuntary and overall dreadful had a huge impact on Kevin and the other boys. One aspect they could not properly absorb was certainly the confusion about what happened within their bodies and the incongruent associated emotions. Spiering and Everaerd (2007) note that arousal alone does not make a sexual experience rewarding, pleasant or even sexual as such. It depends on the person's schema about sexuality that associates arousal with a sexual experience. All but one man in the current study were heterosexual and their sexual schema therefore associated with someone of the other sex. The disparity between their bodily arousal and their emotions raised therefore a lot of questions in regards to future sexual interactions with women. For Tom it raised fears of intimacy with a woman:

> *Tom:* Ahm, I guess what I mean is that....confusion in the sense....I was confused sexually because, like in my era we were told, you know, to become sexually active you become sexually active with a woman, which wasn't the case. It confused me in the sense that, ah, although I knew I wasn't homosexual I experienced homosexuality and the experiences that I had were not enjoyable experiences. They...I guess that built a big wall up. I remember thinking 'oh how bad is it gonna be when I get together with a woman?'

Nevertheless, for all heterosexual participants the early confusion about their sexual identity turned into a curiosity and exaggerated desire to have sex with women. However, while the desire was perceived as a natural urge, their high sex drive was in many ways associated with the need to redefine who they were as a man. Kevin said he had to continuously demonstrate to himself that he was not homosexual by sleeping with a lot of women:

> *Kevin:* I tried to have relationships. I was very sexually active, and a lot of that was about me trying to validate my sexuality, too. I felt like I had to prove myself.

Kevin's increased libido and early risky sexual behaviour is a common theme in the literature exploring CSA (Homma et al., 2012; Krahé & Berger, 2017; Senn et al., 2008). It was not the intimacy with women that fed his and others' need to be overly sexually active at an early age. The inner code of being a man and what participants associated with manhood seemed to require a constant expression of either fighting other men or having sex with a woman. Steve described:

> *Steve:* I feel I used to go out and, excuse me French, used to go out for a fight or fuck. Cos I had such a big sexual appetite, sexual drive, that I'd always end up in fights. Cos I was angry. I was angry that I had all this confusion in me.

Steve's sexual confusion was not only overly troubling for him; it also preoccupied his mind with sex. At the same time his inner conflicts expressed itself in aggression and the only way to release some tension was to engage in physical fights. There was no overt intent to hurt women and many participants voiced their regret about their behaviours towards girlfriends or casual partners. It was, however, as if these young men tried to regain some of the control they perceived as lost due to the sexual abuse they experienced early on in life. Being

in charge of their sexuality gave them a sense of inner strength and control over their own body even though they felt emotionally empty.

Leo described that he did not really see women as true human beings, because he did not see himself as a human being after what had happened to him. He further explained:

> *Leo:* Yeah I had no centre. I had been ripped from me. Everything else was just reaction and get by. There was no quiet time inside myself. That had all gone, you know.

Leo's words show that the impact of the sexual abuse reached much deeper into these young men's psyche than could be judged by their overt behaviours.

A kind of death - an empty shell

For all the participants in this study, CSA was not only life changing: metaphorically, it was life ending. Their perpetrators took advantage of their vulnerability at the time and invaded their innocent bodies in the most hurtful way possible. However, their actions went well beyond the physical and destroyed core beliefs and values alongside whole personalities. While all these boys tried to build a life for themselves, it was as if someone had switched off the light for good. The men could not connect with themselves anymore after their traumatic experiences and appeared to wonder around as empty shells of themselves. Kevin described:

> *Kevin:* Ahm, again it's when you believe you're a fuck up, you're a mistake, it's a dark place walking along in that abuse, it's a very dark place. You just don't give a shit. There's no purpose for life. You're not just having your, ahm, you know, your sexuality or you know, no one's just taken your innocence. They're taking your whole existence. It's almost like an emotional and spiritual death that occurs that inside of a person when you're abused. It's so much more deeper and more profound than I think you can take it for. It completely robbed me of my whole existence, my whole universe. You're in no man's land. So, all there is is anger and aggression. These are the only things you're left with.

Kevin emphasised how his CSA experience had left him with only a hollow existence. It destroyed not only his core values and beliefs; it took his sense of being and his compass in life and left him without any desire to move forward. Everything he used to care about lost significance to the extent that he did not

even care about himself. Instead, he perceived himself as defective, tarnished, and useless. The way in which Kevin explained this experience portrayed a belief that the damage went beyond the mere emotional into a deeper layer that could be called the soul. It raises the question of what people associate with their existence. What makes a person an individual being full of zest for life and personal interest? According to Aristotle (as cited in Sanderson, 2007) it is the soul that constitutes the essence or law of life within living things. Further, he defines living things by their ability to develop and perish, nourish themselves, think, and feel sensations (Aristotle as cited in Sanderson, 2007). It could therefore be interpreted that the human soul symbolises an individual's being. I do not intend to get too philosophical about this topic, but philosophers have debated the soul and its existence for a long time. Be it religious beliefs or philosophical arguments, the soul is usually seen as an entity that is fully interdependent with a body. It is therefore believed that only the intertwined nature of body and soul make each individual a person (Sanderson, 2007; Schorn, 2013; Teske & of Auvergne, 2000). In this sense, the men in the current study described their sexual abuse experiences as soul destroying and it robbed them of their enthusiasm for life. Kevin explained:

> *Kevin:* Everything. You're whole...they rob your person. It's almost like the person that you were gets pulled out and you're left with this empty shell that's gotta be filled up again, and the only thing that's there is bitterness and anger. I used to think of myself as a zombie where I was neither living nor dead. I was, I didn't feel anything, I didn't care, I was just, you know, there was nothing good about who I was. You know what I mean? There wasn't anything good in who I was.

According to Kevin's words there was no real purpose anymore as the trauma left him only with an empty shell, without substance. He said what was left of him after the sexual abuse was merely a zombie; he was not dead but neither was he alive. This symbolises a person who is nothing more than a moving corpse without a will, personal control, or a soul. Kevin's body was functioning in the world, but his personality was not there anymore. As Ben explained, life became colourless and shapeless and the only person he relied on was himself:

> *Ben:* It's just an empty life. You feel empty or you feel dark on the inside. That's it, you know. You're looking at life as instead of a beautiful green tree it's...ahm...black and white; outline. That's it.

> Or ahm, you go, when I went into competition fights, I didn't see the person as a person. What I saw them was a demon shaped figure. That was it. And there's no way that demon was gonna get to me, so I made sure I got the better of the demon, you know.

It is not difficult to imagine how lonely one would be with such attitudes and outlooks for life. CSA appears to be so much more than a physical and emotional violation of an innocent young boy. Previous research has uncovered some of the devastating immediate and long term effects of CSA, including mental and physical health problems. However, for many the aftermath becomes much more than a healing process from a fragile mental or physical state (Dube et al., 2005; Kea-Keating et al., 2005; O'Leary et al., 2017) . Metaphorically, the experience of CSA was fatal for the participants in this study. The person they once were did not exist anymore after the sexual abuse and could not even be traced. It left them only with a confused, angry, but empty shell they somehow had to refill in order to find a way and place to live in the future. Kevin described that it was a process of redefining oneself. Trying to find the person who got lost in the abuse was pointless as there was no going back. Kevin had to reconstruct himself in order to find purpose, because the boy he used to be before the sexual abuse was gone forever:

> *Kevin:* You never get that person back again. That twelve year old boy prior to being abused, me being abused, has never come back and never will. He's dead. He died when I was abused. The person that I am now is from me rebuilding myself, and finding who am I, making myself again to who I am now as a person, as a man, as a husband, as a father. All those things I had to remake myself. So in the sense when you're abused, I always said when you're abused you may as well been murdered, because that person that was there will never ever be back again. You'll never see them back again. So it's not just a physical event, it's not just an emotional trauma, it is a life changing experience. It's a life ending experience.

Kevin's comparison to a life ending experience emphasises how violent, powerful, and overwhelming CSA can be for boys. Some of the physical and emotional pain can be possibly healed over time. However, sexual abuse seems to have more profound consequences in that it requires men to find and redefine who they are as a man and as a person.

Rebuilding the void

Having to rebuild a new personality was a very difficult task for the men in this study as they were unable to make sense of their childhood traumas. Many tried to create a new identity by engaging in relationships with women and new experiences including having children. However, fatherhood placed new challenges on the men and some of the barriers seemed nearly impossible to overcome. Tom described:

> *Tom:* I had probably the first seven, eight months of my daughter's life there was things that I should have enjoyed as a father that I struggled with emotionally, psychologically. Even though she's a girl and I'm a boy, the feelings were the same. I got a nephew that runs around now, that I battle with. Like you know, I just always tell him 'put pants on'.

Tom could not handle the thought of doing something wrong with his daughter. Touching her in this vulnerable stage of life brought up too many memories of his personal violation. It paralysed him in his natural ability to love and care for her without interference of his own memories and burdens. Seeing a little boy naked instead of a girl made such matters only worse. As discussed by Price-Robertson (2012), one of the harmful myths for male survivors of CSA is that they naturally become sexual abusers of children themselves. However, while such discourse is wide-spread, claims are often not backed up by accurate statistics. In reality it is unlikely that men's experiences of CSA turn the majority into perpetrators themselves (Price-Robertson, 2012). What the common perception within society does, however, is create further harm for male survivors of sexual abuse as described by Tom and Kevin:

> *Kevin:* But I was terrified when I had kids. That's another thing I had to get through, because you're get told, oh as, cause you've been abused 95 % go on to abuse. Ahm, so you get paranoid about that! 'I don't wanna be one of them', you know, that I'm not gonna abuse my kids. I mean I know there is no way that I was ever gonna abuse my kids.

Similar to Price-Robertson's (2012) study, many men in the current study feared they might somehow harm their children by engaging in activities that seem natural for most fathers:

> *Tom:* Nappy changing for me initially was a real problem. I did it because it needed doing. Like I said, a daughter wasn't as bad. I've never ever changed my nephew's nappies, ever. And I've got two nieces, my sister has got two girls, so I...gratefully, so far it's not something I had to encounter, cos I don't know how I'd deal with it. In saying that we've got a meeting with the fertility clinic in a couple of day's time, cos my partner wants to try for one more and she's had problems, so I could end up with a son and that would be cool, I'd like a son, but it's highly likely that would open up another box for me. Another box that I have to come out and work through. So, as much as it would be neat it definitely keeps the cogs in the head turning over time.

On one hand the men said that they could never harm their children. At the same time they could not totally shake off the commonly held belief that abused men turn into abusers. Despite their stated confidence, they were left with a high level of anxiety in regards to their interaction with children, but at the same time being worried about missing out on emotional connections:.

> *Tom:* Bathing my daughter was..., it took me major work with my counsellor to work through that, you know. Yeah and if it's a son I don't know how I'd cope, you know, and I wouldn't want that emotional detachment from the early time to be manifested into something later. It wouldn't be the case that I didn't love him. I would be a case of not knowing how to relate to him.

Tom was burdened with angst that a son could bring up too many emotional challenges that he would not be able to connect with him. His and others' stories showed that raising children was therefore another trigger for their own trauma, which has also been reported in other studies (Price-Robertson, 2012). It was another barrier these fathers had to work through in counselling and within themselves in order to give their children the care they deserved. However, for all the fathers in this study, aspects of their trauma resurfaced along the way, which made safety for their own children a paramount priority. Kevin explained how putting in place behavioural rules as well as boundaries became an essential tool to provide his perception of safety and protection for his children:

> *Kevin:* So, I'm starting to look at my son now.... It's quite weird, cause he's got such a bright future ahead of him. He's very confident, he's self-assured, he's very strongly opinionated, and at the same time he's so innocent about what life is like out there. And I've protected him from it. They would never gonna experience

> what I did, never, and so they never have. Have they missed out on stuff in life? No, they haven't. They've experienced a very full childhood, a very good childhood, but without...and I've always been really there to make sure they can talk to me about stuff. Yeah, I'm always there for them...I put my boundaries in, and those boundaries are there, and the kids know those rules apply to everyone that comes into my home, not just for me. That gives them safety, gives them security.

The three discussed subthemes of anger, a lost self, and the attempt to refill the void showcased the lonely and isolated place men find themselves in after CSA. Their sexual trauma in childhood stripped them from the person they were and turned them into confused and very angry young men. It seemed what was left was a huge black hole within each man's soul without much hope to find some light at the end of the tunnel. All of the participants in the current study developed a survival instinct rather than a hunger for life, which made them feel more or less empty. It took effort and time to rebuild some sort of new identity for themselves and many found joy and new hope in becoming fathers. However, as natural as fatherhood might be for most men, it came with a whole new level of fears and worries for the men with a CSA history. Children certainly filled up some of the empty shell they had been left with. Nevertheless, the overarching theme shows how devastating and long lasting the aftermath of CSA experiences can be for men.

Escaping the pain

Violence

As touched on before in the context of anger, violence featured in all participants' lives as a function of self-protection and building up self-esteem. While for some of the men their violent behaviour was more of an involuntary reaction, others went out looking for physical fights or started fights in order to somehow feel better. Previous research has reported that child maltreatment such as sexual abuse has strong links to physical fighting and other risk behaviours later on (Carlson, Oshri, & Kwon, 2015; Smith, Ireland, & Thornberry, 2005). For the men in the current study fighting became an outlet for their built up negative emotions as well as it signified a statement of strength and masculinity:

> *Tom:*...Like violence, you know, is a common theme in a lot of us. Violence was the first draw card and you put the wall up and you put the mask on, so weren't approached.
>
> *Leo:* I just loved to fight. I don't really know I just....ahm...I guess I wanted to be somebody, make a name for myself and stuff, cause of the gangster mentality. I never joined a gang or anything, you know, but I just liked fighting. That's all I can say. It wasn't just from pure anger, I mean, I grew up where you walked down of your driveway there is a good chance you're gonna get attacked, you know. It wasn't all sexual abuse, but the sexual abuse certainly made me mean.

For both Tom and Leo physical fighting was a way to let go of tension that was constantly bubbling on the surface. However, violence was also a tool for the men. The wall Tom put up could be interpreted as a safety shield behind which he could hide his fear, shame, guilt, and emotional imbalance. Violence therefore provided him with a convenient blanket from behind to project masculinity without exposing some of his vulnerabilities. Leo said that he simply liked to get into physical fights, but there is still a message between the lines, which says 'let me be someone else'. His desire to be someone else, someone powerful who is known and respected appealed to him as it would have given him some of the control back that he lost. It would have been an escape from his pain as much as it would have restored some of his feelings of manhood. Bhana and Mayeza (2016) described how hegemonic views about masculinity translated into physical fighting and bullying amongst school kids in South Africa. These boys grew up with a strong sense of homophobia as role modelled by their families and general society. Using power and control against others who appeared weak was a sign of being a true male and a strategy to divert any links to homosexuality (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016). Participants in the current study grew up with similar norms about masculinity. It is therefore not surprising that apart from the participant who was homosexual, all men expressed quite intense homophobia and a need to be in charge of their own lives. Control has been described in many different shapes and forms as an important aspect of masculinity (Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000; Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Lisak, 1995). Sexual abuse was perceived by all men in this study as an extreme form of powerlessness, which would have affected their strong beliefs about what constitutes manhood. Ben described how important

violence became in his life in order to overcome feelings of powerlessness and regain control over himself:

> *Ben:* Once you get abused all your control over everything, the whole lot, is gone. It's just ripped right away from you. Your day to day living control just gone. Ahm, and by turning violent it stopped the abuse, because I wasn't this little innocent kid anymore, I was a right out little mongrel, ahm....well that little mongrel went right through school right to the end of third form as a very, very violent fellow. Why? Because this was my way of gaining control over my life and making sure nobody was gonna hurt me again.

Being in control and expressing violence and strength served the purpose of safety on a superficial level, but it also fed into the notion of feeling like a male again. Steve said:

> *Steve:* And I think it was the thought of the control was then switched, because then that guy there wouldn't have the control of me, but then being big and being strong and tattoos and that, then I'm in control mate. Fuck you, mate, you're not in control anymore, you know. Yeah, so I went to the gym, I did kick boxing for five years, I did bikes for about five years, and I got quite a bit bigger than what I used to be, and got tats on my arms and my back, you know. It was kind of that image what I wanted to be like when I was in that bubble of being abused, because at the end of the day he, when it was happening, he was in control. I wanted to be in control, you know.

Steve expressed a strong emphasis on the connection between power, strength, and maleness through symbols such as contact sports, bikes, body size, and tattoos. Regaining his sense of being a real man gave him back the control he lost during the sexual abuse and put him on level ground with his perpetrator. He was driven by the need to escape from his pain as much as he needed to be different from the person he was as a boy. He needed to become a stronger, and more powerful version of himself in order to feel he could fight back and be a male again.

Substance use

Unfortunately, many participants in this study began to use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate against the pain they were experiencing, which has been a common theme in other studies investigating CSA (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Dube et al., 2005; O'Leary et al, 2017. The drugs or alcohol helped them escape

from the painful memories, the flashbacks, and the deep seated feelings of shame, guilt, and anger that came with their past experiences. Anything that made them feel better was therefore welcome. Steve and Brian explained:

> *Steve:* I know for a matter of fact I started smoking marijuana because it kind of made me feel better.... it made me...not remember about the past. It made me put it aside, forget it. Not actually feel it, put it aside. Ahm, cos with drugs, you know, people do drugs, the reason why they do drugs is cos you feel happier.
>
> *Brian:* Ah, I pretty much started when I was about 13. Drugs and alcohol was in the family, too; my uncles and stuff, so...my granddad was a drinker, my uncles are drinkers, smokers, into drugs. Ahm a lot of that I did because of memories and thinking, and nightmares and stuff. I just didn't want them. So I tried to cover them, but it doesn't cover them, cos they're still there.

Steve and Brian saw an emotional escape in drugs and alcohol as it gave them a short term release from their agony. However, drugs and alcohol were only a temporary plaster over the deep felt pain and served for some also as a means of functioning:

> *Brian:* Alcohol pretty much brought out my probably tough exterior side, where I could just not be afraid. So, the alcohol brought a bit of that out of me. I didn't have to show that I was this scared person or show that I was confident or it eased me along, but underneath well that wasn't tough. Wasn't tough, but it hides it.

Ben felt stronger and freer under the influence of alcohol as the effects somehow masked the memories and sorrow, and released only his core personality. Within his core self was no fear, anger, or emotional chaos; there was simply life. Brian wanted to be that person who existed below his tormenting thoughts and feelings and seemed to cruise along without effort. Unfortunately it could not last as sobering thoughts brought back the memories, insecurities, and fear. Nevertheless, he always knew this side of himself was there. It is well known that people engage in substance use because they act on the human brain's reward system. The effects of heroin have even been described as experiencing a protracted sexual orgasm (Sadock et al., 2015). Other positive effects of drugs and alcohol have been said to be decreased feelings of anxiety, panic, anger, and depression. Therefore, some people may see it as a form of medicine that helps them to feel stronger and stay

on track (Sadock et al., 2015). Tom used to take methamphetamine and described how it had effects that were nearly beyond human and made him feel unbeatable:

> *Tom:* The meth makes you feel bullet proof. It makes you feel invincible. They wire soldiers on that stuff, you know. I used to drive at a 150 km/h up the Auckland motorway three or four ounces of meth and piss in my seat, well that's enough to go to prison for. 8 to 10, you know. Personalised plate, I still got it at home, and I thought nobody knew what I was doing. I was delusional, I was a fucking idiot. The fellow who sat next to me is the one I cut down three years later. He fucking hung himself because it was too much. At that point in my life is where I feel that I realised what, you know, the sexual abuse was the fuel, it was the fuel to be something else, you know.

Tom further described how he had tried to be someone with power and influence in order to feel safe, in control, and free:

> *Tom:* Drugs, the mask. Putting on a mask. You become...I spent my late teens, my twenties spending to be someone I thought I wanted to be. Someone who was synonymous with dealing drugs or hanging out with misfits or idealising people like Tony Soprano or Al Capone. And you get worse down the track. You look at all the wage you made, the trouble you probably didn't need to find, associations you made. You generated an air of....that's what I wanted to be, someone that wasn't really in the system and I look back now, fuck I'm a Dad, I don't want my daughter around that stuff, so.

Considering all the negative after effects of CSA, the emotional short term benefits of drugs such as alcohol, heroin, and meth, do seem like a tempting escape from the past. For all participants in the current study substance use was a solution to their immediate suffering. The memories of their past and the constantly hidden emotional distress drove them to a breaking point where alcohol and drugs became the needed release. However, being able to let go of the traumatic memories was for some participants more than a function of pain relief. It gave way to the perception of opportunities and strength, which provided hope to be someone different who is not connected to their past.

Self harm, false identities, and suicidal thoughts

Another way of numbing the ongoing emotional pain was by inflicting physical pain through self-harm. Self-injury has been documented as common

coping mechanism for victims of trauma experiences such as sexual abuse (Tangeman & Shelby, 2011). Underlying drivers are said to be difficulties with regulating emotions and the need to avoid reminders of the trauma experience. It is therefore a short-term relief from stress similar to the use of substances (Tangeman & Shelby, 2011). Kevin explained:

> *Kevin:* ....I even taught myself not to feel physical, emotional pain. I actually, I used to self harm, and hurt myself to the point where I was physically numb.... I started off doing things like pinching myself, ahm, you know, just nipple pulling myself, just stupid things. I never got into the cutting side of it, ahm....because pain becomes a friend, if that makes sense. And that's probably the hardest part to let go. Because...the pain is actually like a force field around you. It's where you draw your strength from. It's where you draw physical strength. You know how I said to you just that release of adrenalin? Ahm, it's that pain field around us, and we...and we give it off. I walked down the street and people would come the other way and they'd cross the road.

It is interesting to note that Kevin described pain as a source of strength despite the associated suffering. Self-inflicted harm, therefore, provided comfort of the known and helped tolerating and dealing with uncertainties. It made Kevin alert and ready to defend himself should it be necessary, which he radiated to the outside and kept people at a safe distance. Substance use or self-injury served for these men as a means to avoid reality, because dealing with their CSA experiences appeared too unbearable. It was in many ways an attempt to run away from themselves and become a different person. Colin, however, did not engage in drugs or alcohol in order to escape from his past. Instead he was constantly on the run from himself by taking on false identities:

> *Colin:* Those name callings hurt so much, I'd say I'm running away from that. I don't wanna be like that, so I turn around and go in the opposite direction....Why do you think I had the second identity? Cos I didn't wanna face up to myself. Second identity had bank accounts, passports, driving licenses and everything.

Behaviours such as substance abuse, violence, or taking on a new identity can be interpreted as destructive and harmful. However, for the men in the current study they served the purpose of coping with tremendously painful experiences. Not being able to make sense of what happened combined with existing cultural, religious, or particular family values made this process even harder. Tom

explained how the sexual abuse suddenly stopped, even though the perpetrator still visited the family home. On one hand it was a relief that the abuse had stopped, but on the other life became even more uncertain as the shared intimacy was still present. Silent questions about what it all meant as well as feelings of shame and guilt replaced initial notions of liberation and only fostered ongoing pain and confusion:

> *Tom:* I mean, my co-victim it started for him when he was six, so six, seven, eight, nine. And then I was nine, ten, eleven, twelve, so who was next? Yeah it just stopped and he would appear to visit from time to time, but of course then there's all those mixed messages, because of the sexual connection. That's I guess what I was trying to suppress, because as much as it was wrong, that sexual connection that you had was something that you shared, you know. It was something that....ahm....I mean look at sexual history, it's denounced kings, caused wars, you know, it's something that we do as humans and is very powerful, you know. And you have that connection and I was probably just a toy. But for me it was something....I don't know...special isn't the right word, because I didn't enjoy it, but it was something that was very....what's the word I'm looking for....very intimate, because I never experienced it before. I was curious. Obviously after the fact you become curious, because it's all new.

Coping styles are said to be mechanisms that help individuals to control their emotions, cognitions, and behaviours (Harris et al., 2015). Denying traumatic experiences such as CSA or dissociation have been described as common defence mechanisms (Sadock et al., 2015). When a person dissociates from a particular experience he or she appears to try to avoid or ignore certain memories and replace distressing feelings and memories with pleasant ones (Harris et al., 2015; Sadock et al., 2015). However, Harris et al.'s (2015) findings further suggested that distancing oneself from particular memories can also lead to less recollection of one's childhood in general. Kevin suppressed his first sexual abuse at the age of 12. It took him years to find out that his destructive behaviours, dark emotions, and lack of self-worth stemmed from the event he had tried to ignore for so long:

> *Kevin:* It was only in counselling I discovered 'oh hang on....that happened'. How did I forget that one? But what I realised was, cause I thought I dealt with the eighteen year old through church, so everything was gonna be ok, and I'd be fine now. But I found

> out very quickly all that negative stuff started coming back again and I was like 'where is this coming from?' And it just kept coming back, and I was getting worse, and worse, and worse, and that's I think at that point was when I decided I was a fuck up, because I was a mistake, because I thought I had already dealt with that, but I still had this stuff in my life, and I didn't know why. Because I had already dealt with the eighteen year old, the abuse from that gay guy, but I'd forgotten about the initial one, which was actually my real problem; the initial event. And until you deal with the initial event nothing changes; it just keeps coming back, keeps coming back, keeps coming back.

Valerio (2011) asserted that dissociation of traumatic events is a means of last resort as there does not seem another or better way to cope with the trauma. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily a conscious decision and subconscious feelings might affect a person's personality long term as in Kevin's case:

> *Kevin:* I never intended to try to lock it away, I just did. It changes your whole personality. It changes your person; who you actually physically are as a person.

Kevin's example highlights how important it is that sexual abuse is properly addressed. The suffering in silence or ignoring of the events will suppress the healing process as much as it creates further harm to one's personality, interactions with others, and general well-being.

Unfortunately, as emphasised by Easton et al. (2013), trauma experiences such as CSA often increase the risks for self-harm and suicidality. These authors also reported that living within cultural norms of hegemonic masculinity can further increase suicidal behaviour in men after CSA (Easton et al., 2013). Most participants in the current study battled with suicidal thoughts at one point in their lives as feelings of failure, lack of self-respect, and ongoing emotional distress just seemed unbearable. When I asked Brian what brought him to his darkest places he said:

> *Brian:* Not being able to work, not earning any money, not being able to be a proper father. It felt like I had nobody. No friends. I was sick of living with the pain. Sick of living with memories, just didn't want them; I wanted them gone. I didn't wanna live with them anymore, hate it. Depression and stuff kicked in, and I wasn't able to walk properly, wasn't able to do things properly, just everything.

There was seemingly no hope for Brian of getting better, no hope of ever understanding what had happened and why it seemed to carry on forever. The emotional imbalance turned into physical problems, which only increased his discomfort and feelings of worthlessness. Life became simply unbearable for him. As described earlier, CSA seems to rob a man not only from his innocence in childhood. The effects are so deep reaching that they erase some of the core personality and constantly eat away at any remaining zest for life. Kevin described:

> *Kevin:* Well, to me it was 'I need to stop, I need to stop the suffering, I need to stop this life...it's no good', so I had no other option. There was no other choice for me. I couldn't see any other option.

Similar with Brian, Kevin felt he had reached a dead end from which there was no escape or chance to find a detour. CSA and its aftermath brought these men to a point from which they could not even imagine to return. They had nothing left to give, nothing left to try, and nothing left worth living for. According to Easton et al.'s (2013) study, severity, frequency, and involved violence were potential predictors of a higher number of suicide attempts. Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2012) highlighted the significant influence of culturally gendered norms in the suicidal behaviour of adolescent boys. Behaviours and understanding of death were both strongly linked to the cultural beliefs about manhood (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2012). It appears that the stronger an individual adopts the norms of hegemonic masculinity, the higher are the risks of suicidal behaviours after CSA experiences (Easton et al., 2013). Nevertheless, more research is needed in these areas. Overall, it appears that multiple factors play interrelated roles in driving people to the point in which they want to end their lives in order to escape from their agony. As Brian further explained:

> *Brian:* So that was how I ended up in counselling about five years ago. Was because I didn't know what was going on. Attempted suicide, overdose, hanging, had a shotgun in my mouth at 15, so suicide attempts are there, but for some reason I don't think I'm allowed to go [laughs]. Somebody wants me here in this world for a reason.

Brian's attempts to end his life were unsuccessful, which led him to believe that there might be a good reason for him to live. One such good reason for living

Brian was able to identify was the existence of his children. For Brian and others across this sample of participants, children acted as one of the protective factors against suicide. Despite their feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness, their children took precedence and became a reason to carry on:

> *Steve:* well I've actually thought about it [suicide] a few times. But at the end of the day I stayed strong and especially with my kids, mate, I would never do it. The reason I don't do it are my kids, because I grew up without my parents when I was young and I never want my kids to go through that.

No matter how much participants tried to ignore what had happened in their childhood, there was no real break from reality. The emotional and physical pain the men in this study suffered from was nothing a stern get-over-it attitude, overt anger and violence, or ignorance could fix. For many, drowning in substance use was the only short term pain relief and assistance in daily functioning. The innate desire to be or become someone else was very strong and influenced decisions to the point of taking on false identities. Nevertheless, underneath it all, for a long time, nothing lifted these men from their darkness and empty shells. Destructive behaviours including suicide attempts were therefore a common theme while the inner cry to escape from the pain remained.

Damage boils over

Haunting memories and emotional imbalance

One of the tragedies of sexual abuse as a child is that the after-effects seem to be ongoing. The emotional and physical pain, the confusion and anger, the struggle to understand what was going on; all of that would be traumatising enough. However, the memories and flashbacks of their childhood experiences was haunting all the men in this study to this day. For some it may be smells that send them back to their childhood, for others it may be particular locations or simply sleeping in the dark as described by Dean:

> *Dean:* I still find it traumatising, and the thought of that I just resort back to that...to a little bloody eight year old, yeah, eight, nine year old. I can't even sleep with the light off. I've gotta have the lamp on all night, you know, because I'd be asleep and I'd be abused, but it'd be pitch black.... So, I don't know how I deal with that. I don't know if I will ever deal with that. When I once went to sleep without lights I woke up screaming. Screaming, I was just freaking

> out. So I just had to calm myself down....where I am. It took me a few minutes to realise where I was. I looked at my hands and I thought 'I'm all grown up now', you know, because I still felt like a child. Yeah so it's hard for me.

It would be difficult for most adults to imagine that the darkness of the night would become a vehicle for journey back to childhood. However, for Dean such experiences are very real. Darkness became a perceptual proxy for sexual abuse, instantly triggering fear responses such as panic and screaming. While Dean's adult mind knows that he is safe now, his childhood trauma took over whenever he was put in a triggering situation. Similarly Ben explained:

> *Ben:* I still do (having flashbacks). Not as bad now, but yeah I still do. I get hot and cold sweats with it. I shake or....simple things...I could be sitting down, having a cup of coffee in here talking to you and next thing all of a sudden I see you, I just see what had happened twenty years ago, you know. And then I'd go, put the cup down and I just start shaking and everything. It just happens.

These findings confirm what other researchers reported in terms of haunting memories and flashbacks in adulthood. In Willis et al.'s (2014) study, for example, men had very strong emotional reactions to sensory stimuli such as smells or sounds, and were similarly triggered by certain places. It was so bad for many of those men that they often sought relief in alcohol and/or drugs in order to be able to calm themselves (Willis et al., 2014). Memories create emotional and sometimes physical reactions. It is therefore not surprising that an individual would remember, and to some extent relive, traumatic childhood experiences such as CSA throughout life. For the men in the current study the memories created an emotional imbalance, which expressed itself in low mood as much as in anger and physical outbursts:

> *Kevin:* I was in cycles. It was...ahm...and it really just depended on what was happening in life, too. I'd go in cycles of being really upbeat and happy into depression, I guess, real lows, and then from depression I went to anger, and that anger would obviously just release all the stress that was built up there, so that I could be happy, and then I'd start that cycle again. That was a constant cycle I followed right through those years.

Kevin's emotions seemed to follow a cyclic pattern. He was aware of his changing emotions, but still unable to control them. Life was in charge of Kevin instead of

Kevin being the master of his life. No matter what circumstances, it seemed as if his early trauma had subconscious dominance and created underlying tension. It would have been a very uncomfortable time of confusion and unease for Kevin. Similar emotional imbalance was also described by Ben. Due to his destructive lifestyle over the years Ben's physical health had deteriorated quite badly. It was therefore even more important to him to heal his mental and emotional suffering through positive attitudes and efforts in order to regulate his emotions. It became particularly important after he realised how his son perceived him:

> *Ben:* ...my eight year old son drew me a graph, and what it does it goes up....it's like a heartbeat like this [draws a heart monitor line in the air] and he goes 'right Dad' he says 'here's your graph'. I said 'what?' and he drew a line straight through the middle bit. He said: (pointing to the straight line) 'that's what a normal person looks. (then pointing to the jagged line) That's how you fluctuate', and that's an eight year old.... That's how he saw me.

Ben knew that his mood was imbalanced. However, his son's drawing emphasised that others, particularly his children, were aware of it as well and could potentially be affected by it in negative ways. Having his mood swings highlighted on paper was an incentive for Ben to look for help in order to heal emotionally.

Looking for the missing piece

The difficulties the men had as young boys to make sense of their CSA experiences continued into adulthood. They knew what they had had to live through was wrong and they were aware of their confused strong emotions in all areas of their lives. However, it was still impossible to piece together what was broken. Willis et al. (2014) called it lack of insight in regards to men's inability to connect ongoing relationship problems in adult life with the sexual abuse as children. Only through the healing process did they begin to see how CSA affected many areas in their lives including their view of themselves (Willis et al., 2014). The participants in this study had very similar experiences in regards to their emotional problems, relationships with others, and their perception of themselves. The men were driven by their negative emotions and lived within a wall they had built around themselves. It was meant to help with ongoing disappointments and potential pain without really the source of all the emotions.

Kevin described how the abuse started a chain reaction of emotions and behaviours that was difficult to break as it provided a convenient, but painful safety net:

> *Kevin:* I was obviously giving off something of 'just stay the fuck away from me', you know, and people were picking up on it very clearly and they would cross the road. So, ahm, to me it's like an invisible barrier, and it's all the emotion that we've had from the abuse, from the phony in life and it feeds it. So you get the abuse as your initial event and then from that you start failing at school, so you get pain from that. You get teased at school, so you're getting pain from that, and then as you come out into the workforce you can't hold down a job, so you're starting to feel, you get pain from that, and all is adding to the pool. As you go through life you start failing at relationships, all these things happen and it keeps adding to the pool. So that field just gets stronger, and stronger, and stronger.

Kevin's invisible barrier had been built by the 12 year old boy who had suffered sexual abuse. Later on this obstacle increased in strength as he kept feeding his emotional chaos with subconscious ignorance, bitterness, and anger. In a sense, growing into adults only provided Kevin and the others with the size and physical strength to develop tools and strategies in order to avoid getting hurt. However, what they did not realise was that by closing up inside they also kept all the built up pain locked in. Consequently, the childhood memories of the abuse were never dealt with in order to relieve the burden of confusion, and emotional turmoil. In situations where the men felt threatened or an emotional memory was triggered they lost control and reacted accordingly:

> *Kevin:* If people looked at me funny I would smash them over, ahm, had a man strength, like there was a switch in me, and every time I felt threatened or I thought someone was looking at me the wrong way, you know like to abuse me or anything, I would, I would just flip that switch, and all this adrenalin would just flow, free flow into my body, and I was super strong. I could pick guys up my size and just throw them through windows and all sorts of stuff. It was just raw adrenalin.

Kevin's reactions were more like reflexes triggered by memories he was not fully aware of. His fight or flight instinct took over the minute he felt the need to defend himself and it came in full force, which he could not fully understand or explain. It was as if the boyhood experiences channelled extra energy into his

adult persona and created twice the strength of a normal adult man. As adults the men were still looking for answers and fair and decent treatment. Authority figures such as employers, medical doctors, school principals, or police were therefore often perceived as a figure of power and a potential threat. It became very important for the men that everyone treated them with respect. Anything less would bring these men right back to their childhood where they felt vulnerable, powerless, and not in charge of what was happening. Brian described an incident with his employer:

> *Brian:* I was working on this truck, had a bit of a laugh and blablabla, I was nearly finished with it when he'd come back. I had only a couple of things to do. So he'd come back and he was a totally different person than before he left and I was like 'what the hell has just' that bloke his whole attitude just changed and he'd become this angry guy. What the hell is going on here 'oh that thing's still on the hoist' eh, but you just said that we don't have anything coming in this afternoon and this guy's not picking it up till probably close to five and it was only like two o'clock or something. What the hell and then he started kind of staring at me and I was like, I had a tear drop out of my eye and I knew at that point I'm getting angry and something's gonna fly. I had my hand on the hammer and I just grabbed it and I was like, my eyes had changed, my whole posture had changed, I was like 'if you say one more word this hammer is gonna come flying straight at your head', but I just managed to try to control myself and just put the hammer down and I just looked at him and went 'you can go and get stuffed', you know, bugger you. You're gonna be like that I don't have to put up with this shit. So, he got a little bit grumpy, I finished the job off, got the truck done, put it off the hoist, then went and put my tool boxes in my car. And he was looking at me like 'what are you doing?' 'Well do you think I'm gonna stay here after you just did that? I don't have to put up with that shit, man.' So he was...this was like on a Wednesday I think it was, 'can you stay til the end of the week?' And I went: 'Nah, I'm out of here, bro, see you later.' So I just took off, and that was the kind of shit that I had been taking from some bosses. So that's what made it hard that male figure role that looked down on you and thinks that 'I'm this superior person and you gotta bow down to me' kind of thing.

Brian's reactions to his employer's bad mood or grumpy behaviour was not one from a reasonable adult. What came to the surface were feelings of being invisible, disrespected, and uncared for, which he experienced for many years growing up. In time Brian seemed to learn to resist his immediate emotional

response by simply walking away and sending a signal of strength and control. CSA seems to freeze hurt young minds in time as they often do not get the opportunity to speak up right away and get the help and support they need. For men growing up with traditional norms of masculinity it becomes additionally difficult to express their emotions and further reinforces the invisible personal security wall (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Kia-Keating et al., 2005; Willis et al, 2014). However, the vulnerability may be locked in, but as many participants described, it surfaces when situations become too triggering or intimidating. Ben explained such a situation within the school context, in which he was faced with dealing with authority figures:

> *Ben:* I go into the school, I'll sit down and talk to the principal and deputy principal together, but any more than those two I've gotta leave the room. My anxiety starts kicking in, I get into a panic attack that changes into rage, rage changes into wrongs.

Ben got to know his limits over the years and is aware of the moment when he needs to leave the room before his emotions escalate. In such instances it appears as if it is not Ben as an adult who is in control of the situation. It is the mentality of Ben the young boy who had learned to defend himself through the use of violence in order to be safe.

Memories can take people back to treasured days in the past: they can also haunt individuals after traumatic experiences. In the case of CSA, memories appear to take on a particularly strong role in holding survivors hostage to their childhood vulnerabilities, emotions, and behaviours. As the men in this study grew older, their understanding of the past events did not naturally become clearer. The confusion and pain lived on even though they tried to lock it away. As a consequence, all participants struggled with their emotional balance, which not only affected their mood, but also their behaviours and lives in general. Therefore, while they tried their best to navigate the world as adults, it was the emotions from the damage they experienced as children that boiled over when situations appeared overwhelming.

Mistrust - a place of safety

Difficulties with authority

Trusting people became a real problem for the participants in this study. The sexual abuse experiences at a very young age left them with feelings of being

alone in a world where others try to control or take advantage of them. The feelings of mistrust were particularly strong against any authority figures such as employers, people in uniform, or even doctors. Engagements with people were therefore driven by a developed survival instinct and a hyper alertness towards anyone, who could be a threat to their own or their children's safety:

> *Kevin:* So, anytime, ahm, anyone in authority becomes a target, because you had someone opposing the authority on you when you're abused. So police now become a target; anybody that's in authority. Teachers, parents, anybody who tries to claim authority over you becomes a target.

Any person in power seemed to become a representation of their perpetrator. However, even more importantly, the men seemed to have a real need to stand up to any perceived authority in order to compensate for the lack of power and control they experienced as children. As Kevin said "anyone in authority becomes a target", which emphasises not only a fight back position, but more so a stance of attack. CSA experiences seem to instil in survivors not only a need to fight for their rights and safety; there appears to be a strong desire to retaliate on behalf of their inner vulnerable child, who seeks revenge. Similarly, Brian described how he tried to tell some of his employers about his abuse history, because it could help them understand some of his difficulties around interpersonal relationships. It was a way of reaching out for support and trying to handle potentially triggering situations as good as possible. However, underlying was an expressed need to be treated respectfully and equally without being looked down on. For Brian and the other participants in this study CSA left them stripped of their personalities to an extent that made them feel not even human. Negative reactions to their attempts to open up and become an accepted part of society had profound effects on their already low self-esteem. Therefore, when people with influence appeared unable to cope with realities such as male sexual abuse it isolated the men further and fostered feelings of mistrust and an aversion towards authority. Brian explained:

> *Brian:* Like the authority will change, or they don't wanna know. They just want you there as a worker and don't really want to understand the problems that you're actually dealing with in terms of: 'we don't really wanna know, because we just want you here as a worker. We don't need to know about that stuff'. But in actual fact I think they do, because if a person's gone through that they need support around them, and if a boss can't do it, because you got that

> male dominant side of it, and you kind of feel like they are carrying you down here, so it makes it really difficult for the employer to actually try and engage with you; to try and help you out, because they don't know how.

Brian said that his employer just wanted him as a "worker" without knowing more personal details about him. The worker can be also interpreted as the non-human, who does not need to be respected. Similarly, Brian admits his own interpersonal difficulties by saying that the employer would not know how to engage with him without knowing some of his past. Superficially it might be a plea to develop better relationships. What he really asked for, however, was to be understood, accepted, and supported in order to feel like a respected employee and member of society. Being treated respectfully by others is often seen as a basic human right (Nickel, 1982). CSA experiences represent anything but what most people in Western cultures understand by respectful treatment of humans and adherence to basic human rights. For these men their sexual abuse was the most degrading experience possible including all its repercussions. These feelings of not being valued as an equal member of society started in childhood and carried into adulthood. As children they were not able to interpret the events properly, but they instinctively knew they were not treated the way they should have been. As no one came to help, they developed a strong sense of self-reliance. Therefore, as adults in situations where they felt unfairly treated they switched into survival and self-reliance mode without thinking of the consequences:

> *Colin:* My employer wouldn't give me the time off work when I needed it. So, I got very disgruntled. He treated me like a piece of crap, so I was thinking oh yeah get abused again; by someone else taking advantage of, so yeah. I was worth more than that, so I just helped myself.

Colin stole money from his employer as he felt abused and unfairly treated. This was not an effective way to regain respect as Colin got caught and had to deal with the consequences including paying the money back. Nevertheless, Colin's quote symbolises what many participants in this study felt in many circumstances and interactions with employers, police, or other people in power. The lack of received respect and care during childhood instilled in those men a need to take back control whenever they felt they could lose it. While they could not do

anything about people who let them down as children, as grown up men they would not be in these powerless situations again.

Overprotective fatherhood

Price-Robertson (2012) reported how the men in his study acted out in situations where they felt they had to protect their children. Fatherhood often triggered bad memories for survivors of CSA and influenced interactions with others through overprotective measures in regards to their children (Price-Robertson, 2012). The current study supports these findings. Even if the men knew that their behaviours were unjustified, children's signs of distress brought them back to their own feelings of powerlessness and suffering in the past. Reactions were therefore purely emotional as they felt a strong responsibility to act on behalf of their children:

> *Ben:* After being abused and everything like that I've got this authority problem. Anybody in uniform I don't like, cause that's authority. Ahm, even though, like classic example: couple of weeks ago my six months old was in hospital. I got escorted out of the room; I was gonna punch the doctor out, cause even though I knew he was...the tube had to go down the tummy and things like that, I knew it was all for her own good, she was crying and screaming through it, and the good side just went out the door. That was it, he's hurting my kid, I wanna kill him. So I got escorted out.

Ben's emotions and reactions would be perceived as completely normal in the context of his daughter being harmed by a stranger. In a hospital setting, however, it becomes to be seen as out of control, violent, and inappropriate. It shows that Ben's past is still lingering deep within and it does not take all that much for it to surface. He experienced extensive sexual abuse over several years from multiple perpetrators, male and female. Ben suffers from flashbacks, anxiety, and panic attacks to this day, which puts his behaviours in the hospital in a very different context. The crying or screaming of a child brings him back to his childhood and triggers the fight instinct for himself as much as for his baby girl. He is not alone with such experiences. Tom described how his mistrust towards others showed when he was supposed to leave his daughter in the care of others. Not being able to control who is in charge of looking after his child made him very uneasy:

> *Tom:* I took my daughter to day care when she first started and I went down there, and I was the crazy Dad who sat there looking at

> everybody looking and the person who owns the day care is a personal friend of my fiancées, you know, and she comes up 'oh hi, how are you?' and she said to [partner's name] I look like I'm on guard pretty much. And I said to her: 'what sort of background checks do you do on these people here?' and she said 'oh I don't need to background check them'. She came up with some sort of bullshit, police or something, and I said to her: 'oh that's doing only fuck all. Look at the principle in Northland that just was violating all those boys and he had a police background check.' I said: 'you don't put in much faith in me' and of course my fiancée was pretty embarrassed cos A it's a friend and B I'm probably the only parent in the fucking village who's asked the hard questions, you know.

For Tom and all other participants in this study trusting other people was a big impediment; particularly if they did not know the person. In order to protect his daughter from any potential harm no question was off limits for Tom; no matter how offensive or embarrassing it might have been. Tom's words showed overt determination to keep his child safe from any potential harm. However, underneath appears also sadness about the fact that no one had looked out for him when he was young. For most men in this study such situations always brought to light how much they had been let down during childhood by people they were supposed to trust. Also, Tom's question about background checks was not satisfied by the involvement of the police, because they did not symbolise public safety in Tom's world views.

Feeling let down and personal space

As Leo described it, police represented a part of the childhood trauma associated with the perpetrators' control and the boys' powerlessness. Growing up Leo had no respect for anyone who tried to exercise such power, including police:

> *Leo:* I was just bucked authority the wrong way, you know. Had seven assault charges, I had no respect for authority. It wasn't normal, you know, when police pulled me over said 'can you please give me your details' I'd jump out and just start throwing punches. So obviously I had no respect for them, you know. And I guess yeah there was a part in me that felt why weren't you there. Here you are, you know, chasing me down, putting me into a boys' home and trying to lock me up as much as you can, but you let these two walk, you know.

What reacted from underneath the rebellion were more important layers of anger, pain and disappointment towards people who represented help for the ones in

need. No one was there to help Leo when he really needed it as a boy. No one showed interest and cared about his behaviours enough to dig deeper and find out what was driving it:

> *Leo:* Yeah nah I wish I got a bit of help. Look I remember my parents took me to a psychologist when I was about 13. I got one visit and just told me I drank too much.

Leo's example shows how quick even health professionals were in handing out negative labels and judgement without adhering to their safety responsibilities and code of ethics (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012). Many of the men in this study experienced being labelled in negative ways for their behaviours that were only masking pain. Sadly, it is very common that children and adolescents rebel and act out in environments such as school in the hope someone might care enough to investigate why (Hunter, 2011). It is therefore even more devastating if no one does. Hence, it is not surprising, that these boys grew up with a schema of being alone in a world they felt they had no place in. Mistrusting others became the modus operandi for the men in the current study as it provided a place of safety. At the same time it fostered feelings of anger towards loved ones or authority figures, who were supposed to protect them and care:

> *Dean:* I just felt that for my whole life no one gave a shit. No one gave a shit about me, you know. And I blame my mother for a lot of it, I blame my mother for a lot of it, cos one of my abusers was supposed to be looking after me, cos Mum would be out partying. Mum would drop me off to him and that's what he'd do, he abused me. I had a lot anger towards Mum, cos my parents divorced and a lot of anger against Dad, cos Dad should know. I don't know, it's a thought he should have known and he should have been there, but he wasn't. A lot of anger towards my siblings, cos I'm the youngest out of ten, and a lot of them were way older than me. So, I felt they didn't fulfil their part as a sibling and were there, you know.

Leo did not tell his family about the abuse at the time, but as so many others he acted out and eventually ran away. Disclosure is a difficult process with many barriers and connotations I am going to discuss a bit later. However, if the saying '*actions speak louder than words'* has any standing, one would think that all of these boys spoke up loud and clear. All men in this study had an underlying desire to be supported and understood. Instead they were used, overlooked, mistreated, and labelled. Had there been more support along the way for most of these kids,

outcomes could have been different. Kevin explained how reactions are so often misinterpreted without even questioning potentially underlying reasons:

> *Kevin:* But then I had the right supports coming in at the right time. Both my parents were counsellors, so they understand the process I needed to get through. The natural grieving process that we all have to go through. So, I think these are all very important things. I think today we get caught up on the symptoms that we see as opposed to what's actually causing those symptoms. To every action was a reaction. For me to become unstable there has to have been something that made me unstable, you know what I mean?

Receiving the right support was a key factor in Kevin's recovery and changed his life. The connection between social support and positive health outcomes is well documented (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Godbout, Brier, Sabourin, & Lussier, 2014; Jonzon & Lindbald, 2004). In Kevin's case the right support was the love and care from his family, which has been associated with emotional support (Berkman et al., 2000). However, support from non-relatives can be just as effective and what it shows is that people do physically and emotionally better within social networks than being isolated (Berkman et al., 2000). Participants learned to distrust others as they felt they could only rely on themselves in order to stay safe. Being filled with mistrust towards anyone after CSA is therefore quite a big predicament and barrier in regards to positive outcomes, but unfortunately a widely experienced burden (O'Leary et al., 2017; Kia-Keating et al., 2010; Willis et al., 2014). Dean described how it is impossible for him to take people at face value:

> *Dean:* When I think about, I still have trust issues, you know. When people talk to me and I don't really know them I think 'what are your real intentions?' And I don't like to be touched, you know, sometimes when my family come close it's too much for me. I just feel too smothered. I basically need my space.

What stands out from Dean's words is certainly an ongoing and general mistrust towards people. However, it also reveals a deep discomfort with being around people. It's the physical space that seems to become very important after CSA experiences, which is not just guided by mistrust, but by physical comfort. Dean is not saying that he does not trust his mother or his siblings, because he does. However, physical closeness seemed to trigger a subconscious level of discomfort

that could lead to flight responses even amongst a group of people where he knows he is safe. Similarly Ben explained:

> *Ben:* I've got a place up in Auckland, a mate's place where I stay and I fix the fishing rods there...he put the word around what day I'm gonna be there, but I always show up the night before...ahm, and I'll set up a rope, probably the width of this room out the front of his garage, which means nobody is allowed within that rope apart from me. That's my safe zone. You cross that line, that's it, you're screwed. You just keep on that side for your own safety. Plus that's my way of protecting my gear as well.

Both men's examples show how important it has become for them to stay in control of their personal space. While Ben might want to protect his property, the fact that people he does not know may come too close to him is much more emphasised. Even after many years after the sexual abuse these men could not let go of the feeling of powerlessness they experienced as boys. CSA clearly left such a prominent and demeaning mark on these men's souls, which only a lifelong shield of protective measures can offset in order to function within communities.

Affected relationships

While physical closeness is somewhat manageable in regards to strangers or lose interpersonal connections, it becomes a massive barrier with intimate relationships. Tom explained:

> *Tom:* I had one relationship that lasted seven years. The rest of it was, I couldn't, I had major physical boundaries to overcome, like, I guess to paint you a visual picture, after sex I had to go and have a shower, I felt dirty. So the woman that you're with thought you're fucked in the head or that she was dirty, or you know, and the backdrop of the environment I've found myself comfortable in was, you know, you don't trust people, you didn't talk to police, you basically become a member of a lower socioeconomic group, because that's where you feel you're supposed to fit.

Even though Tom had sex with a woman, which was within his own accepted schema of sexual relationships, the feeling of being blemished or unclean stayed with him. The sexual act itself brought up stowed away memories and emotions associated with his abuse as a boy, which he could not turn into something acceptable or positive. Sex became something wrong, hidden, and dirty. Even though he felt comfortable enough to engage in sex with a woman, the schema of

sexual interaction had been set in his childhood with only negative connotations. Cognitive psychology tells us that people develop schemas through their experiences, which provide a guide for understanding and navigating the world they live in (Goldstein, 2011). In some way schemas are a sort of memory bank, which feeds stored information to present experiences even though these experiences might be different from the original one (Goldstein, 2011). For Tom and others in this study the schema of sexuality was humiliating, dirty, and forbidden, and even pleasurable sexual experiences could not completely change that. In fact, the stored negative implications and connotations of sex affected not only their sexual expression and drive; it created such a low view of themselves that they did not feel worthy of a descent life. As in Tom's example, his view of himself was below any respectful rank despite a decent job and income. According to his emotional make-up he felt he deserved no more than to belong to the members of society who struggled with economic and social success. Kevin went as far as to say that the critical view of himself fed a type of a vicious circle, which looped itself around anything but positive including interpersonal relations:

> *Kevin:* Yeah. It's almost like that, because you start attracting people that you don't want in your life. Like attracts like...ahm, you know, and you do, you seem to magnetise all these people that come into your life that aren't helpful; they're feeding that destructive process. Whether it's street dealers, alcoholics, homosexual men, they all just seem to gravitate towards you once you've been abused.

Kevin's quote symbolises a strong feeling of hopelessness without a way out of destruction, self-feeding misery, and an involuntary destiny. More so, it taps into an earlier theme of being somehow visually marked after CSA, which provides the entry key into the 'darklands' of the world. What it shows is that sexual abuse in childhood ripped Kevin and all other participants psychologically apart and left them without compass to find back to their true self. Consequently they subconsciously looked out for anything that fit into their negative emotional view of themselves including the connection with people who were detrimental for their progress.

As discussed earlier, the participants in this study felt more like an empty shell after their CSA experiences and appeared to live merely within the shadow of their previous self. One would expect such emotional emptiness to affect

anyone's ability to connect with another person deeply or meaningfully. Unfortunately this was the case for all participants in this study. Their trauma seemed to depersonalise relationships. Even sexual relationships, often thought of as being the most intimate, were devoid of emotional connection. Leo, for example, explained how he became very active sexually with girls at 13 after his first sexual abuse at around 10 years of age:

> *Leo:* Ahm, yeah I would have seen people as objects to be used, you know. It's how I felt I was...and somewhere along the lines I got it mixed up with women as well, you know. They became, in my earlier teens, more of a conquest than you found someone you really wanted to spend time with and that was a friendship.

And Tom described:

> *Tom:* I lost count of the amount of drugs we traded for sex and stuff. It was fucked. I had no emotion. It was fulfilling needs rather than fulfilling emotional contentment. I was like a lonely old bore really, I lived on my own. I had two dogs and they were sort of like my kids. They slept in my bed and when I went away I left the back door open and they slept on the leather couch. That was pretty much the only dependents I had. I don't think I had physically a woman sleep in my bed for a long time. A lot of missed opportunities eh. I met some decent chicks in my time that I was a mongrel to. It has been positive to be able to build a bridge. I guess my own piece of mind, too. For them to know there was nothing they did or...because some of the shit could have fucking scared people for life, eh.

Both men's extracts express a lot of regret in regards to their emotional unavailability. The extracts also speak to the men's desperate attempts to keep their inner pain locked in while still trying to function and satisfy certain needs. In Tom's case, his affection and care for his dogs was as far as he was able to let go of his emotional barriers. The two dogs provided him with enough company in order to not feel completely lonely. At the same time they were emotionally unthreatening enough for Tom to feel safe around them. The connection to animals as a first entry point of emotional interaction after CSA experiences has been mentioned in previous research (Kia-Keating, 2010). In Tom's case his dogs were able to replace the desire of physical and emotional closeness with a woman until he was ready. Maybe they even built the first corner stone for the bridge he was able to build eventually. However, looking back, there is expressed sadness

about the fact that their CSA experiences left the men numb and emotionless for a long time.

For some men who experienced CSA the physical barriers built around sexuality became too big to overcome as described by Dean:

> *Dean:* It's ahm, with me when it comes to sexual, the sexual side, or having a sexual relationship with somebody, I have flashbacks. They can touch me in a certain way and I have flash backs, and for that moment I resort back to that kid again and I'm like 'fuck off, fuck off', and then I realise I'm not back there, it's just me, it's not my partner, and the sperm really puts me off. Yeah, because when I was abused he used to shoot all over me, and the smell of sperm...I mean...you know I've come to realise now sex is actually...it's a normal and it's a healthy thing. It's really healthy to have sex, cos you gotta play yourself out, but you know, because of the injustice that was done to me that's why I have a problem with it. And I still have problems with it now. I mean, I avoid even masturbating, because the feel of sperm and the smell of sperm just puts me off, and because of that I just can't have a relationship.

Dean was able to unpack his own behaviours and emotions associated with sexual intercourse. On a reasonable or logical level it was therefore clear to him that there is nothing wrong with having sex with a partner of choice. However, for Dean the memories flooded straight back into the present moment with any sexual encounter and made it impossible to separate the bad from the good. This included not only sex with a partner, but also masturbation, which left him with no choice of sexual pleasures and imprisoned in the past. In comparison to the other participants, Dean faced an additional physical hurdle as he is homosexual. Nevertheless, it shows how deeply CSA experiences affect men's core, beliefs, and emotional make-up. Kia-Keating et al. (2010) reported how the men in their study carried the built up social isolation from childhood into adulthood. Mistrust towards others stayed with them as grown men and made it difficult to connect intimately. Some acknowledged that satisfying sexual intimacy requires time after CSA, but with the help of understanding partners, they were able to take one step at a time. Another participant found intimate satisfaction in being a body worker, which provided him with the desexualised safety he needed (Kia-Keating et al., 2010). Nevertheless, there is also a deep sadness associated with the struggles of intimacy for these men. For example, Dean said:

> *Dean:* Everybody wants to love somebody, but I just couldn't do it. I just couldn't...I could have relationships, but I couldn't deal with the sexual side of it, cos it totally threw me off. And so I just got angry cos I thought I was defunct, so I just destruct. And drugs sort of helped me with the sexual side of things, but it also made me quite destructive towards people, friends, ah...partners, just everybody really, family. I'd be really ugly.

Knowing how important social interactions are for human beings, it appears that CSA has a cruel way of stripping men from their core personalities including some of their basic needs.

Overall this theme summarised the emotional difficulties around trust and intimacy in connection with interpersonal relationships after experiences of CSA. All men in this study struggled to accept authority figures as adults. Not only was exercised power a reminder of their own helplessness as children, it also symbolised the lack of respect they received as young boys. Due to their sexual abuse the men grew up with feelings of inferiority and craved understanding and respect from others as adults. Any sign of authority was easily misinterpreted and perceived as a threat even if it was a doctor in hospital helping their children in pain. Their children became part of their need to protect themselves from any potential harm, which made them overly vigilant and wary towards others. Also, trust did not naturally develop in intimate relationships for the participants in this study. Many were negatively triggered by sexual encounters, which made it either impossible to engage in relationships or created a physical and emotional barrier. Only time, patience from understanding partners, and insight through healing helped a few of the men in this study to overcome some of the emotional difficulties. Nevertheless, to protect themselves from further harm, they could not afford to trust anyone.

Social norms and barriers to disclosure

Disclosure and its difficulties

Children, adolescents or adults who were sexually abused often face the question 'why didn't you tell anyone?' Telling someone seems a rather simple solution to an overwhelmingly painful event. Unfortunately, reality is not as simple and cultural norms and social behaviours have a lot to answer for its complexity. Many who are quick to judge forget that children are still very simplistic in their thinking at an early age. They are easily scared, manipulated,

and impressed, characteristics which are exploited in the grooming process (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Paine & Hansen, 2002). Perpetrators are often known by the family and the child and come from a position of trust. They seek out moments alone with the child and inflict enough fear after the act, so children keep it a secret (Paine & Hansen, 2002). Tom's experience was no different:

> *Tom:* ....when somebody robs your confidence, like it's bad enough that you're violated and your told 'ah you can't tell anybody, because something bad will happen to me'. So, you carry a big burden and you know it's not right and you don't enjoy it. But it's twisted up and you don't want to say anything, because you don't want anything bad to happen, because initially, before you had this sexual connection you had an element of respect for this person at the start. At such a young age....had I been 15 or 16 I would have been 'wait, fuck you just raped me' and it probably would have come out. But because you're so young and you're groomed 'you can't tell anybody, can't do this' deep down you want it to stop, but you don't know how, you know. And they just keep taking and taking.

Tom knew his abuser before it happened as he was one of his father's friends and often in their house. Also, Tom had two younger sisters and he said "one of my greatest fears was that I sort of felt as though if I wasn't receptive that they might be going to be next. And I shut my mouth because of that, you know". Not only had Tom to deal with the betrayal of trust, he also felt a responsibility to protect his younger siblings. His experience also shows that age plays a significant role in the way children can make sense of the sexual abuse. He was too young to know how to deal with such overwhelming physical and psychological pain. As explained by Jensen, Gulbrandsen, Mossige, Reichelt, and Tjersland (2005), children need the support and encouragement from trusted adults in order to be able to talk about distressing secrets they are unable to make sense of. As Dean explained:

> *Dean:* I grew up at a time when you didn't talk about that, and I used to get threatened: 'if you tell your mother, real bad things will happen to you.' It's the normal typical abusers way of saying to you....just threatening, just threatening.

Fear is a very powerful emotion and for a child to believe that even worse things could happen should they tell anyone about the abuse would be mortifying. Perpetrators use their power and control over young children skilfully and their

threats have usually the intended effect and make the child compliant (Hunter, 2011; Paine & Hansen, 2002). Another commonly reported problem with disclosure is that the situation often does get worse after the child opens up (Hunter, 2011). For example, the abuse either continues or they are not believed and punished even further (Hunter, 2011). The fears inflicted by the perpetrator then become reality, which causes additional feelings of self-blame, shame, and a false sense of responsibility. One of the probably worst cases of betraying a child's trust is the siding of an adult with the perpetrators actions as described by Leo:

> *Leo:* Well I did tell someone, see. I told the guy's mother. She gave me a hiding. She gave me a beating, yeah, and told me if I ever told Mum that would destroy the family. This was a close family, you know. I called her aunty. That was his mother. Yeah and she actually caught him in the act and ah... she gave me a bit of a beating afterwards for...to make sure I wouldn't tell my Mum, because the answer to that question was I wish I'd told someone, you know.

It is not surprising that Leo felt completely on his own after that experience. He later explained that being beaten up by a person he regarded as part of his trusted family was the beginning of him never talking about it. It took Leo many years before he was able to open up a little bit within a counselling setting. The torture of the sexual abuse itself would be seen as enough inflicted pain on a child. However, the aftermath of losing confidence and trust combined with feelings of shame, guilt, and fear add to the pain and seem to have long lasting effects. Unfortunately it is also very common that children who disclose sexual abuse are not believed by their parents or a significant other they trust (Hunter, 2011). This could destroy children's hope of positive change and instil mistrust towards others, which may have long lasting effects as shown in the current study. Ben tried to tell his foster parent when he was about six years old, but unfortunately was not believed at the time. Only in his later life, at nearly 50 years of age, did he have the discussion with his father again:

> *Ben:* I would have been about six. And he just turned around and told me to shut up, I didn't know what I was talking about. I was supposed to be a kid; I was not supposed to know any of that. But we had a good talk, he broke down, cried, and I said: 'Dad, I don't blame you.' I said 'You weren't the one who did it. You're not the

> one to blame for it.' He said: 'No, what hurts, son, is I should have been there when you needed me.' I said 'hey, it happened.

It seems a real shame that, for so many children, the disclosure process is such a disappointing and dreadful experience (Hunter, 2011). Ben's father later expressed his regrets, but for the six year old boy the insight came too late. Ben's abuse eventually stopped at the age of around seven, when he started to be so violent that he fended off his perpetrators with knives or anything he could find. I use plural here as Ben is one of the participants who suffered sexual abuse from several people over the years. However, one can see how Ben developed his mistrust towards others and his sense of self-reliance as he could only count on himself in order to be safe. Another example of childhood disclosure came from Brian. After many years of sexual abuse he reached a breaking point and told his grandparents, who looked after him at the time:

> *Brian:* So we sat there and had a talk for probably about an hour, just talking to me and asking what had happened and I just said to them he has been touching us in places and stuff and they were just like 'oh my gosh'. So, they were like 'we have to get your Mum' and I was a little bit scared at that time. Imagining how Mum's gonna take it. I felt really bad that I'd brought it up, but I had to. I couldn't live with it anymore. I just couldn't.

Brian's sexual abuse started when he was very little and lasted several years, which shows that disclosure takes form of a developing process and can't be rushed. There are too many risks, which even children recognise. While they seem to believe their abusers threats, there is still always an element of doubt in everything associated with the abuse and the perpetrator. Brian's mother did not believe him at the time, but he was lucky enough that his grandparents did and provided him with support from there onward. The uncertainty about outcomes if children do break the secret appears to be an additionally inflicted fear to the extent that the risks outweigh potential benefits (Hunter, 2011; Paine & Hansen, 2002). Hunter (2011) asserted that many survivors of CSA eventually talk about their childhood trauma as it is part of their healing, but for the majority it takes until adulthood. As adults they often feel emotionally more equipped to talk about their CSA experiences, because they are able to understand what was going on at the time (Hunter, 2011). Nevertheless, as explained by Tom, disclosing as an adult still comes with emotional turmoil:

> *Tom:* I guess not talking about it for years and moving on with life, there were certain demons that followed and really troubled me. But then in turn sitting down and talking about it in great detail and having to draw pictures and you know, recollection of events, places, times, ages, that was like just meeting the monster all over again, you know. It was going back to being a little boy and I think that was probably tougher.

Tom's demons included shame, guilt, and fear. As shown in Hunter's (2011) study, boys in particular suffer from shame more than girls due to cultural norms of masculinity and their abusers often being male. Guilt arose later on as Tom wondered about what happened after it had stopped with him, because he did not have the courage to speak up. There was likely another victim and he felt partly responsible. One can see how heavy such a load would be to carry for a young man. Nevertheless, having to go back to that little boy who experienced it all was even more distressing for Tom. This is particularly emphasised by the description of his abuser being a 'monster', which portrays a childhood perspective of what he had to live through. It signifies how horrifying his experiences were and how difficult it would have been for him to open up as his perpetrator became something that was not human. If in childhood or as an adult, the participants showed that opening up about what they experienced is difficult at any age. Tom's fear followed him all his life and was associated with the judgement of others if they knew about his CSA:

> *Tom:* I used to really struggle with the three demons that I see commonly troubling a lot of us that come here. The false guilt, the shame, and the fear. The fear of judgement, you know. Like I have been judged...one friend who was good friend, and still is, I was at their place when the news sort of broke that I'd been in courts...I was sitting and talking to my mate and like I said I don't really drink, but he brews ginger beer, non-alcoholic stuff, we were just having a drink at home, hadn't caught up for a long time, and he went out to the kitchen and his misses didn't think I could hear them, but she said she didn't want me left alone with the kids. So that's the fear, the fear of judgement that is one that's very real...The other victim in my circumstance has had two kids not allowed to come to his house, because parents had found out what happened to him and don't want their kids being unsafe. So, my biggest fear is not what people think of me. It may hinder my daughter in the future. Even though I was a victim society doesn't see that.

All participants in this study disclosed their fear of being seen as a perpetrator themselves due to their experiences of CSA. However, Tom also worried that his daughter might be disadvantaged due to public opinions that are based on incorrect facts. Social norms provide a form of guidance within communities and help people interact with others. However, these norms stem from people's experiences as well as cultural believes and shared understandings (Gergen, 2009; Moghaddam, 2005). For most individuals these shared values and beliefs become an intransigent reality, which may provide comfort of knowledge, but can also be very harmful to minorities within society:

> *Tom:* Statistics are terrible things, because people who don't understand read them, and a lot of statistics are presented around sex offenders in prison who said they offended because they were offended against. These things poison people and it would be my worst nightmare to be trying to defend innocence against something I'd never do. That would probably be the end of me to be perfectly honest.

Tom's fear of being accused as a sexual perpetrator was very strong and real. A person who grew up without experiences of injustice might say that his thoughts are exaggerated or unwarranted. However, Tom lost his trust in people and justice at a very young age and fought against inner turmoil, emotional imbalance, and sexual confusion growing up. He did not understand why he was sexually abused for too many years in his childhood, which opened up feelings of shame, self-doubt, and a low sense of worth. He worked for years on coming to terms with his trauma history and feel part of society. Therefore, the thought of being falsely accused of something he condemned with every cell in his body would leave him once again alone and without feelings of belonging. However, the public belief that CSA leads on to being a perpetrator has managed to penetrate into these men's mind and shake their confidence. As Steve explained:

> *Steve:* They say people who get sexually abused will often go on and sexually abuse other people. But I said no. I said you break the cycle. It's just like me being physically disciplined when I was young. It's just, I'm not blaming my parents for doing it, it was just back in those days you got physically disciplined. But I don't do it to my kids, I never hurt my kids, you know.

Steve knew in his heart that he could never hurt a child. Nevertheless, public opinion of him being a potential risk left him with enough self-doubt to make a

deliberate decision to break the cycle of something that is perceived as inevitable. Dean expressed another strong example of these men's fear to do anything wrong that could be seen as sexual abuse or effect children in a negative way:

> *Dean:* I don't know, I think, you know, I don't get turned on by children, but I think myself, ahm, could I possibly...I don't know, a little one change or something. So, I really think about it. I can't. My sister had to go to Australia, because someone got into a car accident over there. She has two little boys under four, and she goes: 'can you look after them for a weekend? My son's not too bad, but I don't wanna take them over there to see all that.' I said: 'I only do if...if someone comes and stays the weekend with me.' Cause I said 'I will help, but I will not shower them, I won't toilet them, and I won't change them, ok? I'm happy to do that for you as long as another person comes over.'

What stands out in Dean's quote is that he is not only afraid of social disapproval. Apart from the fact that certain activities such as showering his nephews might bring up traumatic memories, he actually feared that he could harm them unintentionally. Underlying seems to linger an element of mistrust towards himself. Even though the men in this study strongly rejected the public opinion about who becomes a sexual perpetrator and how, they still struggled to fully deny the possibility. It shows how much their self-confidence suffered through their CSA experiences and how delicate their self-esteem and view of themselves still is as grown men. It is important to realise that public opinion or created social norms are not necessarily permanent realities since they are nothing more than accepted standards created by people's experiences over time (Gergen, 2009; Moghaddam, 2005). However, rules can be changed and so can socially constructed norms.

Views of masculinity

A particular set of social norms relate to masculinity. The influence of hegemonic masculinity has been a thread throughout these findings. All the men in this study grew up in more or less the same generation and all emphasised how CSA had compromised their sense of manhood. During their youth, homosexuality was still regarded as abnormal and to some extent unacceptable, which led to strong feelings of homophobia. This was even further emphasised for those who grew up in a religious household in which homosexuality was overtly condemned. The fact that their first sexual encounter was involuntary and with an

older men made these matters only worse. Consequently, they developed a sensitivity around any comments or jokes that brought them in connection with homosexuality:

> *Tom:* I come from a small town. Now it's growing a lot, but in my time growing up there, I mean the discriminative slang, like at high school, was 'you're a fagot'. That takes on a whole new meaning when you're physically experienced it. That's not something that would go in my head. It's something that I would take highly objection on. You know I got suspended from high school twice for reacting to that comment with violence. But it was pretty hard to sit down and talk to the Deputy Principal who was a devout church follower about, you know, I couldn't speak up and explain why I reacted the way I did.

Tom's example shows the strong feelings associated with homosexual behaviour. Similar to Bhana and Mayeza's (2016) findings, Tom's reaction to homosexual comments was violence in order to demonstrate perceived masculinity. His reaction restored his personal sense of manhood as well as it sent a masculine message to his peers. Nevertheless, his Deputy Principal's religious beliefs made it impossible for Tom to disclose what drove his violent reactions. Consequently, such incidences isolated him even further as he became known for his violent actions while silently suffering the pain and shame of being sexually abused by a man. Unfortunately it was only too common, and may still be so, that educational and health professionals do not pay enough attention to the subtleties and hidden motives of children's behaviours.

Too many of these boys' actions were taken at face value and viewed as part of male behaviour without questioning what might be going on behind the obvious:

> *Dean:* Then on the other hand society could...he [a judge] could have got me assessed to see what was my problem, you know. What was my problem? Why was I doing the things I did? Was it just because of the drugs? Was it rehab I needed or was it medical help that I needed, but no society didn't do that for me. All they do was we stick you in jail for a day and hopefully you snap out of it.... So I think society let me down in some way. I mean cause I was only a young person at that stage and you know, and I felt the judge should have looked at my file closely and go 'a person of this age having a file this big, there's some serious issues!'

Dean grew up with a feeling that no one ever cared for him in his family. These feelings extended to the wider society when his actions were not further questioned by a judge either. The only thing people around him ever saw was his behaviour, which was in many ways nothing more than a cry for help. In the end, Dean felt let down by society at large, as much as by his family, and developed a sense of being unworthy and invisible. Sadly enough, social attitudes and beliefs pushed these boys into deeper silence and loneliness without tools to handle potential stigma. For example, Leo did not know how to cope with his emotional pain amongst his peers and the only way to maintain a masculine front was by running away:

> *Leo:* I guess after I was quite, I used to weep a lot, eh, you know. That gets knocked out of you as a young boy, you know, harden up. I had to find that out for myself, so fighting was my way of saying 'yeah', you know. You don't, no young boy likes crying or being emotional, and sometimes I couldn't stop that. I just had to walk out of school, you know, which let to me being known as a truant, you know, and then when they say 'why did you leave' it's 'fuck you'.

It is the cultural norms of hegemonic masculinity that made it impossible for Leo and the other boys to express their pain and psychological turmoil. Leo explained that he often had flashbacks in class, which made it very difficult for him to hold back tears. However, boys did not cry according to his known male standards, which left him with no other choice than being disruptive, so he would be sent outside. When I asked him if no one ever asked why he behaved the way he did Leo said:

> *Leo:* Nah, it was 'oh that's just Leo being a little brat' and that sort of things, yeah. This was better for me than to go and have to tell someone.

Anything that was associated with female behaviour such as crying and showing emotions openly was shaming for these young boys, which has been seen in previous research (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016). This gendered bias was not only a huge barrier for the boys to speak up about their CSA experiences, it was harmful for their emotional development in the long run. Hegemonic masculinity has been described as a stance of strength, fearlessness, control, and rationality (Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000; Lisak, 1995). However, reality is that men still feel pain,

boys are still vulnerable, and people's feelings can get hurt no matter what gender they are. Brian said:

> *Brian:* I think males in general are just looked at as these people that are supposed to be almost bullet proof, and don't talk about their emotions and this and that, which I think is a lot of crap, because males aren't as tough as what they're said they are, you know. They still break whether they've been abused or not, but abuse makes it a little bit harder for them. So they go out, some of them go out and be these tough men and go and put up themselves into jobs where 'ah people are not gonna hurt me anymore' type of thing. Unfortunately it didn't quite work for me. I just got hurt by people over and over again.

Brian highlights how powerful social norms including hegemonic masculinity are. The men in this study saw no other option than to put up a brave face and react according to the accepted male standards of violence and aggression. However, underneath the hard veneer, these boys and men later on were still hurting, trying to move forward and make sense of what had happened to them. Consequently, behaviours did not change, but hurt feelings and ongoing pain did not improve either. Society has come a long way in accepting homosexuality as well as minorities such as men and women who are transgender. However, looking at how few services are provided for men to discuss issues such as CSA, it appears there is still a lot of room for improvement (Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse, n.d.; Male Support Services, n.d.).

Perceptions of men being only perpetrators and no victims still remain today as described by Ben:

> *Ben*: I thought that was quite discriminating really, ahm, because the cops say come and talk to us about anything; anybody can. And yet they sit there and are very judgmental on you, you know, and they wonder why guys don't go to them. Even now. There's women out there raping guys, but if the guy goes to the cops the cops turn around and 'yeah, yeah [laughing] fuck off. Stop wasting my time. Sure it wasn't you that did it?'

Ben was the only participant in this study who was sexually abused by males and females. His frustration with public views that portray men as the only possible perpetrator and women as the default victim can be heard loud and clear. Unfortunately this is still the widely adopted view within many Western societies and makes it difficult for male victims of sexual abuse and violence to come

forward. However, studies show that some women do sexually abuse boys. Dube et al. (2005) asserted, that of their nearly 8,000 male participants 40 % reported that they had been sexually abused by women. Results also showed that the risk factors for detrimental physical and psychosocial health outcomes were not less severe, which is often not acknowledged by societies. In the light of hegemonic views of masculinity such gendered attitudes are not surprising, but disappointing.

There is no doubt that there are many obstacles to disclosing CSA and that disclosure comes with risks. However, in line with other research, this study shows that the process itself does not get any easier as children grow into adulthood. Social norms and adopted views of hegemonic masculinity as well as the associated fear of judgment are mainly to blame. It appears that society needs to acquire a more sensible and diverse view of masculinity in order for boys and men to express their emotions truthfully. Only by changing the status quo will CSA in boys come to be more acknowledged. It requires a change in the way societies see gendered traits in order for men to receive equal understanding for physical and emotional pain as well as trauma experiences. Therefore, it seems time to move away from fixed thinking patterns that put men in the unemotional war zone and women into solely nurturing roles.

From missed opportunities to healing

Missed opportunities

The effects of CSA appear to be both long lasting and life changing. All participants in this study reported how their sexual abuse experience turned them into a different person. The boys had innate potential and dreams for the future, but developed into men with feelings of darkness, lack of motivation, and no vision for the future. Every man had a different story, but all of them shared sadness about their paths that had been changed due to their trauma. Steve explained:

> *Steve*: I got sexually abused for a good year and a half...Used to love the days on bikes, but at night time there would be abuse happen. Priest would be there and he came to bed with me and then...there you go. I was at a time in my life, I didn't want to know about sex because I was a Catholic and Catholics don't really talk about sex much, cos it's like a no no word, you know. And you don't have sex until you're married or if you become a priest you don't have sex at all. So I was wanting to become a priest, I was an

> alter servant.....so I said I would love to become a priest. But then what happened was I rebelled cos I got sexually abused and then I ended up in jail. I know for a fact that I wouldn't have ended up in jail if it wasn't for the abuse...I got a lot angrier suddenly, ja. I used to go just fighting mate, fighting, fighting, you know.

Steve's perpetrator was not only a person he fully trusted; he used to be an idol, someone in whose steps he wished to tread. Religion played a big role in Steve's life growing up and having had his trust broken by the person he looked up to contradicted his foundation, values, and beliefs. Apart from the confusion and inability to understand the what and why behind his experiences, Steve lost his direction in life and drowned in his emotional turmoil for many years to come. Brian and Ben described it similarly:

> *Brian:* Yeah. I couldn't see a future. Like even though I knew what I wanted my future to be, working, having enough money, being tied down in a relationship, my response to it was 'meet, greet, and see you later' kind of thing.

> *Ben:* Robbed, my whole life basically. If I was, didn't have any abuse happen to me, I'll be a lot nicer person. I'd probably be very successful, ahm, being all very well to do a paying job, whatever that job is, I wouldn't know, probably be a lot nicer and would help a lot more people, but yeah, since it went pear shaped and went the other way.

Brian once had a clear picture of his future and even though such plans and visions can change over time, for him they simply vanished. Also, his engagement with others changed, which further influenced decisions and behaviours. Ben's particular regret focused on his lack of sociability and altruism. His abuse was ongoing from infant to about 7 years of age, which made him develop into a fighter with an intense survival instinct. Other participants talked about their missed opportunities in regards to their lack of motivation or desire to start a family. For example, Steve remembered that he lacked enthusiasm in all aspects, which directed him towards a path of least resistance:

> *Steve*: ... my motivation is not as much as it should have been. I feel I'm always out to do things the easy way and that goes back to my younger age and drug scene. I was ah, fuck working, I'll just sell drugs. And this is the way, you know. It kind of took my motivation from me...Don't take me wrong, I feel like, jail, at the end it is your life, you've definitely taken the wrong road, you

> know. And I know I wouldn't have ended up in jail if I wasn't abused, because I wouldn't have gone down that road. But it's all part of, ahm, thinking, ahm, taking the easy way out with everything you do in life after. I think I just lost my momentum.

Or as Colin described, his early experiences made him so untrusting of others that he never felt ready to start a relationship. While he came to accept his choices, he still knew that his life could have been very different and potentially richer had it not been for the abuse:

> *Colin:* Well, cos of the abuse at school I have no wife, no kids, I just don't want to get involved with that kind of thing. It's life. And then I got three brothers who are all married with four kids each, and they just wanna know why.

Similarly, Kevin and Brian explained how their CSA experiences affected their educational outcomes and professional opportunities due to feelings of insecurity, lost motivation, and other influences they could not fully understand:

> *Brian:* ... I'm just sick of who I was, I didn't like it. That kind of person I was is a bully, take all that bad stuff out and...when I look back to how I was as a kid, man, damn...I had so much talent that...yeah that's pretty much where I can kind of kick myself, too. The talent I had, I feel like I've just wasted it. That's very hard when you know you were like that and all of a sudden just gone.

> *Kevin:* I think I would have been able to cope with education, ahm. I didn't cope with kids my own age, ahm, I didn't feel safe around, you know, so for me going working was the best place for me...because adults were more predictable. I could read them better. Kids were too spontaneous for me, I couldn't read them, I couldn't engage.

Brian could not fully identify why he did not pursue options befitting his talents. However, earlier quotes described his lost sense of self and tapped into feelings of inferiority. His early and ongoing experiences of sexual abuse appear to have eroded his self-confidence in ways that made it impossible for him to believe in his natural talents; what was left was only a feeling of inferiority. Kevin, on the other hand, needed control of situations after his CSA experience, which he could not exercise amongst his peers. Further education was therefore too unsettling for him, but opting out also deprived him of certain opportunities. All these men started out with hopes and dreams about their lives and the future. However, after

being sexually abused their anger, emotional chaos, isolation, and conflict with their own self-identity made a destructive lifestyle look more fitting and accessible. Research asserts that emotional and behavioural responses are driven by human's biochemistry and can be altered through the exposure of stress such as CSA (Beauchaine, Neuhaus, Zalewski, Crowell, & Potapova, 2011). Early exposure to trauma appears to make children a particularly vulnerable target for changes in emotional and behavioural responses (Howell & Sanchez, 2011). Unfortunately it has been said that detrimental experiences early on in life lead to a lack of social skills and an inability to interpret non-threatening situations correctly (Howell & Sanchez, 2011). It seems therefore not surprising that the men in this study developed such strong social mistrust and hostility as well as violent defence mechanisms.

Coping mechanisms and healing

As children, the men in this study started to develop certain coping strategies that helped them to get by. As these findings show, anger, violence, ignoring what happened, drugs, alcohol, and running away were all part of trying to cope with their emotional pain. However, as they grew into adults their sense of self was still lost. While some tried to drown themselves in substance use, others found some peace in spirituality or activities close to their heart, which helped them breathe and function within society. Tom for example talked about his passion of being in the bush just by himself:

> *Tom:* My thought. Find myself. There's no white noise. There is nothing around me. I hunt with mates occasionally, but I do a lot of hunting alone. I like it because I feel clean and untarnished out there. My thoughts are my own. The dogs will listen, but they don't talk, you know. Sometimes you seek that, someone who would just listen. I used to have that physical blow out. I could, It's nothing to blow out 20 or 25 km a day in a walk. That's a good walk, eh? Sometimes carrying 6 to 8 kg, I found it, because I'm drug free and have been for a while, I found that physical depletion, like just being...to ground out to nothing, I could sleep without the demons. I can sleep and the body recharged and I didn't have that, like I said, the smells, sounds, places.

Two things stood out from Tom's quote. Firstly, he had a real desire and need to find out who he once was under the layers of negative emotions. Secondly, he was not able to connect with himself in the middle of others, work duties, and his day

to day environment. It was the peace around him, the natural sounds and smells of the bush, and physical exhaustion that brought him back to his inner self and freed him from the burdens he carried day by day. His dogs played a very crucial role in this process as they were his active, but silent sounding board. They provided company and a feel of social inclusiveness without judgement or provocative commentary. Tom was able to let his soul free and talk about anything he wanted within a safe environment, which provided him with nothing but comfort. Also, nature seemed to provide Tom with a sense of self-control and through the unspoiled nature of the bush he felt clean and untouched himself. Literature and research has provided strong indications for the link between nature and well-being (Beringer & Martin, 2003; Greenleaf, Bryant, & Pollock, 2014). Nature has been acknowledged as being not only restorative, but also curative and soothing due to its release of energy (Greenleaf et al., 2014; Lalonde, 2013). As Brian described:

> *Brian:* Breathing. I used to do a bit of martial arts when I was younger, but I sort of gone back into a little bit of breathing, and water, use water as a calming....like the sea or I put myself in a position where I can just go for a walk around trees or bush or something like that, and that helps, just breathing the energy of the universe. And that's what I just try to do, just use the universe's energy to try and help myself cope with what I'm going through. It's working like I've seen signs of it working. And lot of self-talk, eh. You gotta self-talk yourself all the time. You gotta tell yourself that it's ok. No one's gonna hurt you anymore, it's ok.

There seems to be a strength within the natural environment, which some people appear to be able to soak up and use to replenish their energy levels. Brian also used conscious breathing techniques and self-talk, which helped him to calm himself and fight his negative view of himself. CSA seems to leave so much negative emotions behind, so much self-criticism and self-blame that only time and active engagement with oneself can bring about positive change. For example, Brian said further, that he reflected a lot on his experiences in order to make sense of it:

> *Brian:* That's another thing I've been doing as well. Looking at things, reflecting and going 'that happened for a reason, why did that happen', so that's how I started to just come along. See these problems, acknowledge all these feelings and emotions and just go

> 'what was that all about?' and that's how I kind of helped myself through my journey.

Brian found answers to certain questions by revisiting his past and even though he might never understand why it all happened to him, it still helped him to redefine himself. It has been discussed in previous research that finding and creating meaning to traumatic events such as CSA is helpful in the process of recovery (Grossman et al., 2006). Some participants in Grossman et al.'s (2006) study needed to help people in order to find inner peace. Others needed to understand the sexual abuse and associated reactions cognitively or they used creative ways to express their emotions, feelings, and thoughts (Grossman et al., 2006). Healing is therefore an individual process, which varies from individual to individual in terms of pace and activities. However, being able to connect the traumatic experiences from the past to a meaningful outcome appears to be a crucial piece in the puzzle of recovery. This includes accepting the sexual abuse as well as the associated feelings, emotions, and pain (Grossman et al., 2006; Kia-Keating et al., 2005). Some participants in the current study also recognised their own limits in dealing with their emotional pain. Consequently, they found some solace in spirituality, which appeared powerful enough to free themselves from some of the developed feelings of self-responsibility and self-reliance:

> *Brian:* ...and then when my Nan passed away last year in December, she passed on my 40th birthday, I felt a little lift, like something had kind of lifted from me, and I just put it down that Nan took some of my pain with her, because I was a little bit different. I felt different when she left.

Brian's grandmother was the person he opened up to after many years of abuse. To some extent she symbolised the catalyst of change in his life and instigated first steps of a long lasting healing process. Brian felt that he could leave some of his past in her hands when she died as it was a safe, but intimate place to offload some of his pain. When I asked Leo and Kevin about what had guided them through their CSA experiences, they responded similarly along the line of spirituality and religious belief:

> *Leo:* It would have to be religious belief, yeah, that one day I'll be made whole, you know, full, and feel clean.

> *Kevin:* Faith....Well, it's something that's bigger than yourself. So you can hand over....if we're our own God, then who do we turn to when we need to offload, you know? Ahm, so for me, and God had been, faith had been a very big part of my whole journey really right through my suicidal years, right through the darkest times, too. Cause I used to abuse it all the time; I used to abuse it like mad, you know, 'you fricking asshole. You said, you know, if I would believe in you nothing bad would happen to me' and I couldn't handle what happened to me, and it was religion, religion taught me that if... nothing bad would happen to me that I couldn't handle if I had faith in God. So then I got abused and I was like 'well I can't handle this'.

CSA took some very essential parts of Leo's personality away leaving him feeling unbalanced and dirty. He did not know how to make himself whole again and saw only religious or spiritual interventions as powerful enough to give him back what was taken from him. In Kevin's case it was anger and disappointment in a God he had believed would protect him from evil. He lost his trust in religion through his experiences, but he still kept faith that there is a God who is bigger than him and could deal with his pain. There was an emphasis on a higher power these men needed in order to be able to let go of the emotions and feelings associated with their sexual abuse. Grossman et al. (2006) described how some of the men in their study found relief through their spiritual or religious beliefs. Such beliefs built a bridge towards forgiveness and an acceptance of what had happened to them, which provided healing and helped them to move forward (Grossman et al., 2006). For the men in the current study religion and spirituality played more a role of a higher power. Alliances were sought in order to be able to give away some of their agony and receive back parts of their soul they perceived had been lost.

Other coping strategies that assisted a healing process were building safe zones, receiving counselling and talking about the experiences as well as feeling connected. Ben explained how important it was for him to have his own space and to make sure it was maintained in order for him to feel comfortable:

> *Ben:* Yeah well it's more for me. The safe zone is more for me, ahm, not so much because I might hurt you or anything like that. It's more for my own comfort, my own safety, things like that. Yeah, cause growing up, you know, [town name] is not a very big town, it's very heavily gang associated down there, ahm, yeah you sort of...you're on edge and you're sort of thinking 'oh fuck if I go through there and those two have a go at me, we get away from my

> safe zone. They feel safe in numbers; you're by yourself, where's your safety, you know. So right through, yeah, after it happened and I was old enough to understand it a bit better and things like that I was constantly looking for safe zones. Constantly.

An important aspect of Ben's safety zone was gaining a better understanding of his behaviours and how they connect to his past. Similar to the participants in Grossman et al.'s (2006) study Ben needed to find meaning in his actions, so he could keep himself within a comfort zone that helped him to move forward. He therefore moved from instinct and reaction to understanding why he felt the way he felt and was able to change some of his behaviours. Outlets for pain can be very individual and each person needs to find their ways of feeling better. For Kevin it was his music, which helped him to engage in relationships and deal with associated anguish:

> *Kevin:* Music. I had my song writing. I've written a lot of songs, yeah. That was my outlet, and at times, you know, it's stuff I was going through. A lot of it was about love, relationships falling over, ahm...you know, you could see I was really elated getting into this new relationship and it was all very exciting and you could see that in the music, and then it would fall apart and I would be down. But I think the interesting thing for me wasn't so much sex that I was looking for in a relationship. It was that...ahm...safety, I guess.

Dean on the other hand came to realise that he needed to be more compassionate with himself and accepting of his feelings without closing them in:

> *Dean:* I came back, I set myself up in a flat, and I then I met Mike [counsellor]. I think if I hadn't gone through that process I think I probably would have been dead by now. You know, you can get away with it for so long, but then there's gotta be a cut-off point somewhere and you gotta come down with a crash. That's what I've learned from it. And really not to bottle things up now. I don't let things bother me so much, you know, I say to myself it is what it is. You can cry about it, think about it and then move on. Works for me.

Dean learned to cope better through understanding and accepting his past. He had a strong desire to come out of the fog he was living in, so he could feel more like himself again:

> *Dean:* ...But free and embracing and understanding what I had been through, without the drugs, you know. Without drugs. It's a bit like you go to the supermarket. You get Pams, you get, at certain chains you get No-Frills, yeah well I was Signature trying to be Pams, but I was really No-Frills [laughs]. Cause I had all the designer clothes, I had the money, but I didn't have the real me. I didn't have the real me. I had everything I could have wanted, not through legal means, but you know, I was still happy, but I wasn't being real. It was all based on crime, drugs, you name it, you know, and I had no appreciation for anything. And now that I've gone through all that, come out the other side, and working, I do have an appreciation for. I've never had an appreciation before 'ah, just get another one tomorrow', you know, or scam something up or get something tomorrow, but to go and work for it, it's totally different. So there we go, that's my life in a nutshell.

Dean had to be brave and apply a dose of tough love to himself in order to feel real, which united him with his family and helped him to seek help. The quotes in this theme reflect to me the following basis for healing: As a first step it appears there is a need for insight into the fact that something has gone terribly wrong along the way. Secondly, men survivors seem to need to develop a compassion for themselves in order to allow their feelings to surface, and thirdly, they appear to need to be honest to themselves. According to the participants' experiences, men might be able to admit to themselves that they need help and look for the right support once these three steps have been achieved. What Dean showed was that each person needs to find their own path back to their true self and utilise the tools available. For some it might be family and friends, while for others it could be the support from likeminded men who went through similar experiences. Ben for example described how much he came to appreciate the fact that he was not alone as survivor of CSA. The connection with likeminded men made him feel understood and opened up a new safety net for him as well as an opportunity to help others:

> *Ben:* In the group we got [mentions a few names] we all gave each other our phone numbers as a support network. And quite often, like I know [name of one group member] he's got his own business and I know he's awake into God hours in the morning, so if I have a flashback and I've got no work to do and I think I can't cope I just text him and he rings me. So I got support there. During the day, [another group member] will ring me and we just make a circle of it. Just to make sure everybody is alright, you know. We don't do it

> as such as making a habit of it, we're just a mate checking in on a mate. We can relate to each other.

Even though each man's story of the aftermath of their CSA experiences was different including their coping styles, they all shared an appreciation for talking about their past. There was a common acknowledgment that speaking up about their pain had been an essential part of their healing process. For example, Dean explained:

> *Dean:* I just say if I hadn't come here [Male Support Services] I think I'd be still walking in circles. Walking in circles, trying to find the corner...I had just bottled everything. Bottled it up, cause I just felt....shameful, this is shameful. Now that it's all gone I feel lighter, feel a lot lighter inside myself.

Being freed of some of his shame was as if someone finally removed some heavy weight that he had been carrying for so many years. Talking about the events was therefore a first step towards recovery. However, Dean also described how difficult the initial process was and how long it took him to be able to face his past:

> *Dean:* We went through that for six months. I just came here to have a cup of tea. Talking a lot of shit about how my day was, how my work was, but never about what happened and then I finally said to him: 'Well, I'm ready.... And I got it out. In my mind I could see, you know, as opposed to me resorting to a little child I could see me growing... he would help me look at it and ask me how I saw it and then how he saw it.... It was a slow, but effective process, and I think that's what I really needed cause I didn't want someone to go full on with me, because I still hadn't really, ahm, digested it by myself. Everything had been like on fast forward. I knew what had happened and it was masked by drugs, but it was just like ok, everything is just a blur, but then when I opened up it all came out. And that's when I started understanding why I did the things I did.

It took time for Dean to be "ready". Healing processes and therapy need the survivor to be ready, the right fit in terms of the counsellor, and time, which has been shown in previous research (Rapsey, Campbell, Clearwater, & Patterson, 2017). Dean needed to build up trust to the counsellor as much as courage to relive his traumatic past in discussion. Having everything locked up inside was a burden, but Dean was able to shut it out with drugs. Speaking about his CSA

brought the memories back very clearly, which was frightening for him and very painful. At the same time he realised that he had bottled it up successfully while it was all waiting to come to the surface. Once he started talking he could not stop and hearing his own words brought clarification as well as relief. Kevin for example described how emotionally draining this process can be:

> *Kevin:* Ahm, I think it was just through my own healing. Going through that process of healing. I actually, yeah, because you, all of a sudden you're starting to release all this stuff that you've carried around for years. You're working out why you backed out...I remember I used to do a lot of sleeping when I was going through counselling. I would sleep all day. I'd go to counselling for an hour a week and the rest of that time I would be sleeping. I was absolutely wasted, yeah. It was that tiring and emotionally draining for me, yeah. I would sleep for a whole week and then I would go back to counselling.

The sheer effort of keeping all the pain and emotional turmoil under cover and trying to function within society was very exhausting for Kevin and others in this study. One can only imagine how much tension these men carried inside for 24/7 since they were children. Bringing all this anguish to the surface was therefore even more tiring as it meant letting go of the stress and tension while reliving the events once more. All the participants in this study reached a certain point in their lives, which led them to counselling and started the healing process. Even though barriers of disclosure were still present, they all craved inner peace and better well-being. Some of the men had serious health problems by the time they started counselling and were motivated to heal at least parts of their emotional make-up. Others wanted to change their aggressive and emotionally unbalanced selves for the sake of their children, or they were simply tired of running away from their past. In all cases motivation for counselling was the wish for change, which has been noted to play a significant role in the engagement of therapy and the recovery process (Rapsey et al., 2017). Easton, Leone-Sheehan, Sophis, and Willis (2015) found that therapy was for many the turning point that started the healing process. The current research can support these findings. For most participants in this study it was the counselling sessions through which they were able to connect their dysfunctional years back to their sexual abuse as boys. Once they gained a better understanding of their actions and received acknowledgement for their emotional pain instead of judgement, they saw a way forward. Kevin

said: "it [recovery] can happen quite quickly when you're hungry. When you know there is a reason for your troubles....it's 'hey, I got a shot at life here'." Therapy can appear scary if survivors do not know what to expect from the process. As noted by Rapsey et al., (2017), men might fear that they will not be believed or understood, which acts as a barrier in addition to their feelings of shame. It might be therefore useful to know how one of the participants in the current study experienced therapy for himself:

> *Kevin:* All it [counselling] did was it pointed out to me what I was actually saying. It made me look at myself. Counselling to me wasn't about someone fixing me; it was about me fixing me, but I had somebody else guiding me through that process. Pulling me up on things I would say or beliefs that I would have and they'd pulled them out 'what do you mean by that?' and they I would go 'what did I mean by that?'. So it made me start thinking. So all they did, they helped me help myself really.

Kevin perceived therapy as a reflective engagement, which enabled him to think about past events, behaviours, and emotions objectively, but also with the necessary support. It was therefore not an experience of exposure to treatment that is meant to cure him from his pains. Instead it was a process in which the counsellor provided a safe scaffolding in order for Kevin to find the answers himself. At the same time he was realistic about how much can be achieved through counselling alone. He said:

> *Kevin:* The counselling helps as far as helping you understand the process, and understand what's there and why things have happened the way they have. But then there's a lot of it again of...ahm, resurrection, I guess, part of you restoring yourself back to normal or how do you retrain yourself again as a person, as an individual? I don't know. I don't know how you'd do that other than have a higher power, I really don't. I've not seen it work without a higher power.... You gotta have something to hand over, you know. It's gotta go somewhere. Even though you go through counselling it's still there. It's like a physical object that you need to go, you go 'here you go' and hand it over, and get rid of it. If you're it, if you're your own God, if you're as high as the chain goes where does that leave you to put it? It's a weight, it's a monkey on your shoulder. It's a weight on your back. There's nowhere for it to go, and I think for me being able to hand it over has been the most freeing part of the whole process, because it's now not mine. I just said 'here, have it. I don't want this anymore, I can't deal with this. This is bigger

> than me, it's bigger, ahm, but it's not bigger than you, so you have it. You deal with it.'

Kevin's experiences and how he dealt with it makes clear how big, how deep, and how wide reaching the effects of CSA for men are. Even though counselling provided him with understanding and gave him some of his freedom and personality back, he still needed to offload the burden he carried around with him. In Kevin's case he was able to connect with his religious roots and find a carrier for his agony through spiritual beliefs. Not every person would be able to relate to religion or spirituality. However, the really important message in Kevin's words is not that a God needs to be part of the equation. Significant is that sexual abuse in childhood appears to leave too much hurt and baggage behind in order for a person to deal with it. Maybe it can be the assistance of nature or some symbolic ritual through which male survivors can pass on their pain. There is no doubt that it will be a very individual process. However, finding something bigger than oneself might be the crucial key to the final door of emotional freedom for male survivors of CSA.

Some of the men also emphasised that they feel their CSA experiences made them stronger. This is not to say that they would not have chosen a different past had they be given a choice. As discussed in previous research, therapy was a turning point for some of the participants in this study (Easton et al., 2015; Rapsey et al., 2017). For Kevin in particular it seemed to have the effect, which most would desire. He described:

> *Kevin:* I look at it that way now, cause now I'm 44. I got a business, I got my wife, my kids, you know. It's interesting, because when I did the counselling thing I was like a flipped coin. It was literally like someone flipping that coin, you know, and it's heads for me, because, instead of tails, because now I had everything I touched turned to gold. I couldn't do anything wrong. I just, everything...anything I set my mind to was a success. And it was a complete change from being 'can't do anything right and falling apart'. It was almost like I'd touch a rose and it would die sort of stuff to I touch everything and it turns to gold. It was literally that sort of transformation for me and that was just through dealing with the abuse. It took me another, I reckon, another five, six years to deal with all the secondary issues or the triggers.

Kevin went from nothing to everything after counselling. However, it is also important to note that counselling cannot provide all the answers. A few of the

men in this study were still struggling to find their feet without much hope for positive change. Nevertheless, therapy can provide more than insight and for some participants it can even create purpose and a goal for the future. For example, Tom explained:

> *Tom:* So, I believe, you know, I'm hoping that in my time that I get to see the change where...well a personal goal of mine is to stay involved here (Male Support Services) as long as I need to be for my own well-being, but to be a part of change. I wanna see change. Sounds big picture from a victim, but I wanna see change, I wanna see it where guys can speak up, where you're not alienated for speaking up, because you're a guy and should have defended yourself. Where the system is accepting 'hey you are a victim and yes you do deserve the same treatment as others'.

It requires a shift in people's mindsets in regards to masculinity and how we, as a society, interpret and value social norms in order to bring about change for men. Through Tom's CSA and counselling experiences as well as his connection with other survivors, he realised that he would like to be an advocate for change. His determination and new found strength will hopefully go a long way to initiate different public perceptions and create more equality for the acknowledgement of men's vulnerabilities. The themes discussed in this study show how devastating and long lasting the aftermath of CSA for boys is. It appears therefore even more important to emphasise that there is a potential for success and happiness after traumatic experiences such as CSA. Kevin's past changed his outlook on life significantly. His values do not include material things, but instead focus on his family, providing a good environment for his staff, and not getting caught up in triviality. He described his personal growth process despite the pain he experienced:

> *Kevin:* Well....I was brought up very sheltered right, so I had...I guess I was very naive around life, around what people go through in life, I had a good family, I was in a good home. So yeah I think that, ahm, going through that whole abuse process of first losing your innocence and then struggling with your sexual identity right through to trying to figure out how to get on with life and how to piece life back together again; it really defines you as a person, because you end up pulling yourself apart and then rebuilding yourself I guess through this process, so, ahm, I reckon, for me anyway, I feel I am a stronger person at the end of it than I would have been had I not gone through those experiences.

Kevin's words emphasised how soul destroying CSA for boys is. He is also a good example for the fact that a good family home is not necessarily the key to a guarded upbringing. However, whatever the family circumstances sexual abuse in childhood left Kevin and all the other men in this study with a task that many would find nearly impossible: First, to let go of who they were as boys before the abuse. Secondly, trying to find each piece of the puzzle that got scattered around through the abuse in order to find their identities somewhere down the track.

This theme highlighted how lost motivation, dark emotions, and a lack of vision for the future led to many missed opportunities for these men after their CSA experiences. The trauma reset their ability to pursue natural talents, higher education, or develop social skills, which ultimately affected the way they interacted with others as children and adults. For many, romantic relationships or starting a family became emotionally too difficult. Even though coping strategies were developed and helped the men to function within society, they were still slaves of their own emotions and behaviours. In the end it was the process of opening up, facing their demons, and talking about their experiences that helped these men to gain a better understanding of themselves. For most, counselling was the beginning of positive change and allowed them to be vulnerable in order to move forward with new strength and purpose in life.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In this, the final chapter, I summarise my findings, tie the emerged ideas together, and describe my reflective process during the research. Further, I explain the limitations of this study and make suggestions for further research.

The aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of men who were sexually abused in childhood. Unstructured conversational interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to produce narrative dialogue and data. As noted by Dibley (2011) and Riessman (1993) this method worked well in order to explore participants' understanding of their childhood experiences as well as the aftermath of their trauma. It further helped to gain an appreciation of the men's general and cultural values and beliefs. TNA was an appropriate method to analyse the data as it gave me the opportunity to interpret meaning from within each story while identifying shared themes across narratives. I was therefore able to focus on each case with its own significance and context. In order to stay within a social constructionist perspective the participants were recruited within a similar generational, social, and cultural context of New Zealand society. TNA allowed me to value each narrative in its own right and find similarities between certain experiences, which helped me to discover themes of shared understandings. The findings were discussed within seven main themes: *Shame, guilt, and lost self-identities, Anger and hurt - a kind of death/an empty shell, Escaping the pain, Damage boils over, Mistrust - a place of safety, Social norms and barriers to disclosure,* and *From missed opportunities to healing*.

Shame, guilt, and lost self-identities highlighted the inner demons all participants in this study battled with throughout their lives. These negative feelings eroded these boys' - and later men's - self-esteem until they struggled to know who they were. Each story was different and every man fought his very personal battle with his inner demons, but the result was the same for all: it placed them on a long journey of self-discovery in which they tried to hide their inner feelings from others. The self-doubt, self-blame and shame had such strong impact on these boys that their childhood trauma started to define their whole persona. CSA did not only take their childhood innocence, it completely diminished their self-esteem leaving an invisible scar that they perceived as being physically visible to others. For some of the men, a religious background added

an additional layer of guilt and shame as homosexuality was strongly condemned in their belief systems. However, regardless of any religious connotation, all men felt used, tarnished, and unworthy due to their sexual encounter with an adult male. Consequently, they buried their secrets deep within themselves and descended more and more into isolation, which has been described as one of CSA's most hurting effects (Valerio, 2011). The fear of being judged was certainly one piece of the puzzle and has been described in other studies, such as the one conducted by Dorahy and Clearwater (2012). However, the current research revealed some deeper layers associated with the fear of exposing their experiences as disclosure was perceived as a threat to their existence.

Baumeister (2011) explained how the awareness of self in a person develops over time through interaction with others. Socialising has therefore been said to have several functions including educational elements through which people develop their personal values and beliefs within a particular cultural context (Baumeister, 2011; Moghaddam, 2005). Cultural values and beliefs can therefore be interpreted as strong pillars of an individual's sense of self. The men in this study grew up within a Western cultural context of hegemonic masculinity, which strongly influenced their view of sex between men. The sexual abuse by an older male created enormous confusion and cut into the core values and beliefs that were cornerstones of self-image and personality. The men who were abused as infants and toddlers developed a persona with low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority very early on. As they grew older, the cultural and social norms further shaped their perceptions of manhood, sexuality as well as notions of right and wrong. Their CSA experiences became therefore more hurtful as time went on and continued to damage their view of themselves. Memories of their trauma dominated these men's world growing up and later as adult men, which affected their sense of belonging. Many associated with antisocial peers, because they felt this was the only social group deserving of their unworthy selves. Unfortunately, these peers only added to the emotional and physical pain in the long run without improving the men's self-belief or self-validation.

Most men in the current study showed symptoms that could be associated with PTSD in childhood and adult life, including feelings of shame, guilt, and fear (APA, 2013; Sadock et al., 2015). In order to protect themselves emotionally many of the participants tried to blend in with others around them and pretended to be psychologically healthy. However, the underlying confusion about

themselves as well as the emotional pain and the ongoing memories still defined their entire being. Hiding all the turmoil served only to push them further into their own shadows without increasing self-respect or developing a self-identity. According to Baumeister (2011), individuals identify themselves through their achievements and roles in life as well as their connections with others. CSA seems to interfere with this process and leaves many men in a state of limbo without direction or aspiration, because the connection with themselves disappeared through their trauma. The feelings of self-blame, shame, and guilt dominated a big part of the participants' lives and overshadowed their real selves. For these men, it was a very long road of self-discovery in order to be able to step out of their own shadows.

Related to the previously discussed theme were feelings of pent up anger and accumulated confusion, which left them emotionally empty and affected their lives in multiple aspects including fatherhood. All the men in the current study described how anger was one of the few emotions for which they found an outlet. For many it took the form of super strength in their physical reactions. The smallest indication of threat sparked these men into lashing out at others with a force they could not explain themselves. For most it was their fists that became their voice for their bottled up pain as they felt they were not able to talk about their sexual abuse to anyone. Anger is not new to the CSA literature and aggression is a well-known expression of hegemonic masculinity (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Goodyear-Brown et al.; Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2012; Rowan, 2006). The anger was driven by mixed up emotions and to some extent by confused sexual identity. While participants were clear about not wanting to engage in sexual activities with their perpetrators, their bodies often showed a physical response, which they associated with arousal. Having an erection within a context they rejected in every sense of their being created enormous conflict with their sense of masculinity. The anger that arose from all these underlying emotions was therefore channelled into behaviour that expressed culturally accepted norms of masculinity, which included physical fights. Further, the tension around their sexual identity raised fears about having sex with women and for some it reinforced a need to be overly sexually active with females. For some of the participants having sex with the opposite gender became an exaggerated need in order to express and manifest their maleness. Also, being in charge of their sexuality gave them a sense of regained power, which they felt lost through

their CSA experiences. Unfortunately, for many men, women became not a symbol of compassion and intimacy, but more a means to find in themselves what they believed was lost. It was not about physical harm towards women, but about regaining control over their bodies while still being emotionally numb. The men were simply unable to reconnect with themselves after their sexual abuse; what was left was only their empty shell.

Participants described how lost they had felt at the time without any interests, aspirations, or hopes for the future. It portrayed the damage caused by CSA as something beyond emotional layers at a depth tapping into their notion of being, which could be interpreted as the soul. The soul has been described as an essential part of life for all living things defined by their ability to feel, think, grow, and die (Aristotle as cited in Sanderson, 2007). Further, the soul is commonly described as a unit, which is mutually dependent on a body. The intertwined nature of body and soul have therefore been believed to represent an individual as a person (Sanderson, 2007; Schorn, 2013; Teske & of Auvergne, 2000). Hence, I venture that the soul could be seen as a person's symbolised sense of existence. From this perspective, CSA violated not only the men's bodies, but in fact challenged their whole notion of being, becoming what many perceived as a life ending experience. The person they once were was gone forever and the body that was left behind had to be redefined and refilled with new meaning in order to move forward.

For some participants fatherhood and the serious engagement with a woman were part of this redefinition process. However, children also brought new challenges into the men's lives. While having kids filled them with new purpose and enthusiasm for life, some of the demons they fought to destroy reappeared. Seeing their kids naked and vulnerable raised fears, which were not so much rational, but more a reflection of their own memories and feelings of helplessness in childhood. The widely held myth that CSA in men turns survivors into perpetrators later in life was additionally harmful in relation to raising their own children. All participants in this study were certain that they could never harm their children or any child for that matter. Nevertheless, public opinion was strong enough to instil a sense of doubt and discomfort. This shows how powerful society as a whole can be. Unfortunately people are often misinformed and impose their beliefs and judgements on others without critical thinking or establishing the real facts (Price-Robertson, 2012). It would be desirable if the

public applied more critical thought to topics such as CSA in boys in order to avoid marginalising minorities and inflicting further harm.

Another side of conflicting fatherhood was the men's over protectiveness of their own offspring and children in general. Safety became paramount and mistrust towards others only increased through the men's need to protect their children from potential abuse or harm. Putting boundaries and rules in place as well as doing background checks were therefore important means to maintain their personal and emotional equilibrium. Having children was certainly one element through which some men in this study found new meaning in life and through which they were able to redefine themselves. However, it also showed how long and slow the process of recovery was and what overall impact it seemed to have on men's lives in particular.

The men in this study described how their emotions often became overpowering. Even though participants tried to ignore what had happened to them as children, all of them looked for something that could numb their pain. Fighting was one outlet, which featured across all participants in this study. On one hand, violence was an expression of their masculinity and helped to rebuild self-esteem. On the other hand, it acted like a pain killer and gave the men an expressive outlet for their internalised pain, built up tension, and helped them to feel better. Exercising power over others also became a formula for becoming someone else or a stronger and more dominant version of themselves. Violence appeared to take on a connotation of regaining control over oneself in order to make up for the helplessness the men had felt during their CSA experiences. Control has been said to be perceived as an important characteristic of masculinity. It is often expressed in physical fighting due to its expression of power over oneself as well as others (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000). All participants in this study saw their manhood taken away from them due to their sexual abuse by another male. In combination with their concept of hegemonic masculinity, strong feelings of homophobia were therefore a natural consequence.

Substance use has been described as a common outcome for survivors of CSA and the current study supports this (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Dube et al., 2005; O'Leary et al., 2017). The men described how their use of alcohol and drugs helped them escape from their memories, thoughts, emotional chaos, and internalised pain. Even though it only served as a temporary relief, it provided

moments in which the men were able to forget, be more relaxed, and improve their functioning. Some of the men described how alcohol or drugs brought out some of the core features of their personality as well as masking feelings of fear. It gave their self-esteem a positive boost, provided hope for a life without the memories, and helped in their interactions with others. However, the effects never lasted long enough and, in the long run, years of substance abuse only accentuated their difficulties, such as physical health problems.

Self-harm, adopting false identities and suppressing memories, and suicidal thoughts were other coping mechanisms and attempts to escape from the past and ongoing pain. Tangeman and Shelby (2011) described how self-injury functioned as a coping mechanism for trauma victims. Similar to substance use, self-harm provided a short-term stress or pain relief, allowed distraction from the traumatic memories, and helped them tolerate uncertainties. Further, self-harm seemed to provide a protective shield, which increased alertness and the readiness for defence. Also, taking on false identities was a way of escaping from the past. However, it only began a vicious cycle of running away from oneself, which was not only exhausting, but ultimately damaging. Dissociative reactions such as amnesia, trancelike states, or symptoms of dissociative identity disorder (complex amnesia, and changing habits, skills, and knowledge) are also common after trauma experiences such as CSA (Sadock et al., 2015). Such reactions are a coping mechanism, which featured in the current study and served as an avoidance strategy in order to replace distressing memories and emotions with positive ones. However, as described by Harris et al. (2015) they can lead to general memory loss of one's childhood and is seen as a rather drastic coping mechanism (Valerio, 2011). Therefore, dissociation often seems to illustrate an unconscious act in situations where coping appears impossible (Valerio, 2011). In the current study dissociation was described as a change in personality, which appears fitting in regards to defined symptoms and the participant's described memory loss of his childhood. The example emphasised how important it is to address sexual abuse fully and appropriately as any event of CSA has been reported to increase the risk of suicidality (Easton et al., 2013). The findings in the current study confirmed this theory. Most participants explained how their emotional pain took them at times to the darkest places possible and ending one's life seemed the only solution left. It highlighted the sheer devastation CSA appears to leave behind in a majority of men, particularly in connection with

adopted cultural beliefs of hegemonic masculinity (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2012).

Violence, substance use, dissociation, false identities, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts featured as coping mechanisms in order to escape from the ongoing emotional distress. Participants were driven by a desperation to feel better and forget what had happened to them. For some, their coping strategies provided short term relief from the constant tension and even provided some help in daily functioning. Nevertheless, no matter how hard they tried, there was no break from reality and the attempts to forget were only more destructive for their lives.

The findings of this study revealed that one of the most debilitating after-effects of sexual abuse in childhood appears to be the memories that remain with survivors throughout their lives. All participants reported how flashbacks were triggered by sensory stimuli such as smells, sounds, or tastes as well as certain places, and darkness at night. Whenever these triggers were activated, participants reverted to their childhood and reactions were driven by the vulnerable child they once were in order to cope with the situation. As a consequence, the men experienced frequent and rapid mood changes and often reacted through the expression of overt anger and physical outbursts. Even as adults the participants struggled to fully understand their emotional imbalance and how their CSA experiences affected every part of their lives. It strongly influenced their self-image as well as their relationships with others and the persistent negative emotions seemed only a driver for further isolation. During their childhood, all the men in this study built an invisible barrier around themselves to protect against further harm. Unfortunately, these walls did not come down as adults. Instead they grew taller, which provided them with a sense of security, but also locked in the pain experienced in childhood preventing the opportunity to release tension and heal. Anxiety provoking situations therefore triggered defence mechanisms carried out by the adult, but driven by the child who experienced sexual abuse.. CSA appears to affect boys incredibly deeply with memories and flashbacks being a relentless reminder of their well-kept secret even in adult life. One could see how this would make it difficult for men to navigate their environment as their emotional base would have no opportunity for growth while the vulnerable boy within remains dominant.

Trust became one of the biggest hurdles for the participants in the current study. Authority figures, such as police, medical doctors, or employers became a particular target as they stood for a power imbalance the participants were no longer able to tolerate. As a consequence the men had to learn to walk away from certain emotionally charged situations in order to avoid violent behavioural outbursts. At the same time the men felt a strong need to stand up for themselves and fight for their rights, which underlines the lack of power they experienced during CSA. The sexual abuse in childhood made it extremely difficult for the participants to engage with people as everyone was perceived as a potential threat. All the men described how their interactions with others was tempered by a developed survival instinct and awareness of risk. This hyper alertness towards everyone grew even more intense for the men who had children, because the protection of their sons and daughters became paramount. Nevertheless, the participants in this study also expressed a desire to be understood by others. Any encounter, which demonstrated a lack of interest in their story was an additional disappointment and a further sting in their childhood wounds. Unfortunately, the men's overprotective nature in regards to their children was sometimes expressed in an overly hostile and violent manner, which made it difficult for others to interpret correctly. The sexual abuse experiences robbed these men of an innocent perspective towards others and created a demand for respect while still craving acceptance and compassion for who they had become. Additionally, the trauma experiences led them to leap to conclusions that were not necessarily correct interpretations of particular interactions with others. To some extent, misinterpretations were not surprising, as many participants experienced ignorance, and negative labelling in childhood from professionals and authority figures, who were meant to help them. Consequently, interpersonal difficulties seemed to become inevitable and potentially positive experiences that could increase trust and personal growth were missed. This is particularly sad as social support has been said to be important in regards to positive health outcomes and general well-being (Berkman et al., 2000; Godbout et al., 2014; Jonzon & Lindbald, 2004). Therefore, mistrust of others after CSA seems to build a massive barrier to healing and creates an unhelpful vicious cycle, prolonging the process of rebuilding a fulfilling life.

As mentioned earlier, CSA appears to generate and foster such a negative self-image, low self-esteem, and emotional numbness, that only antisocial or

destructive people appear worthy social companions. Many participants described how through their lack of self-worth they seemed to subconsciously gravitate towards people in their lives, who fuelled the negativity they tried to escape from. It served their feelings of inferiority and mistrust towards others through which they gained a false sense of safety and belonging. Personal space became very important to the adult men after CSA. Social gatherings could easily trigger feelings of discomfort, and closed in rooms became uncomfortable. Personal space was therefore an equivalent to personal safety, which grew into a further barrier in connection with romantic relationships. Sex with a woman was within their accepted cultural schema of sexual interactions, but it often lacked intimacy and love. Further, for some, it still triggered feelings of being blemished and dirty, which stemmed from their CSA experiences in childhood. Hetero sex was wrong, secretive, and negative even though it involved a woman and pleasure instead of feelings of pain and disgust. As explained by cognitive psychology, such developed schemas take time to adjust or change through new experiences (Goldstein, 2011). The findings in this study showed, that only time, patience, and the love and compassion of partners seem to be able to create a positive shift of these damaging schemas. Nevertheless, even after gaining insight and some healing, all participants expressed ongoing problems with mistrust as it remained their place of safety.

The process of disclosure has been said to be very difficult for children and unfortunately does not guarantee positive outcomes (Hunter, 2011). As discussed in other research, perpetrators know how to groom children, so that fears persist and secrets are kept. Further, sexual abusers often come from an advantaged position of trust as they are frequently family members or otherwise close to the family of the targeted child (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Paine & Hansen, 2002). These findings were confirmed in the current study. Many of the participants were abused by men they had trusted in the past, which was the starting point of their feelings of betrayal and made disclosure even more difficult. The fear that things could get worse if they told anyone was very real for all participants, and for some, such fear was borne out. The boys were often let down by people who were meant to be there to help. This includes ignorance from teachers who simply labelled their changed behaviours as naughty as well as parents, guardians, or psychologists, who reacted to their stories with disbelief. As a result, these boys withdrew even further from the outside world, developed even greater feelings of

anger, mistrust, shame, and self-blame, and swore themselves to secrecy. While they carried the emotional burden silently, their self-respect diminished more and more in the aftermath, which led them on a path of self-destruction. Sadly, society and cultural norms of masculinity seem to be one of the major contributors to this dreadful process. For example, unsubstantiated views that portray sexually abused men as eventual perpetrators, caused further harm and discontent in these men's lives. The fear of judgement eroded already low levels of self-confidence, increased feelings of shame, and became an impediment in the men's interaction with children. Such reactions by society are nothing more than an outcome of fear and become social norms perceived as reality without further scrutiny (Gergen, 2009; Moghaddam, 2005; Price-Robertson, 2012).

Similarly damaging were the accepted social norms of hegemonic masculinity. All the themes throughout this study covered elements related to the way the participants perceived the meaning of maleness. The generation they grew up in encouraged homophobic thoughts and created a stigma around sexual abuse in males. It is therefore not surprising that all men in this study were afraid of social disapproval as it created enormous conflict within themselves and their sexual identity. Not only was it one of the major barriers of disclosure, it also created self-doubt and was one of the main contributors to their overwhelmingly strong feelings of shame. To make matters even worse, authority figures such as school principals, psychologists, and even police undermined their experiences by emphasising hegemonic masculinity as the acceptable view of manhood. Consequently, the participants were marginalised as boys and pushed into deeper silence and isolation as adults. Social and cultural norms provide people with the comfort of a common understanding of living and a guide for behaviour (Gergen, 2009; Moghaddam, 2005). Nevertheless, it seems crucial to acknowledge that such norms can be changed over time in the same way they were established in the first place. Men are still perceived as the bulletproof, stoic, and unemotional gender that is able to weather any situation without psychological harm. This view point is particularly highlighted by the lack of services that cater for men's emotional needs (Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse, n.d.; Male Support Services, n.d.). Only by changing some of society's perceptions of manhood might boys and men find acceptance for their physical and emotional distress in situations such as CSA. Society has come a long way in accepting individual differences such as homosexuality. Nevertheless, it appears that further improvements are essential in

order to show men equal respect in socially important matters such as CSA. It seems time to change fixed norms that encourage hegemonic masculinity and portray women as solely vulnerable and nurturing.

The findings in this study further revealed that the men failed to reconnect with their inner selves, which fostered ongoing confusion, mistrust towards others, and negative views about themselves that made interactions with others difficult. Some participants found solace in nature, which helped to release tension and reflect on the past as well as their behaviours. Others reached a breaking point through physical struggles, which guided them towards counselling and opened up the necessary discourse that helped them make sense of their experiences. As described by Grossman et al. (2006) the ability to create meaning through trauma acts as a catalyst for healing. It seems to involve acceptance of the past events as well as associated emotions and behaviours (Grossman et al., 2006; Kia-Keating et al., 2005). Some participants in the current study found meaning in spirituality, which provided a powerful source for regaining strength and to offload overbearing feelings of self-blame, self-doubt, and self-reliance. Further, religion and spirituality helped some of the men to drop parts of the accumulated pain and regain aspects of their personality lost along the way.

The sample for this study was drawn from one of the few counselling providers for men and all participants perceived counselling as one of the major catalysts for healing. However, it was also acknowledged as an exhausting and painful process that took time, reassuring the right person to talk to, and the openness and motivation of the survivor himself. Other tools supporting the men's recovery were being able to associate behaviours with CSA experiences, demonstrating compassion towards themselves, and engaging in pleasurable activities such as playing music or art. Also, the connection with other survivors provided the men with a sense of belonging and opened new channels of trust. These findings show that because each man's story of CSA is different, it follows that their healing processes are also individual. Recovery cannot be rushed and takes its own path with the tools that are available for each man separately. However, what all participants shared was an appreciation for finally talking about their traumatic experiences. It took some of the heavy burden they had carried since childhood off their shoulders and set them free to pursue a more positive approach to life. Counselling was therefore the most helpful tool in order to gain a better understanding of the childhood experiences and associated life

choices. It could be argued that recovery requires men to join the dots between their CSA experiences and associated behaviours before they reengage with life and find a way forward.

This research contributes to the dearth of literature about male sexual abuse in childhood. The findings confirmed some of the outcomes shown by previous research, but also highlighted further and deeper layers of complexity. I would like to note that I investigated the men's personal experiences within a particular cultural, social, and historical context that was different to my own. Therefore, I had to be mindful of my personal cultural background (Swiss), which would have shaped my personal values and beliefs. Consequently, I was continuously reflective and examined my interpretations critically in order to understand the narratives from within their respective realities (Parker, 2005). I hope that the participants' narratives and my interpretations can improve the knowledge of the impact of CSA on men. It is also an attempt to decrease existing taboos and help men with CSA experiences to create meaningful, fulfilling, and less painful lives for themselves.

Strengths and limitations

One of the strengths of this research was its qualitative nature, which allowed me to explore personal narratives in more detail and depth. It seemed particularly fitting for a complex topic such as CSA in order to uncover multiple layers of associated emotions and outcomes. Further, while recruiting all participants from one service was convenient, the fact that the participants had already undergone counselling also served as a strength. Each participant was at a point in his life where he could reflect on past events without drowning in emotional turmoil.

The current study had some limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the findings are not representative of universal outcomes as survivors of CSA are a diverse group. Secondly, all participants were sampled from one service provider where all participants have undergone counselling. While backgrounds and contexts were different for each man participating in this study, the sample nevertheless represents men who sought help for themselves. Therefore, it would have been beneficial to interview a few more men who had taken a different track. Thirdly, the sample ranged in age from 36 to 50 years in order to capture generational insights into certain views such as masculinity and social norms. Also, the participants shared the same cultural background within a

New Zealand context. It is therefore not representative of a broad age group nor cultural background, which could influence experiences and outcomes significantly. Despite these limitations, the findings in this study provide important information about the aftermath of sexual abuse in boys, which may help to improve future outcomes for men with similar histories.

Implications for future research

More research is needed in order to gain a fuller understanding of how men are affected by child sexual abuse. Future studies should focus on boy's barriers to disclosure in order to initiate the healing process earlier and potentially prevent further harm from destructive lifestyles. Also, research should investigate the differences between men with a CSA history, who go on to abuse children sexually as adults and men who do not. This may increase knowledge about different views on masculinity as well as it may help to decrease unhelpful stereotyping within society.

Moving forward

The findings in the current study illustrated how severe, wide reaching, and long lasting the after-effects of male sexual abuse in childhood are. It further showed that positive outcomes are possible with the right support. It appears important that each survivor gains a better understanding of the child who experienced all the physical and emotional pain in order to let it go. This may help to create new meaning and compassion for past experiences and behaviours, which will assist the process of finding one's lost identity. However, the findings also illustrated how powerful social and cultural norms can be and while they provide knowledge and comfort, I do not believe they should serve to compromise well-being. Society carries therefore an important responsibility in creating positive change for successful outcomes in boys' and men's healing processes. Research can only raise awareness of existing problems and point towards necessary change. It may be beneficial if the government sponsored public education programmes advocating changes to social norms such as hegemonic masculinity. At the same time men need to find the strength to find new definitions of manhood in order to be able to express their vulnerabilities without feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame. Only by adopting a new and more flexible mindset in regards to gender norms will victims of male CSA find more acceptance and better support. The good news is that public perceptions and social

norms can be changed in the same way they were established; even though the process may take time. Nevertheless, it leaves hope that norms such as hegemonic masculinity can be adjusted, so better overall outcomes are achievable for men who experienced sexual abuse in childhood.

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Appendix A

Living with the Aftermath of Male Child Sexual Abuse

Kia ora, my name is Doris Mattenberger and I am an adult student at the University of Waikato, completing a Masters Degree in Psychology. I am carrying out a research project focusing on how New Zealand men with a history of child sexual abuse understand and reconcile their experiences with everyday life and in relationship with themselves and others.

What is this research project about?

I am really interested to hear your story about your personal experiences of having been sexually abused as a boy and how you feel about it all today. This would take place in the form of an unstructured, conversational interview. Participation would give you the opportunity to reflect on a traumatic period in your life, which may enhance your own understanding of yourself, your story and your relationships with others.

I want you to feel safe and comfortable during the interview process. If for any reason you felt uncomfortable to talk, you could ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the conversation. I would stop the recording and check in with you first before continuing with the interview. The interview could also be continued on a different day if you wish. I am aware that our conversation may bring up some distressing memories and emotions and I will ensure that you receive support if needed on the day through Male Support Services. I will also contact you the day after the interview to check that you are okay and to help arrange any support you may need.

Am I eligible to participate?

Yes, if you meet the following criteria:

- You are a New Zealander who has also grown up in New Zealand.
- You are between 35 and 45 years of age.
- You were sexually abused as a child.

What will I have to do and how long will it take?

I would meet with you at Male Support Services, 292 Cambridge Road, Hillcrest, at a time convenient for you. The interview, a very loosely structured conversation, would take about 90 to 120 minutes.

Can I bring someone with me?

Yes: you are very welcome to bring one or more support person(s) to the interview. In addition, I would contact you the day after the interview to check that you are okay and help you find any support you might need.

What will happen to my information?

Once I have transcribed the interview, I will invite you to review our conversation and make any comments or corrections you think are needed. You will be able to choose how you would like to review the transcription (e.g. file sent via email, or meeting with me in person).

Once you have approved the transcript, I will use the information to write my thesis. I and my supervisors may also want to use the information in preparing articles for submission to academic journals. In all cases, your anonymity will be protected and you will be provided access to findings/publications.

It will be very important to me that your identity is protected at all times during the research and after. I will use a pseudonym in the study, subsequent reports or publications, and obscure any specific details that would expose your real identity.

The transcripts will be saved in password protected documents. Audio recordings and hard copies of transcriptions will be stored in password protected files on my laptop and a secure area in my home office. Only my supervisors and I will have access to your information. All recordings, transcriptions and consent forms will be handed to my supervisor, Dr Neville Robertson, at the end of the research project. Dr Robertson will store all your records securely and separately, and destroy them after five years.

How can I take part in this research project?

If you would like to participate in the study and accept this invitation, please give Mike your contact details (e.g. phone number and/or email address). Please let Mike know how you would prefer to be contacted. I will then get in touch with you to confirm your participation in the study.

What if I change my mind?

I am interested to hear YOUR personal story and if you do decide to participate, you can still decline to talk about any topic you do not feel comfortable about. You are also able to ask questions about the study throughout the project. Should you have doubts about your involvement in the research and wish to withdraw, then you can do so at any stage up until two weeks after you have read your transcript.

What if I want further information?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisors, Dr Neville Robertson and Dr Carrie Barber, if you have any questions related to this research project.

Thank you.

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Waikato Research and Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research you may contact the convenor of the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee, Dr Rebecca Sargisson, phone 07 557 8673, email: rebeccas@waikato.ac.nz.

Appendix B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Possible questions in case the flow of the conversation stops:

- How do you think your experience of sexual abuse as a child changed you as a person?
  Theme: Identity of self

- How do you think your experiences changed your personal development?
- Have you ever felt disadvantaged in a particular area (e.g. school, career, having your own family) of your life due to your experiences?
  Theme: Personal development and restrictions

- What do you think helped and still helps you to live through your experiences?
  Theme: Coping mechanisms

- How do you think your experiences changed your outlook on life, your values and beliefs?
- How do you believe your experiences affected your goals/perspectives for the future?
  Theme: Outlook on life / Goals and perspectives

- How do you think your experiences affected your relationships with family, friends, others?
  Theme: Relationships with others

- How do you believe your experiences impacted or still impact your relationship with your spouse?
  Theme: Dynamics in romantic relationships

- How do you think society as a whole influenced decisions you made along the way?
  Theme: Social impact, societal approval/disapproval

Appendix C

Living with the Aftermath of Male Child Sexual Abuse
Consent Form for Participants

I have read the **Participant Information Sheet** for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that:
(please tick the box)

☐ I am free to decline to answer any particular questions in the study or to withdraw any information I have provided up until two weeks after I have read the transcript.

Please indicate how you prefer to be contacted: ☐ email: _____

☐ phone: _____

I agree to provide information to the researcher under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the **Participant Information Sheet**.

I agree to my responses to be recorded and to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the **Participant Information Sheet**.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Please provide your address details below if you wish:
(please tick a box)

☐ **a summary of the findings**

☐ **a copy of the full thesis report**

Either,
Email address: _____

Or,Street address: _____

Suburb: _____

City: _____ Postcode: _____

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