

Coming to Terms with Sexual Abuse*

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On January 1st of 2002, I became President of MaleSurvivor: National Organization on Male Sexual Victimization (www.malesurvivor.org) for a two-year term. Little did I know that within weeks there would be an explosion of interest in the subject of male sexual victimization because of the scandals involving the Catholic Church.

In the past few months, I have become a media spokesperson in a far more active way than I ever imagined. Numerous newspapers and other media journalists have approached us for comments on pedophile priests and their victims. Interestingly, a number of the stories we worked on were killed by editors. My sense is that the media, like the public at large, is more comfortable thinking about the effects of the scandal on the Church than about the effects of sexual abuse on boys. As I write this in late June, however, there has been a shift in media attitude. Journalists have made more serious attempts to find out about what happens to victims, and this has resulted in longer interviews and some television appearances for me and some of our members, including men who were abused by priests.

My connection to MaleSurvivor goes back to 1994, when I was present at the constitutional convention in Columbus, Ohio, that formally created it. However, MaleSurvivor's roots go back further, to 1988, when a group of therapists from different parts of the country who were working in isolation with male survivors of sexual abuse decided to have a conference in Minneapolis. Since then, we have had a series of conferences, approximately every other year, in Tucson, Atlanta, Portland (OR), Washington, Columbus, San Francisco, Vancouver, and New York. They have included a heady blend of participants: therapists who work with male survivors, male survivors, therapists who are themselves male survivors, survivors' families and loved ones, and other professionals who work with male survivors (researchers, law enforcement and corrections officials, criminologists, attorneys, educators, clergy, journalists, and students). Our conferences have always been exciting and filled with emotional immediacy, in addition to offering professional training and also healing to survivors. (Our next conference is scheduled in Minneapolis on September 18-22, 2003.)

MaleSurvivor's mission statement is: "Dedicated to a safe world, we are an organization of diverse individuals, committed through research, education, advocacy and activism

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to the prevention, treatment and elimination of all forms of sexual victimization of boys and men." To this end we have organized healing retreats for male survivors, advocated for male survivors in state legislatures, responded to media, encouraged research, and established our web site. In a recent seven-day period, the web site had over 70, 000 hits worldwide. I invite you to visit it. It contains a variety of resources, including bibliographies, articles, a Discussion Forum and chat room for male survivors, and a Resource Directory of professionals who work with male survivors. I encourage anyone who has an interest in treating this population to apply to be in the Resource Directory. This can be done on line, and you do not have to be a MaleSurvivor member to be listed, although of course we welcome new members.

My own interest in male sexual victimization goes back to the 1980's, when a male patient began to recall memories of severe sexual molestation by his father. I had little understanding of sexual victimization, and read what I could in the literature. At that time, there was very little available, and what there was mostly related to women. While these books and articles acknowledged the existence of sexual abuse of boys, they did not focus on it, and the reader was left with the impression that it is rare and that its treatment is very similar to that of sexually abused women. That did not match my own impressions, which became stronger when I started a group for sexually victimized men after I could not find one in New York for my patient. As I began to understand how masculine gender socialization and concerns about homosexuality intersect with a man's capacity to process sexual victimization, I began to write about my views in a series of five papers given at Division 39 (Psychoanalysis). These papers led to my writing *Betrayed as Boys: Psychodynamic Treatment of Sexually Abused Men*, which was published by the Guilford Press in 1999. I became a member of MaleSurvivor's Board of Directors in 1998, was Program Chair for its 2001 conference in New York, and started my term as President this year. Had anyone told me twenty years ago that this would be the arc of my career, I would have thought them ridiculous!