

Introduction to
Understanding the Sexual Betrayal of Boys and Men

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When I began speaking in public about the sexual victimization of men and boys in the early 1990s, I frequently met with blank stares from both lay people and colleagues. The subject was rarely mentioned in either the literature or the media, and many doubted such behavior could even happen.

When speaking to professional audiences, I began by asking how many among them were treating male patients who had been sexually victimized. In a group of 100 therapists, perhaps two or three would raise their hands. I then asked, “How many of you have ever asked a man about a history of sexual victimization?” Virtually no one ever raised a hand; professionals had simply not been trained to inquire about male sexual victimization. Indeed, they were generally not trained to inquire about childhood sexual abuse at all.

I never had that training either, and I also never asked about male sexual victimization when I began practicing. Early in my career some men did reveal boyhood sexual abuse, but in my ignorance I never addressed it at any length and never knew how

to understand their disclosures or deal with the aftereffects of their sexual trauma. The little I'd heard about childhood sexual abuse suggested accounts of it should be approached cautiously, as they were likely to be expressions of sexual fantasy or wish fulfillment rather than reports of real events. This was the legacy of early battles in the psychoanalytic world about the origins of hysteria and whether patients who reported being sexually abused as children could be believed.

But in the 1980s a patient slowly began to recall boyhood sexual abuse by his father and brother. Memory fragments emerged slowly over a period of months, with neither of us initially understanding the portent of the unnerving flashes and partial images he recalled. There was partial confirmation of his abuse when he confided in a sister who disclosed she had been abused as well. Then other pieces of his history began to fall into place as his sexual abuse became clearer. I could no longer deny what we were dealing with.

I looked into the professional literature for help in understanding how to treat this man. I was surprised to discover that other than a few articles (e.g., Nasjaleti, 1980; Finkelhor, 1981; Johnson and Shrier, 1985), virtually nothing had been written about male sexual victimization.

There were articles and books about female victims of sexual abuse and incest, though not many (Herman, 1981, is one example). These usually acknowledged the existence of male victims, but included no discussion, leaving the reader to believe either that boys and men were rarely abused or that the impact on them was not different than on female victims. Neither, as it turns out, is true.

By the time I wrote *Betrayed as Boys: Psychodynamic Treatment of Sexually Abused Men* (Gartner, 1999), more articles and some books had been published about male sexual victimization in the professional literature (e.g., Briere et al., 1988; Bolton, Morris, & MacEachron, 1989; Singer, 1989; Mezey and King, 1992; Gonsiorek, Bera, & LeTourneau, 1994; Friedrich, 1995; Lisak, Hopper, & Song, 1996; Holmes and Slap, 1998). Additionally, there were now books on the subject written for sexually abused men themselves (e.g., Lew, 1988; Hunter, 1990). The field had gained a certain amount of professional recognition, although it was not yet part of the public discourse.

This changed in 2002, when an increasingly public series of scandals emerged involving sexual abuse of boys by Roman Catholic priests and its subsequent cover-up by the Church hierarchy. At that point, whether or not any individual accusation was thought to have merit, it was undeniable that the sexual victimization of young boys by adults could and did take place.

By now, as demonstrated by the contributors to this book and its companion volume, *Healing Sexually Betrayed Men and Boys: Treatment for Sexual Abuse, Assault, and Trauma*, we know much more about male sexual victimization than we did in 1999. Rather than write, as I did in *Betrayed as Boys*, in a single voice, sharing my own expertise, I have invited individuals experienced about diverse aspects of male sexual victimization to write about their areas of knowledge. They are a varied group, including mental health professionals of distinct backgrounds, academics, survivors, survivor-professionals, attorneys, and a physician. Each has written about a topic in which he or she is experienced and authoritative. In this volume the focus is on understanding how a

boy or man processes sexual victimization, using clinical examples. The companion volume focuses on the healing process for sexually traumatized boys and men.

This book introduces the reader to sexually abused men and their experience, first through clinical and personal vignettes (Gartner, Lisak), then through understanding a male survivor's reaction to somatic problems (Spinelli), research about male sexual victimization (Easton), and brain chemistry after trauma (Brenner, Hopper). Next the emphasis is on the cultural and institutional settings of male sexual victimization (Mujica, Burmester, Gartner), and finally on various aspects of sexuality, from trafficking in adolescent boys (Procopio) to gender and/or sexually diverse men (Struve, Fradkin, and Beckstead) to orientation confusion, sexual interests and compulsions, kinks, and sexual dysfunctions (Kort).

The breadth of points of view is astounding. I invite you to partake.