

**Breaking the Silence:**  
**The Stories of Men who are Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

by

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I declare that **Breaking the Silence: The Stories of Men who are Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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(Mrs.) H.C. Medurić

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Date

## Abstract

This research focuses on the personal stories surrounding men who were sexually abused in childhood. The aim of this study is to shed light on the experiences of these men, and attempt to lift the veil of secrecy and stigma attached to male childhood sexual abuse. Three participants were selected for this qualitative study using the selection procedure of purposive sampling. Each participant was introduced with the use of a semi-structured interview format, and the information that was obtained from each participant was explored using a hermeneutic analysis approach. The results suggest that society's naivety and ignorance of issues pertaining to sexually abused men are prominent. Both differences and similarities, in relation to the experiences of these men, are evident. With particular reference to the three participants whom partook in this study, the differing experiences that appear significant are suicidal ideation; low self-esteem; flashbacks; fear of men in general; and mind-body separation. The similar experiences that are evident within the participants' stories are their desire for secrecy; fear of what society may think of them; desperate attempts to cope and subsequently escape the memories of their pasts; long-lasting effects, such as a lack of trust and an absence of intimacy; and determination to move forward and prevail.

**Key words:** Sexual abuse; male; men; boy; childhood; molestation; abuser; secrecy; silence; coping strategies; taboos; postmodernism; social constructionism; hermeneutics; qualitative research.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### “ONCE UPON A TIME”: AN INTRODUCTION

*Once upon a time in the middle of a thick forest stood a small cottage, the home of a pretty little girl known to everyone as Little Red Riding Hood. One day, her Mummy waved her goodbye at the garden gate, saying: “Grandma is ill. Take her this basket of cakes, but be very careful. Keep to the path through the wood and don’t ever stop. That way, you will come to no harm.”*

*Little Red Riding Hood kissed her mother and ran off. “Don’t worry,” she said, “I’ll run all the way to Grandma’s without stopping.”*

*Full of good intentions the little girl made her way **through the wood**, but she was soon to forget her mother’s wise words...*

*The wood became thicker and thicker...*

*In the meantime, two wicked eyes were spying on her, from behind a tree a strange rustling in the woods made Little Red Riding Hood’s heart thump.*

*Now quite afraid she said to herself, “I must **find the path** and run away from here!”*

*At last she reached the path again but her heart leapt into her mouth at the sound of a gruff voice which said: “Where are you going, my pretty girl, all alone in the woods?”*

*“I’m taking Grandma some cakes. She lives at the end of the path,”*  
*said Little Red Riding Hood in a faint voice.*

*When he heard this, the wolf (for it was the big bad wolf himself)*  
*politely asked: “Does Grandma live by herself?”*

*“Oh, yes”, replied Little Red Riding Hood, “and she never opens the*  
*door to strangers!”*

*“Goodbye. Perhaps we’ll meet again,” replied the wolf. Then he*  
*leaped [sic] away thinking to himself “I’ll gobble the grandmother first,*  
*then lie in wait for the grandchild!”*

*At last, the cottage came in sight. Knock! Knock! The wolf rapped on*  
*the door.*

*“Who’s there?” cried Grandma from her bed.*

*“It’s me, Little Red Riding Hood. I’ve brought you some cakes because*  
*you’re ill,” replied the wolf, trying hard to hide his gruff voice.*

*“Lift the latch and come in,” said Grandma, unaware of anything*  
*amiss, till a horrible shadow appeared on the wall. Poor Grandma! For in*  
*one bound, the wolf leapt across the room and, in a single mouthful,*  
*swallowed the old lady. Soon after, Little Red Riding Hood tapped on the*  
*door.*

*“Grandma, can I come in?” she called.*

*Now, the wolf had put on the old lady’s shawl and cap and slipped into*  
*the bed. Trying to imitate Grandma’s quavering little voice, he replied:*

*“Open the latch and come in!”*

*“What a deep voice you have,” said the little girl in surprise.*

*“The better to greet you with,” said the wolf.*

*“Goodness, **what big eyes you have.**”*

*“The better to see you with.”*

*“And what big hands you have!” exclaimed Little Red Riding Hood, stepping over to the bed.*

*“The better to hug you with,” said the wolf.*

*“What a big mouth you have,” the little girl murmured in a weak voice.*

*“The better to eat you with!” growled the wolf, and jumping out of bed, he swallowed her up too. Then, with a fat full tummy, he fell fast asleep.*

*In the meantime, a hunter had emerged from the wood, and on noticing the cottage, he decided to stop and ask for a drink. He had spent a lot of time trying to catch a large wolf that had been terrorizing the neighborhood, but had lost its tracks. The hunter could hear a strange whistling sound; it seemed to be coming from inside the cottage. He peered through the window and saw the large wolf himself, with a fat full tummy, snoring away in Grandma’s bed.*

*“The wolf! He won’t get away this time!”*

*Without making a sound, the hunter carefully loaded his gun and gently opened the window. He pointed the barrel straight at the wolf’s head and BANG! The wolf was dead.*

*“Got you at last!” shouted the hunter in glee. “You’ll never frighten anyone again.”*

*He cut open the wolf's stomach and to his amazement, out popped  
Grandma and Little Red Riding Hood, safe and sound.*

*"You arrived just in time," murmured the old lady, quite overcome by  
all the excitement.*

*"It's safe to go home now," the hunter told Little Red Riding Hood.*

*"The big bad wolf is dead and gone, and there is no danger on the path...."*

(*"Little Red"*, n.d., ¶ 1-36).

The age-old fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* may be read in a variety of ways. It may be primarily read as fantastical words in a mystical story, taking the reader into a far away magical land of folk and fable. On the other hand, this seemingly innocent children's story may be read as an allegory - "The wolf who intends to eat the little girl symbolizes the adult male who abuses her, having deceived her in order to gain her confidence" (Dorais, 2002, p. 27). The wolf appears to have planned and manipulated the whole event, in order to lure Little Red Riding Hood within his reach. Such a tactic also appears to be adopted by abusers in terms of grooming a child or children, with the intention of sexually abusing them (Sanderson, 2004). Such an interpretation gives a rather gloomy slant to this virtuous children's fable. However, this interpretation can be extended even further to an additionally daunting conclusion: What if Little Red Riding Hood was a boy? "Little boys know how to defend themselves, it seems, so [*sic*] no one can imagine that they too can be taken in by wolves" (Dorais, 2002, p. 28).

### **Aim and Rationale**

*While our emotional response is understandable, if we do not take time to pause, reflect and undertake the research that can help us address the challenges of child sexual abuse, our actions will be ill-informed and will do little to turn the tide of this very distressing and highly challenging problem (Richter, Dawes & Higson-Smith, 2004, p. 1).*

Childhood sexual abuse is a devastating experience that the world recognises; yet it continues to occur with shattering consequences for the abused. When it comes to delving into the deep pool of the devastation of sexual abuse, the focus is on little girls being the victims of abusers' desires. With little girls therefore appearing to be the focus, a rather untouched and minimally researched area of sexual abuse appears to emerge: What about the boys?

Sexual abuse statistics and therapeutic interventions appear to zone in on the little girls who become easy targets for predators. While boys are not entirely forgotten, "...the focus on women has misleadingly implied that the occurrence of sexual abuse among boys is rare" (Gartner, 1999, p. 19). This needs to be addressed, as it is all children, and not only female children, that are at risk of being sexually abused (Bolton, Morris & MacEachron, 1989). Therefore, male childhood sexual abuse also needs to be acknowledged with the same regard as female childhood sexual abuse, as "...the term



*childhood sexual abuse* is a misnomer unless the plight of sexually abused boys is acknowledged” (Spiegel, 2003, p. 15).

According to Finkelhor (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006), there has been inconsistent and minimally explored research conducted regarding the victimisation of children. In addition, Mendel (1995) stated that even though there have been clinical reports pertaining to boy victims of sexual abuse from as early as 1937, male sexual victimisation still remains an unexplored phenomena within research. Even less research focusing on male survivors of childhood sexual abuse has been done thus far, and is difficult to find, especially within a South African context.

“We tend to be more protective of female than male children. Consequently, the victimization of female children, particularly their sexual victimization, may raise greater concern than a similar situation involving a male” (Bolton et al., 1989, p. 39). Thus, the main focus of research studies conducted regarding sexually abused children tends to be on female survivors, their experiences, their coping mechanisms, and their healing or therapeutic processes. This gender bias has overshadowed the sexual abuse of male children and the subsequent issues relating to it (Rodriguez-Srednicki & Twaite, 2006).

Due to the focus on female sexual abuse victims, there is limited research, programmes, and information to assist men who were sexually abused in childhood, and therefore “...it is assumed that boy’s experiences are basically similar to girls’, and that their treatment therefore follows similar lines” (Gartner, 1999, p. 19). Sepler (as cited in Mendel, 1995,

p. 91) stated that “...principles appropriate to female victimization are inappropriately transferred to work with males where they may do more harm than good.” This may lead to many mental health service providers failing to question in ways that are deemed to be sensitive to male perceptions and experiences (Gonsiorek, Bera & LeTourneau, 1994). This poses a problem.

Although there are many areas that appear to coincide with regards to the effects of childhood sexual abuse between men and women, there are certain aspects that appear unique to male sexual abuse. According to Urquiza and Capra, (as cited in Drauker, 2000), the acting out of compulsive sexual behaviours, as well as conduct disturbances, appear to be two areas that stand out with regards to males who have been sexually abused. For Watkins and Bentovim, (as cited in Friedrich, 1995, p. 12), there appears to be three effects of sexual abuse thought to be unique to males: “1) confusion/anxiety over sexual identity, 2) inappropriate attempts to reassert masculinity, and 3) recapitulation of the victimizing experience.”

Regarding the distinctiveness of male childhood sexual abuse, further research needs to be conducted in order to formulate effective treatment programmes and therapeutic interventions that are sensitive to gender specific issues that may arise for such men, as “...there remains limited empirical evidence on treatment effectiveness for sexually abused adult males” (Romano & De Luca, 2005, p. 41). This is because “male survivors of child sexual abuse constitute an extremely under-identified, underserved, and, all too often, misunderstood population” (Mendel, 1995, p. 1). According to Drauker and

Petrovic (as cited in Draucker, 2000), by disregarding the male's perceptions and experiences pertaining to their sexual abuse, and thus by working solely from a female-based model, counsellors may increase the male survivor's feelings of isolation and alienation. For if a counsellor approaches therapy with a man from a female researched model pertaining to dealing with sexual abuse, his or her male client may feel that his personal sexual abuse experience is not being understood from his unique frame of reference. This may cause him to distance himself from dealing with his trauma; for if a therapist is unable to understand him, how will the rest of the world be able to understand? Therefore, it becomes important to remember that in dealing with sexual abuse, one size does not fit all.

Within the South African context, which according to Van Niekerk (as cited in Davidson, 2008) has "...the highest incident of rape per 100,000 of the population...", a problem tends to emerge when it comes to researching men who were sexually abused as children. Firstly, the definition of sexual abuse appears inconsistent as it varies across differing cultures, as well as over time (Davidson, 2008). Ultimately, this may lead to confusion when defining sexual abuse, especially within South Africa where multiculturalism is prominent. Up until very recently, where the new definition of rape includes all individuals and not only women (National Assembly, 2003), the prior definition within the (South African) National Policy Guidelines for Victims of Sexual Offences explains rape as: "Intentional, unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent" (South African Police Service, 1998, p. 2). This earlier definition completely rules out that men can be raped, and thus sexually assaulted or abused. Such a notion causes great

concern, as even though the laws and definitions have now changed, the change is still new, and stigmas and beliefs need time in order to dissipate.

Research has found that “The percentage of male survivors disclosing the abuse suffered to some recipient is constantly the lowest for all kinds of abuse analysed by the current research” (Sturt, 2006, p. 126). Additionally, some studies have found that “...by analysing the average latency timing between the experience of sexual abuse and its disclosing or asking for help by those who were able to do it, boys are more likely to delay disclosure rather than girls” (Sturt, 2006, p. 126). Such findings appear to raise the question as to why men decide not to disclose their abuse; which factors may be the reasons for their silence; and subsequently, if they do come forward with their stories, why does it take them so long to do so?

According to Spiegel (2003, p. 167), “Concealment is the pervasive secrecy that surrounds childhood sexual abuse, both as a social phenomenon and as a personal life event. It is typically enforced by the perpetrator, reinforced by social mythology, and complied with by the boy”. These notions, amongst others, have lead to the initiation and conducting of this study, with an attempt to understand why male survivors appear to be the least forthcoming with disclosing their childhood sexual abuse.

*As difficult as these matters might be, it is important that we confront them, not least because they are part of the complexity that attends our*

*understanding of sexual abuse, and part of the complexity that needs to be incorporated into the range of our responses (Richter et al., 2004, p. 2).*

This research therefore intends to portray the personal stories surrounding men who were sexually abused in childhood, by bringing a ‘human face’ to the issue of male sexual abuse (Mendel, 1995). The research into participants’ stories is aimed at shedding light on their experiences of sexual abuse, and how as both children, and now as adults, they have managed to cope. Furthermore, this research wishes to lift the veil of secrecy pertaining to male sexual abuse and the stigma attached to it. Secrecy and silence are therefore a focus within this study.

The information obtained from this study may possibly be further used to provide guidelines to practitioners who may encounter male clients who have been sexually abused; as well as to develop more ‘male considerate’ sexual abuse programmes that will endeavour to aid such men in gaining freedom by coming forward, revealing, and dealing with the horror of their childhood sexual abuse.

### **Study Outline**

The outline of this research study has been arranged into five overarching chapters, each comprising its own distinct focus. Each of these chapters shall be briefly discussed so as to provide a framework in which this study shall be presented.

### **Chapter One – “Once upon a time”: An Introduction**

Chapter One has thus far provided an introduction to this research study, along with the intended aims and rationale which are embedded within the centre of this investigation.

### **Chapter Two – “Through the wood”: A Literature Review**

Chapter Two focuses on delving into current and past literature pertaining to male childhood sexual abuse. An extensive search has been conducted in an attempt to create a context from which this study may be read and understood. In addition, focus has been given to the notion of silence, as this study is aimed at ‘Breaking the Silence’ of male childhood sexual abuse. Thus, Chapter Two intends on providing a body of knowledge, as well as creating an awareness regarding the travesty of sexually abused males.

### **Chapter Three – “Find the path”: The Methodology**

Chapter Three provides the ‘lens’ through which the researcher chose to ‘look’ while conducting this study. The focus throughout this chapter is therefore on the methods of conducting, obtaining, and analysing the information that was acquired from each research participant. Within this chapter the reader will become familiar with the chosen qualitative research design of this study, along with the postmodernistic ontology and social constructionist epistemology that lay the foundation upon which this research was conducted. In addition, Chapter Three focuses on the research approach utilised within this investigation, which includes the manner of sampling, data collection processes, and analysis method.

#### **Chapter Four – “What big eyes you have”: The Results**

Chapter Four focuses on the findings and results that were obtained from each participant who volunteered to participate in this study, in relation to their thoughts, feelings, and memories of being sexually abused as young boys. Detailed accounts of each participants experiences pertaining to their abuse have also been provided. This obtained information has then been analysed in a hermeneutic manner, which provides the reader with the dominant themes that appeared to emerge from each participant’s story.

#### **Chapter Five – “Got you at last”: A Discussion and Conclusion**

Chapter Five focuses on three main aspects: Firstly, a discussion pertaining to the results that were obtained within the previous chapter is presented, with the results being discussed in terms of both similarities and differences that were found amongst the participants’ stories; secondly, the potential strengths, limitations and recommendations of this research study is then provided; and thirdly, concluding thoughts to this study as a whole is then given.

And so, Little Red Riding Hood’s mother said: “Keep to the path through the wood and don’t ever stop. That way, you will come to no harm” (“Little Red”, n.d., ¶ 1).

## CHAPTER TWO

### “THROUGH THE WOOD”: A LITERATURE REVIEW

*The existence of child mistreatment in history...is indisputable. However, the extent of such mistreatment and the interpretation within the societies where it took place are issues of greater contention (Corby, 2006, p. 16).*

Many media reports suggest that the sexual abuse of children is a relatively new phenomenon (Richter et al., 2004). This may be as the acknowledgement of childhood sexual abuse only began to occur around the mid 1970s, and according to Banning (as cited in Crowder, 1995), it was not until the 1980s that the idea of males being victims to sexual predators was even entertained. According to Kinnear (2007), a large proportion of childhood sexual abuse cases are never reported to officials. This factor may have played an active role in why the acknowledgement of sexual abuse has occurred so late within society's history.

*The impact of child sexual abuse has the potential to make reporting the experience difficult for anybody...in considering the extent of secrecy and denial set up and maintained by those who abuse...it is easy to see how a wider social denial would prevent a child from telling (Durham, 2003a, p. 18).*



Society appears to have taken its time in coming forward and recognising the existence of childhood sexual abuse, but this does not mean that childhood sexual abuse is only beginning to occur. It may actually be one of the oldest existing offences regarding children, as according to Kahr (as cited in Richter et al., 2004), child molestation can be traced back to the ancient Greek and Roman societies, the Renaissance, and even to the Victorian era. De Mause (1974, p. 1) stated that:

*The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awake. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of childcare and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorised and abused.*

A further reason as to why childhood sexual abuse may only be starting to gain recognition over the past few decades, may be due to many forms of sexual abuse being covered up, ignored, or somehow rationalised. Certain forms of sexual abuse that may have been overlooked are incidences such as “defloration rites at puberty, pederasty, incest, murder and rape of child captives, and the masturbation of infants during pacification” (Richter et al., 2004, p. 23). As such acts may have been disregarded as being sexual abuse, many of its victims may not have come forward to declare what has happened to them – further fuelling the cycle of abusive silence.

As the recognition of childhood sexual abuse has only been prevalent for a relatively short period within society’s history – and for an even briefer period concerning male

childhood sexual abuse – relevant and recent data appears somewhat difficult to find, especially pertaining to the South African context of sexually abused males. This is as the majority of data that is available appears to be internationally based.

Some research suggests that in the United States and Canada, “...approximately one in six boys is being [sic] sexually abused before age 16” (Hopper, 2008, p. 1). In one South African based study, the results state that approximately “...two in every five South African schoolboys...are [sic] being forced to have sex” (“BioMed Central”, 2008, ¶ 1) before the age of eighteen years old. In another local study conducted in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, the results suggest that 8.8% of males are forcibly sexually abused (Madu, n.d.). These findings are higher than the previous 6% of males found to be sexually assaulted, in a study done at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Collings, 1994). The difference between these studies may suggest that either male sexual abuse is on the rise, or perhaps more men are coming forward.

### **Defining the Title**

In an attempt to place the reader in the position of understanding how the researcher comprehends and terms the title of this study, “*Breaking the Silence: The Stories of Men who are Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*”, it becomes imperative to define certain ‘key concepts’ pertaining to this investigation. These definitions also help to create useful and meaningful accounts of the participants’ experiences (Feerick, Knutson, Trickett & Flanzer, 2006).

### **‘Breaking the Silence’**

The notion of silence plays a pivotal role within this research enquiry and will be a central focus pertaining to male childhood sexual abuse throughout this chapter, and subsequently, throughout this entire study.

Silence may be defined as the “...absence of speech...avoidance of mentioning a thing, betraying a secret...” (Thompson, 1992, p. 849). Thus, in the context of this study, the notion of ‘Breaking the Silence’ suggests the idea of wanting to ‘break’ through the ‘wall of avoidance’ that appears to surround the topic of male childhood sexual abuse; thus allowing for those who have been sexually abused to be heard and freed from their invisible ‘muting’ restraints.

Within this definition the concept of ‘betraying a secret’ also becomes important to mention, as the idea of secrecy appears to be pertinently linked to sexual abuse, and thus silence and secrecy appear to go hand-in-hand within this research investigation.

### **‘Stories’**

On many occasions, a story may also be defined as a fictitious tale or words told without any ‘real’ evidence supporting them. In addition, a story may also be viewed as being a recollection of past events, or perhaps a narration of facts or experiences (Thompson, 1992).

In the context of this enquiry, the researcher wishes to define a story according to the latter definition, and subsequently view the stories that her participants will tell as truthful recollections and narrations of each of their past experiences, memories, and endeavours.

### **‘Men’**

The concept of ‘men’ is another central aspect of this study. What makes the focus on men so significant is that there appears to be little research that has been conducted pertaining to men who have been sexually abused in childhood, in relation to the vast amounts of research that has been conducted pertaining to women who have been sexually abused in childhood. Due to the realisation of this phenomenon, the researcher was motivated to conduct her study within the male-focused realm of childhood sexual abuse.

Hence, in the context of this study, ‘men’ will be considered to be those individuals who are male in gender, and who are over the age of eighteen years old. Therefore, only those participants, who were currently over the age of eighteen years old and male, were considered for participation within this study – given that they also met all of the other criteria, which will be discussed further on in Chapter Three. However, it is also important to briefly mention that throughout this study, if a male who is under the age of eighteen years old is referred to, he will be referred to as a ‘boy’ or ‘child’.

### **‘Survivors’**

A survivor may be defined as an individual who is able to survive and function in spite of opposition, misfortune, or setbacks (“Dictionary.com”, ¶ 1). In relation to this study, the participants are viewed as being survivors as they have experienced the adversity of being sexually abused. Thus, instead of labelling the participants as victims, as so many studies tend to do, the researcher found it more appropriate to discuss the participants as being survivors, as in spite of their extreme experiences, they have continued to survive.

### **‘Childhood’**

The International Convention for the Rights of the Children (ICRC) defines a child as “...a human being aged under 18 years old” (“UNICEF Bolivia”, 2003, ¶ 9). Additionally, Green (as cited in Rodriguez-Srednicki & Twaite, 2006) also defines childhood as being any age that is under eighteen years old. Furthermore, within the South African context, Richter and Dawes (2008) state that the South African Constitution and the Children’s act tends to reiterate these aforementioned definitions of childhood, by defining a child as anyone who is under the age of eighteen years old. Thus, childhood refers to the period within a child’s life when they are younger than eighteen years old. Therefore, when discussing the sexual abuse of males in childhood, this study is referring to those males who were sexually abused when they were younger than eighteen years of age.

### **‘Sexual Abuse’**

Sexual abuse is a phenomenon that has been defined by many individuals in a variety of different ways, which thus makes a single unified definition difficult to find. According

to Le Roux (1992) most of the definitions of sexual abuse include the following: The child has been exploited sexually by an adult; the sexual exploitation of the child is directed at sexually gratifying the abuser in a variety of ways; the child is involved in sexual activities which he does not understand and thus cannot consent too; and the child's psychosocial development is not taken into consideration and the sexual act or acts violate both social norms and nurturing roles.

Botha (as cited in Le Roux, 1994) adds the following aspects to the previous definition when defining childhood sexual abuse: The relationship between the perpetrator and the victim is one of unequal authority; the child is unable to defend himself against his abuser; the child is unable to adequately cope on an emotional level with the sexual stimulation that he has been exposed too; and at a point the child becomes aware of the social inappropriateness and unacceptability of what has happened to him.

In adding to the aforementioned definitions of sexual abuse, Allender (1995) also adds that sexual abuse includes any form of interaction or contact (verbal, visual, or psychological), which an adult has with a child or adolescent, that is of a sexual nature. *Verbal interactions* may be “Direct solicitation for sexual purposes; seductive (subtle) solicitation or innuendo; description of sexual practices; repeated use of sexual language and sexual terms as personal names” (Allender, 1995, p. 51). *Visual interactions* may take the form of the child being exposed to pornography, sexual acts, genitals, provocative attire (i.e.: underwear); and inappropriate attention that is directed towards the child's body or clothing for the purpose of sexual stimulation (Allender, 1995).

Finally, *psychological interactions* may take the form of the abuser being intrusively interested in violating physical and sexual boundaries with the child (such as the repeated use of enemas); as well as the violation of sexual and relational boundaries (such as using the child as a spouse surrogate) (Allender, 1995).

Sexual abuse may also be described in terms of its severity: *Very severe* (genital penetration, oral sex, anal sex); *severe* (unclothed genital touching); and *least severe* (sexual kissing and clothed touching) (Allender, 1995).

As may be evident, the definition of sexual abuse is a complex one, and the researcher has attempted to incorporate as many different aspects of sexual abuse into her understanding of the concept as possible. Thus, any action that appears to be of a sexual nature is considered to be a form of sexual abuse within this study, when an individual who is older than the child uses that child (either forcibly or non-forcibly) for their own sexual gratification.

### **The Hush of Male Childhood Sexual Abuse**

#### ***Helpless Little Children***

There may be many reasons as to why so little is known about male childhood sexual abuse and why it occurs. An initial thought is that the male victims are children. Children tend to fall prey to sexual predators because of the sheer fact that they are children –

helpless, defenceless, vulnerable, and weak. Boys though may be seen as more of an ‘accomplishment’ to many child sexual abusers, as males are meant to be tougher than females – according to society’s implication. Thus, when a little boy is still just a little boy, an innocent child, and is unable to stand up and fight for himself, he may become a target to a power-hungry sexual predator who has the desire to dominate and control.

In addition, the focus of many research projects tends to be on adults, and as for children, “...their behaviour, and treatment simply are not studied as carefully...” (Friedrich, 1995, p. 1). The focus of a large majority of research thus tends to be on the adult population, as they appear somewhat more reliable and understanding as participants. Children therefore appear to be unable to produce reliable testimony (Tredoux, Foster, Allan, Cohen & Wassenaar, 2005), and are therefore not taken as seriously as adults. This tends to suggest that children know nothing, and therefore nothing is known.

### ***Sociocultural Influences***

Sociocultural factors may be a second reason as to why so little is known about male sexual abuse. “Both the scope of the problem of childhood sexual abuse and its sensationalistic aspects have polarized the field” (Friedrich, 1995, p. 2). Society appears to have split the notion of childhood sexual abuse into two: One side of the fence proposes the awfulness and revulsion of the crime of forcing a child to take part in insidious sexual acts; where the other side of the fence questions whether or not sexual abuse actually exists at the extreme level as found in research of this topic. This polarisation may cause confusion for both researchers and the general population, when it



comes to exploring male childhood sexual abuse. Other factors pertaining to sociocultural influences and the sexual abuse of boys concern culture, apartheid, and poverty.

***Cultural beliefs: ‘Respect thy elders’.*** Within South Africa, culture appears to play a very dominant role in relation to childhood sexual abuse, why so little is known about it, and why male children keep their tribulations secret. “Adult behaviour towards children is embedded in local beliefs about what is good, what is bad, and what is necessary for children” (Richter et al., 2004, p. 4). Respect and obedience to ‘elders’ within ones family and environment is something that many South African cultures appear to emphasise. Children are taught through cultural socialisation that adults need to be obeyed at all times. Cultural rules and beliefs therefore appear to have a direct link to the possibility as to why so many child victims of sexual abuse – and particularly male victims within patriarchal cultures – remain silent, as many behaviours and attitudes pertaining to childhood sexual abuse are entrenched in ‘cultural practices’ (Richter et al., 2004).

*If the perpetrator is a member of the child’s immediate or extended family (and most often the breadwinner), they may face the loss of a provider – possibly with dire economic consequences for the entire family. Under these circumstances, the perpetrator is emboldened to continue sexually abusing children. Sadly, children’s socialisation to obedience and silence, and their fear of breaking such codes, may contribute to their abuse (Richter et al., 2004, p. 66).*

Young boys appear to know too well what the consequences of losing a financial provider, as well as disrespecting an elder within the family may be. Being that many cultures appear to subscribe to a patriarchal (male-dominated) way of living, boys are taught from a very early age the importance of ‘being a man’ and providing for ones family. Attached to this notion is the subsequent shame that could be faced, should a man be unable to do so. Thus, if a little boy is sexually abused, especially by their provider or an elder within their family or community, they may know all too well the shame and burden that they may bring to their family if they where to expose their abuser or abusers. As a result, many boys, being obedient to their providers and elders, may be forced into a lifetime of silent despair.

*Apartheid: Cultures divided.* Not only do cultural rules and beliefs appear to play an important role in maintaining the secrecy of male childhood sexual abuse, but so do the actual culture divisions themselves. Within South Africa, cultural differences have been emphasised and highlighted throughout the country’s history. Apartheid increased the gap between cultures by emphasising the superiority of the White race, and the inferiority of the Black race. Although the apartheid government was disbanded in 1994, the effects of that regime appear to have had a ripple effect on the Black children of this country.

According to Thanki and Gill (as cited in Durham, 2003a, p. 19), sexual abuse in Black communities appears to have remained “...undetected due to the racist assumptions of

White practitioners that fail to define circumstances as abusive”. Due to this naivety of many White practitioners at the time, many Black boys who were sexually abused were never recognised. The result of this appears to be that the abuse of Black male children went by, and may continue to go by, undetected. This once again feeds into the silence and secrecy regarding male childhood sexual abuse.

*Poverty: Opportunities and survival.* McKendrick and Hoffman (as cited in Richter et al., 2004, p. 250) suggest that childhood sexual abuse is “...interwoven with the pressures and deprivations of poverty”. Similarly, Zuravin (as cited in Madu, 2003) found that poverty, economic stress, and inadequate social support are all strong predicting factors of child sexual abuse. Thus, economic destitution may also be linked to childhood sexual abuse and reasons why it may be kept silent. In South Africa there is a large proportion of the population living in extreme poverty, which coincides with the country’s high unemployment rates.

Evidence appears to suggest that environmental and personal conditions that increase stress, reduce child safety (Richter, 2003). According to Netshiombo (as cited in Richter et al., 2004, p. 76), “...with job losses, continuing unemployment and rampant poverty [in South Africa], child abuse seems to be a softer option for airing one’s frustrations”. Thus, as the stress and subsequent frustration within a household appears to increase, due to unemployment and poverty, children appear to become easy targets for adults, who appear to ‘claim’ back their power by becoming sexual abusers.

In addition, the high unemployment rates within South Africa may also link to the possibility of abuse through the amount of ‘free-time’ that (potential) abusers may have. Thus, opportunities may be created for abusers to abuse children, as they are more ‘available’ to do so, given that they are unemployed. What makes this notion more perturbing is that according to Richter and Dawes (2008, p. 86), “Seventy-one per cent of children live in households in which no adult is employed....” within South Africa. This suggests that a large percentage of children who live within poverty stricken communities are ‘available’ to be abused by the very people within their environment who are unemployed.

Within lower economic areas, not only do abusers have more time to find and abuse their victims – perhaps as a form of venting their frustrations about being poor or unemployed (as suggested by Netshiombo) – but also many families are unable to afford to send their children to school. In particular, boy children may then be sent out to find work, instead of going to school, in order to earn a little extra money for their family. These children are then often left unsupervised all day, which increases their vulnerability of being sexually abused (Richter & Dawes, 2008). This may create the reality of many boy children being more accessible to abusers. Once again, due to many cultures teaching, through socialisation, that adults need to be viewed as those who need to be obeyed and respected, abused children are placed within a situation whereby, through respect or fear of the adult or adults who may be abusing them, they keep their abuse silent.

An additional reason for childhood sexual abuse silence within low socio-economic areas has been explored in a recent report by Van Niekerk (as cited in Richter et al., 2004), whereby the notion of ‘survival sex’ was referred to; which Lalor (2008, p. 95) refers to as ‘transactional’ or ‘exchange’ sex. Survival sex may be explained as an act in which an individual partakes in sexual activities (either willingly or unwillingly), whereby they are somehow remunerated with goods needed for their survival. Survival sex may also link with the HIV/AIDS pandemic that is so rife within South Africa. Due to HIV/AIDS, many children “...have lost their biological parents and are living with caretakers, or living on their own as sibling groups” (Richter et al., 2004, p. 267). The responsibility of survival is placed on many of these children, as they have to learn to take care of themselves, and in many cases, take care of the rest of their family as well. In many of these instances, the boys within these families are required to provide, as society equates ‘providing’ with males. Such children are therefore placed in the potential predicament of being sexually exploited in order to survive. Van Niekerk (as cited in Richter et al., 2004, p. 71), adds to this concept by stating that “...many of the children we have come across involved in sex work are paying the rent, purchasing the food for younger siblings or peers, paying school fees, having school uniforms and books provided by the abuser....” in exchange for ‘sex’.

For this reason, many of these abused children may keep the silence about both their abuse and their abusers. This is because if the abuse were to cease, so too would the remuneration that they may receive for their survival. What may worsen this situation for many boys who are being abused, is the predetermined norms prescribed by a patriarchal

society. Men are supposed to be viewed as being strong providers. Young boys may believe – due to gender socialisation – that they need to provide for their families through whichever means possible. Thus, if such a circumstance may present itself to them – whereby they may receive remuneration for sexual acts – they may choose to remain silent about their abuse, in order to meet society’s expectations of them being able to provide.

### ***Predatory Priests***

According to Kiselica, Englar-Carlson and Horne (2008, p. 99), many incidences of childhood sexual abuse have been “...swept under the table by the adults who were responsible for investigating the matter, which was a common response by officials of the Catholic Church...” for many years. Until several years ago, when it was ‘discovered’ that many priests have been sexually abusing and violating boys, the church and its affiliations appeared to be thought of as untouchable. ‘Holier-than-thou’. Goddard (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006) mentioned that the Catholic Church has been guilty of placing its own interests ahead of children in order to protect themselves against any accusations of abuse.

*It is evident that some church bishops have acted to protect priests to avoid a church scandal and shaming the clergy in the eyes of the public. The church leaders deem confidentiality of the accused priests more important than the victims of sexual abuse (Richter et al., 2004, p. 104).*

Kurkjian (as cited in Richter et al., 2004) has pointed out that the combination of religious hierarchy, male power, and a lack of child power, has created a situation that has become high-risk for child abuse. Furthermore, according to Rezendes and Kurkjian (as cited in Richter et al., 2004, p. 104), “The language of ‘celibacy’, ‘high moral ground’, ‘confidentiality in confession’, and ‘shame’ perpetuates molestation of boy children through silence within the parishes as the church continues to assign offenders to unsuspecting parishioners”.

Hiding behind their religious power, many perpetrators who belong or belonged to the church appear or appeared to be able to use their position of power in society to gain the trust of the boys that they sexually abused and may continue to abuse. A boy who has been abused by a priest or perhaps even by several priests, may have additional dilemmas, whereby he may believe that he is betraying God, which may lead him to have a crises of faith (Frawley-O’Dea & Goldner, 2007). In addition, he may believe that because a priest abused him, that it was God’s will or perhaps even a test from God (Fontes, 2005). The shame of going against God and the Bible may be an integral reason as to why sexual abuse by priests has been kept a secret for decades.

Additionally, the notion of how priests have taken vows of chastity, may lead a young boy to a fear that they have somehow ‘tempted’ the priest to break his holy vows (Frawley-O’Dea & Goldner, 2007), especially if the priest refers to the child as being beautiful, attractive or special. “Whatever the adult’s intent in saying such a thing, the boy may well conclude the abuse was his own fault” (Frawley-O’Dea & Goldner, 2007,

p. 90). Such “Stratagems for keeping silence often employ loud denunciations of male-male desire, protestations of priestly purity, and pulpit thunder against the horror of sexual abuse” (Frawley-O’Dea & Goldner, 2007, p. 233). This may ultimately lead each boy who has been sexually abused by a priest into a life of silent shame, guilt, and feelings of being responsible for their abuse.

### *Positions of Power*

Power appears to be directly linked to those who sexually abuse children. Abuse appears to be made easier for perpetrators when they use the authority that they have over the child or children, in order to ensnare their victims. For perpetrators, the power pertaining to the authority that they may hold over children with regards to respect, or even fear, appears to be a well-executed technique of luring their ‘prey’. “Abusive acts may become so intertwined with the exercise of power that those who wield power cease to recognise their acts as abusive” (Richter et al., 2004, p. 5). Thus, the notion of influential individuals who use their position of power - such as priests, school teachers, or even family members or friends to name a few – in order to overpower and dominate a child or even several children, into silence and secrecy, is a very real concept.

Adults appear to gain their power and authority over children due to socialisation and patriarchal ideology. In most societies, children are taught to respect and trust adults, especially those who are seen as authority figures, such as their parents, grandparents, and teachers. Tang (as cited in Richter et al., 2004, p. 66) mentioned the following:



*Such unquestionable obedience to adults (whether male or female) has a double effect: it may either place the child at risk of sexual abuse because of his or her acceptance of subjugation, or it may provide a protective factor that allows adult members of the family ultra-protective rights over children.*

Thus, by being taught to trust unquestionably, “children may become trapped in abusive situations, silenced by their ambivalent feelings towards their familial abusers” (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 142). According to Summit (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006), a child does not even have to be told to keep the abuse a secret, as they learn that it should not be shared with anyone else. This may very well be due to the power and dominance that an abuser may have over the child, which causes such feelings of confusion and ambivalence within the child, that they keep their voices silent regarding their abuse.

Growing up in a patriarchal society, many boys are further pressurised, not only to trust the adults in their lives, but also to look up to and emulate or identify with them – especially those who are in positions of power. People who are in positions of power are regarded as ‘heroes’ and are well respected within their communities. Little boys are taught that they need to grow up to be great men, and whom better to obey than those people in their life who appear ‘great’. Little boys are sanctioned to become like their high-powered fathers, their strong uncles, their caring teachers, their religious cousins; however, what happens to these little boys if their role models are the same people who

are using their power and influence to sexually abuse them? How do they come forward? How do they unmask their heroes? How do they expose the wolf? Perhaps it becomes easier for these young boys to allow the secrecy to continue, so that they can avoid standing up to a power that appears unmatchable.

### ***Emotional Coercion***

Emotional coercion may be another predominant strategy that sexual abusers use in order to keep their male sexual victims silenced:

*Emotional coercion frequently and ordinarily involves subjecting the child to labels such as “fag,” “queer boy,” “whore,” and “sissy.” The perpetrator manipulates the boy into believing that he will be judged harshly if anyone were to find out, employing injunctions such as “If you tell, people will think you’re a slut” and “If anyone finds out, you’ll be scum for life” (Spiegel, 2003, p. 43).*

Thus, by coercing their victims on an emotional level, perpetrators may be able to silence these boys by playing on their very emotional and internal insecurities. These “socially constructed labels adulterate a male’s self-concept and promote a prolonged and enduring sense of alienation from self, others, and life tasks, goals, and aspirations” (Lisak, as cited in Spiegel, 2003, p. 84). Furthermore, as this emotional intimidation comes from the perpetrator – an individual or individuals that the child may respect and fear – many children may believe that what they are told is the absolute truth. This may lead them to

further believe that the people around them will in fact blame and judge them for what their abuser or abusers have done to them, as if they elicited or “allowed” the abuse to happen.

Taking it a step further, emotional coercion may also “...take the form of the perpetrator convincing the boy to conceal the abuse in order to emotionally protect the parent(s) from learning of their son’s activities” (Spiegel, 2003, p. 44). Perpetrators attempt to convince their victims that if they were to disclose the abuse, they alone will be responsible for how their parent or parents and family members will respond to what they have been told.

In addition, perpetrators may themselves believe that if the child does keep the abuse silent, then they are in fact agreeing to the abuse – and maybe even wanting it. Therefore, responsibility for the abuse – in the eye of the child – appears to shift from the perpetrator to the victim, leaving the child responsible for any negative effects that their abuse may have on their home environment, should they disclose. Thus, according to Berliner and Conte (as cited in Spiegel, 2003, p. 44), “The anticipated and, quite often, rendered outcome of a perpetrator’s coercive strategies is the illusion that the boy is, in essence, consenting, thereby rendering the perpetrator less responsible for his or her own actions”.

Not only have the victims of childhood sexual abuse been afforded the responsibility of their abuse, according to their perpetrator or perpetrators, but they also appear to take on this responsibility out of trust, loyalty, fear, and protection. Berliner and Conte (as cited in Spiegel, 2003, p. 44) believe that on many occasions, “Threats and intimidation are the

means by which perpetrator's initiate and maintain the sexually abusive relationship and the concealment surrounding it." According to Spiegel (2003), sexual abuse with boys appears to have a higher incidence of physical and violent force, than abuse with girls. Thus, in a way, boys may be bullied and beaten on many occasions, into bearing the responsibility of their abuse, which may in turn lead to immense feelings of guilt, self-blame, fear, and ultimately, silence.

### ***Dot Com***

Globalisation may play a part in childhood sexual abuse in the twenty-first century. Due to the increasing need for people, countries, and contents to connect, there have been rapid developments in global communication and interaction – such as the use of satellites and the Internet. Globalisation has led to the possibility of individuals, for example, in South Africa, being able to instantly communicate with individuals, for example, in Russia. In terms of global communication, such developments appear to be truly advantageous, and make the world more easily accessible to anyone who wishes to explore it. There are though negative consequences of such technology too. According to Mudaly and Goddard (2006), there is growing evidence that the globalisation of child pornography via the Internet is becoming a new medium for abusing children, and many individuals, especially abusers, are discovering new ways of using the Internet to do so.

“Perpetrators who use the Internet as a subjection modality are in an unparalleled position to devise and reveal self-representations that might otherwise remain dormant or inoperative” (Spiegel, 2003, p. 36). Thus, it may be possible to state that child abusers,

through the use of the Internet, have been given ‘free-reign’ on almost any child on the globe, who has access to the Internet. Abusers are also given the opportunity to interact with other abusers via their computers, which may lead them to teaching others their ‘techniques’, partaking in and sharing child pornography, or displaying video clips of their abuse practices. This places children in a situation whereby, if they have access to the Internet or have been or are currently being sexually abused, there is the possibility of them being (further) abused or exploited by means of the Internet.

Reporting such acts of sexual abuse are tremendously difficult, as the Internet is expansive, and the possibility of finding each ‘Internet-based’ abused child and their abuser, appears to be a problematic feat. In addition, unless a parent or caregiver constantly monitors their child’s access to the Web, they may have very little way of knowing that their child is being sexually abused. This may be a further reason why so few crimes of abuse are reported, spoken of, or even acknowledged.

As a result of so many Internet-based sexually abusive crimes going by undetected, it becomes apparent why such few cases of male sexual abuse, which have occurred as a result of the Internet, are known about. Thus, with fewer cases having been reported, fewer studies are done, minimal research is available to those who have been abused, fewer individual’s come forward, and ultimately it may add to the further silencing of male childhood sexual abuse.

### *The Media's Role*

The media may play a partial role in the non-disclosure of so many male childhood sexual abuse cases. The media appears to fail to identify male victimisation, with their focus rather tending towards female sexual abuse – if they wish to acknowledge sexual abuse at all. According to Gonsiorek et al. (1994, p. 46), the “...lack of realistic images in the media prevents males from having models with which they can identify, and thereby feel less alone.” For perhaps if the stories of male sexual abuse victims were to be exposed to other males, as well as the general public, via the media, there may be a movement towards disclosure through the idea of possible acceptance. An increase in media portrayal regarding male childhood sexual abuse, may also promote knowledge to those who are in denial about the phenomenon, which may lead to an increase in understanding by society, to encourage boys and men to disclose their sexual abuse.

### *Taboos*

Children appear to believe that it is in their best interest to keep their sexual abuse a secret. “The taboo dimension appears in its full evidence with victimized boys” (Sturt, 2006, p. 126), especially in most African societies, where the sexual abuse of male children is considered taboo and is therefore rarely reported (Shumba, 2004). Deciding to keep abuse a secret appears to be “...inextricably bound up with the messages the child receives from the adult during the abuse itself” (Durham, 2003a, p. 81). Boys especially appear to be extremely aware of the taboos and scandal associated with male childhood sexual abuse (Dorais, 2002), such as male vulnerability; erections equalling pleasure; and homosexuality.

Taboos alone may cause a child to clam up from revealing the truth, leading them down the ominous path of eternal secrecy. This may be as many taboos regarding sexual abuse are often a “...reflection of cultural beliefs about gender roles and socialization” (Crowder, 1995, p. 11). The taboos that are associated with male sexual victimisation also “...violates the male ethic of self-reliance, and [*sic*] it raises the stigma of homosexuality” (Bolton et al., 1989, p. 39). Furthermore, these taboos and stereotypical messages “...serve to keep professionals and parents from identifying the warning signs of victimization when they are present” (Bolton et al., 1989, p. 39).

The stigmatisation and taboos associated with male childhood sexual abuse consequently appear to further add to the under identification of male childhood sexual abuse. This is because boys keep their sexual abuse secret and are reluctant to disclose (Bromberg & Johnson, 2001), so as to avoid being stigmatised by their family, culture, and society. For most boys, the embarrassment alone of admitting to having suffered sexually abusive acts, such as being forced to perform oral sex upon another male, causes them to refrain from reporting their abuse (Powell, 2007) for fear of being ostracised. Thus, if a little boy, or even a grown man, were to challenge society at the roots of its social norms by coming forward with their sexual abuse experience or experiences, they could cause the whole tree to come tumbling down on them.

Two further aspects that appear to be related to the taboos associated with male childhood sexual abuse are those of the myths and legends pertaining to sexual abuse, as well as incest. Each shall be further discussed.

*Myths and legends.* Tower (1989, pp. 336-337) has made mention of a few myths that may relate as to why many males may keep their sexual abuse secret:

*The individual who was abused or neglected will abuse or neglect his...own children...Abused and neglected children become deviant adults, involved in crime, drugs, or prostitution...The effects of abuse or neglect are irreparable and render the future adult incapable of leading a fulfilling and happy life.*

Further examples of myths associated with male sexual abuse victims, which may lead a male victim into non-disclosure about their sexual abuse, have been noted by Gonsiorek et al. (1994, pp. 47-49):

*You Cannot Make Males Have Sex Against Their Will...If a Male Has an Erection and Ejaculates, He Consented...All Males Who Sexually Abuse Boys Are Homosexuals...If Abused by a Male, the Abuse Occurred Because the Boy is Gay or Acted Gay...If Abused by a Male, the Male Victim Will Become Gay...If Forced or Tricked by a Female Into Being Sexual, the Boy Should Consider Himself Lucky...If a Boy Is Sexually*



*Abused, He Will Become an Offender... Boys Are Less Hurt by Sexual Abuse Than Girls...Boys Can Protect Themselves From Sexual Abuse...Males Are Initiators of Sex; if Abused, They Got What They Were Looking For....*

According to Durham (2003a) taboos pertaining to sexual abuse, especially with a focus on males who have been abused, appear to have a tendency to lead to ‘false beliefs’. These false beliefs may have a direct link as to why both men and boys may keep their experiences of being sexually abused secret. Durham (2003a, p. 30) mentions that the fears that may arise from men coming forward with their stories of abuse may be reinforced by the following two central false beliefs: “...first, that boys who have been sexually abused will sexually abuse others and, second, that boys who have been sexually abused are or will become gay”. The idea that society may believe that they will turn into the very people that abused them, may be such a terrifying and shameful thought, that it could lead to a life of secrecy and denial to avoid being labelled.

Secondly, many men appear to question both their sexuality and masculinity, especially if they were sexually abused by a male, and experienced sexual arousal and physical pleasure during the abuse; or if they had a lack of arousal and pleasure if the abuser was female. This questioning and confusion about who they really are as sexual beings may also lead to a lifetime of hiding their sexual and gender perplexity that may have arisen as a result of their being sexually abused.

According to Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (as cited in Shumba, 2004, p. 354), the silence pertaining to male sexual abuse is further maintained by “...the extent that the police, medical and legal authorities accept male rape myths, as [*sic*] they will fail to ask male victims if rape has occurred, or may respond inappropriately if rape has clearly happened”. Such actions by authorities figures within society appear to further exacerbate the cycle of silence for those males who were sexually victimised, in addition to the fear of the myths themselves.

***Incestuous relations.*** One particular universal taboo – should it apply to the boy who has been sexually abused – may also lead to permanent silence: Incest. According to Tower (1989, p. 106), “*Incest* is sexual abuse by a blood relative who is assumed to be part of the child’s nuclear family”. The term *incestuous abuse* may also be used when referring to acts of incest, and according to Russell (1986, p. 5), incestuous abuse may be defined as “...any kind of exploitative sexual contact or attempted contact that occurs between relatives, no matter how distant the relationship.” This definition appears to expand the notion of incest from the nuclear family to the extended family, whereby more victims and perpetrators may be included under the term *incest*.

A troubling thought is that the notion of incest has been around for centuries, which may lead to the image of how many children have been sexually molested by their family members over the centuries. Incest is even referred to in the Bible (as cited in Tower, 1989, p. 7): “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. (Lev. 18:7)”.

In many people's minds, the taboo of incest is still sacred after so many centuries of its existence (Tower, 1989). In numerous instances, the very mention of sexual behaviour between family members may cause a direct shift within a conversation to a completely different topic. It is a perturbing thought that after countless incidences of incest over generations and generations, so many individuals still choose to ignore its occurrence.

The unfortunate reality though is that there is still a significant proportion of sexual abuse that is being perpetrated by family members (Tower, 1989). Incest is a reality, and from this reality there are extensive numbers of male incest survivors (Russell, 1995). In a study conducted in Canada pertaining to men and their abuse experiences, "seventy-seven percent of the sample reported [*sic*] sexual activity with a member of their immediate family...." (Mendel, 1995, p. 151). Such a study appears to indicate that incestuous abuse is not only a reality, but also occurring to a large percentage of male victims.

Kempe and Kempe (1984, p. 190) raise a concern pertaining particularly to male victims of incestuous sexual abuse:

*Boys do worse than girls as victims of sexual abuse. Both mother-son and father-son incest leave a boy with such severe emotional insult that emotional growth is often blocked. Some of the boys tend to be severely restricted and may be unable to handle stress without becoming psychotic,*

*while others may have symptoms but never be recognized as incest victims. Incest, then, can be ruinous for the male....*

With such severity and stigma attached to incest, it becomes rather apparent why a boy who has been sexually abused by a family member, would rather live with internal turmoil and secrecy, than disclose the sinister act, of which they ‘partook in’ or where a ‘silent partner’.

#### ***‘Secret Alliances’***

A ‘secret alliance’ that may be present between an abuser and their victim might be a further reason why those who have been sexually abused may keep their abuse covert. An unspoken alliance appears to be formed during the odious act of sexual abuse, whereby the:

*Victims are probably silent about the sexual abuse suffered because they feel strongly on them the “stigma” of the violence experienced. It is the typical implicit attitude of a person who, after experiencing a sexual coercion, feels partially guilty for the incident happened to him (Sturt, 2006, p. 126).*

Feeling responsible for being abused may cause a victim to clam-up regarding their experience or experiences, as they may somehow believe that those who they may confide in will believe that it was their own fault. This may lead to the abuse victims

remaining silent. For boys or men, this may link directly to the taboos regarding males who are being, or have been sexually abused, such as: Because they got an erection, they wanted the abuse to happen – they allowed it to happen. Tsai and Wagner (as cited in Richter et al, 2004, p. 370), add to the notion of responsibility by mentioning that:

*Many child victims do not resist the advances of the perpetrator; some victims receive emotional and/or physical satisfaction from the experience; and abuse may extend over a long period of time and victims may therefore feel that they 'allowed' it to continue.*

This idea of ‘allowing’ their abuser to sexually molest them may create such internal conflict and confusion within a sexually abused boy, that when he may ask himself the question of why he was abused, according to Wieland (1997), he may respond, ‘Because I am bad’. Children appear to internally personalise bad experiences, and believe that bad experiences may happen to them because they themselves are bad. This “...internalised sense of one’s own badness leads to feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, being looked down upon, being damaged, not good enough, and therefore ugly, unacceptable and unworthy” (Richter et al., 2004, p. 370).

Such beliefs play into the hands of the abusers, as each abuser relies on their victim being shamed into silence in order for them to be able to ‘get away with what they have done’. In relation to sexually abused boys, Durham (2003b, p. 309) made reference to how “...boys are [*sic*] made to feel responsible and guilty about being abused and therefore

find [*sic*] it extremely difficult to tell”. What may perhaps add to this difficulty of disclosure, is that many abusers create the illusion of how “...telling would be met with blame, criticism and disbelief” (Durham, 2003b, p. 310). Some abusers may extend this notion of blame, by perhaps adding that the child may then be “...taken from his...home and placed in an orphanage. Or they may [*sic*] threaten to [*sic*]...harm him...or members of the family” (Frawley-O’Dea & Goldner, 2007, p. 75); thus creating such a fear within the child, ensuring that he keeps his sexual abuse silent. The perpetrator may also place additional blame and ownership on their victim by accusing him of “...seducing the perpetrator, thus filling the victim with shame and self-loathing....” (Frawley-O’Dea & Goldner, 2007, p. 76).

Abusers thus appear to generate a climate of child responsibility, which therefore creates ample opportunities for abusers to justify and rationalise their actions, and thus further silencing their victims (Durham, 2003b). Responsibility, guilt, fear, shame, and embarrassment all therefore appear to perpetuate the cycle of silence brought about by sexual abuse.

Some children may also fear that if they were to disclose their sexual abuse, no one may believe them, or if they do, that they just will not care:

*...many abused minors maintain silence because they accurately perceive that there is no one in their environment who will help them if they disclose. It is more helpful for a child to preserve a fantasy that if he told,*

*someone would protect him than it is to reveal the abuse to another who ignores, blames, or reabuses him* (Frawley-O’Dea & Goldner, 2007, p. 76).

### ***Professional Oblivion***

The lack of awareness, research and training within the area of male childhood sexual abuse may be a further reason as to why many male victims might be overlooked. Sgroi (as cited in Bolton et al., 1989, p. 9) proclaims that the “...recognition of sexual molestation in a child is dependent upon the individual’s inherent willingness to entertain the possibility that the condition may exist.” Consequently, many male victims of childhood sexual abuse may go unnoticed due to the lack of attentiveness and recognition that they are given in research.

According to Mendel (1995, p. 3), a “...significant proportion of responsibility for the underreporting of male sexual abuse must be placed on the doorsteps of professionals”. This is as some professionals have in the past and even presently, subscribed to the misconception that: “Abuse doesn’t happen to boys” (Mendel, 1995, p. 3). Sarrell and Masters (as cited in Mendel, 1995, p. 8), believe that the “...failure of the health care professions to recognize the possibility that a man can be sexually assaulted has influenced research on the subject; there has been none”.

As there ‘appears to be’ such an abundance of female victims of childhood sexual abuse, the focus of sexual abuse research and programmes tends to zoom in on the woman, with men being a blur in society’s peripheral vision.

### *Patriarchal Influences*

A study conducted by Etherington (1995) identified a range of problems that appear to occur for men who have been sexually abused. A key difficulty that appeared to arise from this study was that men appear to have “...difficulties in reporting their abuse, in addition to disbelief, fear of judgement, shame, and guilt” (Durham, 2003a, p. 26). Such a study therefore questions the reasons as to what other factors may directly influence why men experience such difficulty in reporting their sexual abuse. Etherington’s study also recognised the possibility of “...the influence of male socialisation and has gone some way to consider the impact of social and patriarchal factors” (Durham, 2003a, p. 26).

The effects of sexual abuse on boys are in many ways different to the effects on girls within South Africa, due to the “...prevailing culture of masculinity and the right of males to dominate over females...” (Davidson, 2008, p. 6). In South Africa, the “one commonality that cuts across the diverse ethnic groups that constitute ‘South Africans’ is patriarchy and acceptance of gendered social divisions” (Richter et al., 2004, p. 102). Bly (as cited in Mendel, 1995, p. 16) wrote that:



*Men are taught over and over when they are boys that a wound that hurts is shameful. A wound that stops you from continuing is a girlish wound. He who is truly a man keeps walking, dragging his guts behind.*

Boys are meant to be strong and masculine, while girls tend to learn to accept their inequality and subordination within a patriarchal society. Thus, when referring to sexual abuse, the notion of little girls being preyed upon sexually appears somewhat congruent with society's predetermined definition of the role of females. Thus, violence against females has become normalised (Davidson, 2008) and thus generally accepted. Conversely, the notion of a little boy falling victim to a sexual predator does not correlate with what society has predetermined as the male role. This may lead to much confusion pertaining to both the identity and role of a sexually abused male, which may direct him into a life of confusion, shame and secrecy.

Both boys and men appear to be directly influenced by patriarchal relations, and according to Durham (2003a, p. 15), being sexually abused may lead them to feel "...marginalized, subordinated, or inadequate, in terms of their beliefs about men's practices, and awaken repressed fears and feelings about their sexuality..." as men. For example, according to Lew (as cited in Kinnear, 2007, p. 17):

*Since men "are not supposed to be victims," abuse (and particularly sexual abuse) becomes a process of demasculinization (or emasculation). If men aren't to be victims (the equation reads), then victims aren't men.*

*The victimized male wonders and worries about what the abuse has turned him into. Believing that he is no longer an adequate man, he may see himself as a child, a woman, gay, or less than human: an irreparably damaged freak.*

Such a proclamation magnifies the need for additional studies to be conducted, focusing on male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. This is to determine the unique and gender-related effects sexual abuse has on males, as “The dynamics around, and the effects of, the sexual abuse of males reach notably beyond physical violation” (Spiegel, 2003, p. 13). How society can better aid disclosure and develop therapeutic treatment programmes for men who have been sexually abused in childhood, therefore needs to become a focus.

When taking a patriarchal society into consideration, it also becomes important to note the impact of feminism within such a society. This shall be further discussed.

***Feminism: Women unite.*** Continuing with the notion of patriarchy as well as gender stereotyping, many men may be silent due to organisations that identify themselves as having feminist ideologies. This may be because such organisations:

*...are readily able to identify and support females oppressed in a world controlled by males but may have difficulty recognizing the adolescent or young adult male victim of sexual abuse – especially if that abuse is*

*perpetrated by a female, or if the male victim is sex role stereotyped and not “feminist”* (Gonsiorek et al., 1994, p. 46).

Thus, feminism – born from a society of patriarchy and gender stereotyping – may also somehow impact on males who have been sexually abused, in relation to their disclosure, or rather, lack of disclosure. Many boys and men may feel that if they attempt to disclose and are met with disbelief – due to them being male or perhaps victimised by a female – the possible denial of their ordeal may be too much to bear and cause such immense internal anxiety, that they may feel that it would be easier to just keep it all to themselves, and pretend that it never existed.

### ***Physical Evidence***

An additional troubling aspect of sexual abuse, according to Walters (as cited in Tower, 1989) is that it is rather difficult to prove or even identify whether or not it has occurred. This may be as there are minimal physical signs of its occurrence. “Most medical examinations of children suspected of having been abused yield little way of evidence” (Corby, 2006, p. 95). For boys, a medical exam reveals even less evidence than for girls. For a little girl, tests may be done in order to determine if there is vaginal bruising, anal tearing, or if the hymen in her vagina has been torn, resulting in her virginity being ‘stolen’. With little boys however, evidence of sexual abuse becomes extremely difficult to find, for unless there was anal penetration – where anal tearing may be evident – there is no vagina that may be bruised, hymen that may be broken, or ‘proof’ of virginity.

### **Culminating Thoughts**

Throughout the study of male childhood sexual abuse, the term ‘fear’ tends to constantly make an appearance – not only incorporating the term into the fear the victim may have pertaining to their abuser (perhaps in relation to the possible violence that may occur during the abuse), but also in relation to disclosure and the possible consequences that may arise from telling. According to Powell (2007), the reason why fear is so prominent in childhood sexual abuse is because it is easy to instil, maintain, and deny, especially as there is no tangible evidence of its occurrence.

Fear appears to be an overarching emotion that may consume the lives of male sexual abuse victims, and ultimately leads them down a path of lifelong secrecy. Male childhood sexual abuse victims appear to have many possible fears that reiterate their decision to remain silent regarding their abuse. Possible fears may include the following:

*...fear of being perceived as gay, fear of being perceived as “feminine,” fear of being perceived as a potential perpetrator, fear of disbelief, fear of being blamed, fear of being viewed as abnormal or deviant, fear of bearing the responsibility for accusing the perpetrator and for any repercussions experienced by the family such as turmoil, shame, separation, and divorce, fear of negative repercussions experienced by the*

*perpetrator, because he or she may be loved and respected by many, fear of perpetrator harm, fear of scandal, fear of being placed in foster care, with or without siblings, feelings of shame and guilt, guilt for experiencing pleasure, shame for failing to prevent the abuse from occurring, guilt and shame for receiving money gifts or special privileges in exchange for sex, fear of the attitudes of others, fear of familial and peer rejection, and fear that the perpetrator's threats will become a reality (Spiegel, 2003, p. 52).*

So many factors appear to play an integral role in the secrecy and silence related to male childhood sexual abuse; why it appears to be so difficult for the survivors to disclose; and why society struggles to recognise its existence. Hence, the desire to move forward with this study and attempt to explore and uncover the 'secrets' of male childhood sexual abuse, through the use of a particular methodology and research approach, will become the focus in the following chapter.

And so, "In the meantime, two wicked eyes were spying...from behind a tree a strange rustling in the woods made Little Red Riding Hood's heart thump" ("Little Red", n.d., ¶ 10).

## CHAPTER THREE

### 'FIND THE PATH': THE METHODOLOGY

After taking the literature pertaining to male childhood sexual abuse into consideration, along with the aim and rationale embedded within this research, the focus now shifts to that of defining the framework within which this research is conducted. Thus, this chapter focuses on the methods that have been deemed important and relevant to this particular investigation. These methods, along with the research approach will be explained within this chapter, so as to place the reader in the position of understanding the stance of the researcher in relation to the conduction of this enquiry.

#### **Ontology and Epistemology**

##### Ontology

Ontology may be defined as "...the nature of being" (Thompson, 1992, p. 621), and thus within this context, the nature of being within the research paradigm. Paradigms are what all research is dependent upon, and thus this is an integral part of the research process. For the purpose of this research, a postmodern paradigm will be used, and further explained.

*Postmodernism.* In postmodernism there is a belief that there is no one universal 'truth', but rather that 'truths' are related to the context in which they are created. Within

this paradigm, the concept of knowledge is viewed as "...an expression of language, values and beliefs of the particular communities and contexts" (Lynch, 1997, p. 353), in which we live.

Furthermore, there is a belief that not only should one be wary of absolutes that are not context specific, but also that it is not possible to predict the outcomes of change, as perspectives are replacing 'facts' (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). In postmodernism, it is accepted that there are many outcomes that may be possible from a single change within an individual or a system, and therefore there are many avenues that may bring about healing.

Postmodernism is thus the chosen paradigm for this research for these very reasons. This research intends to look at sexually abused males, with specific reference to the participants, and their own unique personal contexts. Conversation will be the context in which expression will be understood, and thus the participants' words, values and beliefs will become the 'well of knowledge' from which this research will draw its findings.

Postmodernism also tends to focus on the deconstruction of concepts or ideas, in order to reconstruct them in a new way (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). This too intends to be a focus within this research, as the participants' stories pertaining to their own personal life experiences with reference to their sexual abuse, will be deconstructed in order to find themes that may appear, and then reconstructed in order to create new meanings.

This research study will therefore not focus on the belief of a single ‘truth’, but rather on an array of personal experiences that create each individual’s own reality. The participants’ realities will therefore become the awareness that this research intends to create. This study also invites multiple interpretations – not merely a single finite conclusion.

### ***Epistemology***

Epistemology may be defined as the “...philosophy of knowledge” (Thompson, 1992, p. 291), and thus the way in which knowledge is viewed. Epistemology links directly to the ontology, whereby the epistemology is located within the postmodernism paradigm. For the purpose of this research, the epistemological viewpoint is social constructionism, which will be further explained.

***Social constructionism.*** Social constructionism “...locates meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social, community context” (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996, p. 80). Social constructionism therefore argues that individuals’ realities are socially constructed by the meaning that society and culture determines. Therefore, our individual realities are described as being learnt from our social and cultural environments.

According to Berger and Luckmann (as cited in Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001, p. 167), the social construction of reality is:



*...constructed through three main 'moments': externalization (whereby societies and cultures create particular versions of reality); objectification (whereby those constructed realities are made to seem really real – as if they occur naturally, are 'out there' waiting to be discovered); and internalization (whereby, through socialization and enculturation, individuals incorporate this socially constructed reality into their understanding of the world).*

A social constructionist perspective also places much emphasis on 'Grand Narratives', which are "...supported by the weight of numbers, tradition, and firmly entrenched power structures" (Doan, 1997, p. 130), which influence, and are influenced by people. Grand narratives are those structures which people measure themselves against.

Social constructionism is thus the chosen epistemological paradigm for this research due to its social nature. The research process will be one of both co-construction and reflection, within the social context from where each individual comes, as well as the social context that is formed within each interview. For the purpose of this study, how society views men who were sexually abused in childhood, and how those men view both society as well as themselves, becomes the focal point.

### Qualitative Approach

A Qualitative approach provides an ample source of information and is based on an individual's 'lived experience'. According to Strauss and Corbin (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 66), the "...value and importance of the qualitative method is now gaining more attention and becoming more popular in studies involving human beings." This may be due to the attempt qualitative research has in trying to "...understand the meaning of naturally occurring complex events, actions, and interactions in context, from the point of view of the participants involved" (Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990, p. 358). Thus, this approach focuses on the individual and his or her experiences and frame of reference. Qualitative research can therefore be linked with both postmodernism and social constructionism, due to the desire for context, contextual relationships, and language as the basis of constructing realities.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 7), qualitative research is dedicated to "...the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience". Qualitative research is "...a holistic perspective which preserves the complexities of human behaviour" (Black, 1994, p. 426). Amalgamation is key, and qualitative research thus integrates the whole by acknowledging the uniqueness of each situation regarding both the participant's experiences, and that of the actual research process. The researcher of this study needs to be immersed within the process, understanding her role and influence upon the context, as well as the participants, and their disclosure of

information. This adds to the complexity of integrating all the information, in order to ensure a holistic approach is maintained.

In using a qualitative approach in this research study, each participant is empowered, as he is viewed as being the expert in his own life and life experiences. According to Berg (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 66), qualitative research allows participants to “...tell their own stories in their own voices, promotes new realities to be discovered by interactive dialogue between researchers and participants, and prevents the need to find simple answers to complex life issues.”

Each participant is therefore given the space and opportunity whereby his reality may be expressed. The participants are thus given a voice, which is the aim of this research regarding the silencing and shunning of sexually abused men.

A qualitative perspective is therefore the chosen method for this research, due to the aforementioned aspects of this approach. Qualitative research fits hand-in-hand with both the ontology and epistemology chosen for this study, due to the focus on language and context. According to Janesick (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 73), each participant is “...not ‘inserted’ into the study but ‘is the backbone of the study’”. The participants will therefore be viewed as being co-researchers, which is imperative for this research study, due to the personal experiences that will be drawn upon in order to gain insight and knowledge about male childhood sexual abuse.

### ***Reliability***

Reliability may be denoted as the “...stability of measurements, observations or results over time or settings, or methods which lead to this stability...” (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 73). However, within a qualitative approach, reliability may be viewed as conceptually different from the more statistical and quantitative approaches. According to Stiles (1993, p. 601), reliability within a qualitative study may be referred to as “...the trustworthiness of observations or data.” The trustworthiness of what a researcher observes is therefore central in determining reliability within qualitative research, as well as credibility and integrity.

Thus, in assessing reliability that is of a qualitative nature, such as within this study, several strategies may be utilised, according to Stiles (as cited in Rapmund, 2005): “*Disclosure of orientation*” which refers to the particular orientation of the research study (such as the expectations, frame of reference, values, and possible preconceptions of the researcher); “*Explication of social and cultural context*” which refers to the context and background of the enquiry; “*Description of internal processes of investigation*” which refers to the researcher’s internal processes and the potential impact that the study may have on the researcher; “*Engagement with the material*” which refers to the relationship or rapport, between the researcher and the participants, which needs to be trusting, and the relationship between the researcher and the research study material; “*Iteration: Cycling between interpretation and observation*” which refers to the ‘dialogue’ that takes place between the interpretations and theories, and the text and participants; “*Grounding of interpretations*” refers to linking of the interpretations or results of the research study

to the context, such as connecting the themes with the text of the interview; and “Ask ‘what’ not ‘why’” whereby the experiences are grounded within the context, which is consequently more appropriate for story telling.

An attempt will be made to use each of these aforementioned strategies within the implementation of this study, so as to ensure that this investigation is deemed reliable from a qualitative perspective.

### ***Validity***

Within the qualitative approach, validity is also viewed conceptually differently from more statistical and quantitative approaches. Validity may be denoted, according to Padgett, (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 73), as the “...validation of findings through replication”. However, as this research focuses on men who have been sexually abused in childhood, and their unique stories, this study does not claim to be replicable. Therefore, the following definition of validity according to Stiles (1993, p. 601) appears more appropriate to this study, whereby “...validity refers to the trustworthiness of interpretations or conclusions.” Therefore, placing focus on how valid or trustworthy the inferences that are drawn from the data are.

Thus, in assessing validity that is of a qualitative nature, several strategies may be utilised, according to Stiles (as cited in Rapmund, 2005): “*Triangulation*” which refers to utilising information from numerous information sources, the use of several collection and analysis methods, and possibly using multiple investigators; “*Coherence*” which

refers to the 'quality of fit' of the investigation; "*Uncovering; self-evidence*" which refers to how one is able to understand and make sense of their experiences; "*Testimonial validity*" which refers to the validity that has been attained from the participants within the study; "*Catalytic validity*" which refers to the degree to which the participants were able to make sense of the research study, which may possibly lead to growth or change; and "*Reflexive validity*" which refers to the manner in which the researcher's thinking has shifted or changed as an effect of the information that has been obtained from the study.

An attempt will be made to use each of these aforementioned strategies within the implementation of this study, so as to ensure that this investigation is deemed valid from a qualitative perspective.

### ***Ethics***

"The concern for ethics in psychological research may be seen as part of the historical trend in civil and human rights" (McBurney, 2001, p. 53). In stating this, it therefore becomes necessary to ensure that in order to protect the rights of each participant within this research study, the researcher needs to ensure that she presents both herself and her research in an ethical manner.

Within South Africa, the HPCSA (Health Professional Counsel of South Africa) requires that all psychology and research professionals must comply with the 'Ethical Code of Professional Conduct' (HPCSA, 2003). This code provides professionals with a guideline

that clarifies the “...specific ethical and professional issues regarding responsibility for professional standards, competence, relationships...confidentiality, methods and procedures, and public and professional communication” (Tredoux et al., 2005, p. 68). Hence, ethical considerations are the foundation on which any research needs to be based, and is the sole responsibility of the researcher.

The researcher’s morals, integrity and values, ultimately determine the type of ethical approach that is brought into the research project. Thus, many researchers may disagree about what they consider to be ethical depending on their own judgements, experience and training; however, as members of a professional community they are expected to ensure that certain ethical rules are upheld in order to protect both their research from scrutiny, as well as to protect their participants from potential harm (Neuman, 1997).

According to Neuman (1997, p. 445), “Ethical research requires balancing the value of advancing knowledge against the value of noninterference in the lives of others.” This may be the basis on which ethical codes are developed and imposed. These codes have some very specific prohibitions that need to be followed, to ensure the safeguarding of both the researcher as well as the participants.

Neuman (1997) proposes an outline of basic principles that should be taken into consideration when conducting research: Participants should at no time be or feel exploited; participants need to give informed consent pertaining to their participation within the study; confidentiality, privacy and anonymity need to be guaranteed to each

participant; participants should never feel coerced or humiliated; if need be, participants should be debriefed after their participation in the research; the researcher should attempt to predict and eliminate any undesirable consequences of the research on the participants if possible; the researcher should endeavour to anticipate the impact of publication of their research; the researcher should interpret and release the results of their study in a manner that is consistent with the data that they collected; the methodology of the research should be held to high standards and deemed appropriate for that specific study; and research should not be conducted in secret.

Additionally, ethics also extends beyond the protection of the participants. Within research studies the following ethical considerations are also important to note: How potential errors within their study are dealt with by the researcher; the potential 'fraud in science' that may occur; and properly accrediting other professionals work that has been used within their own study (Barlow & Durand, 1999). Researchers therefore need to address their investigations in a holistic way when it comes to ensuring that they are conducting themselves and their research in an ethical manner.

Each of the aforementioned ethical principals has been taken into consideration in the preparation and conduction of this study, so that the research data can be considered to be both ethical and legal. The researcher of this study aimed at ensuring that each participant was fully aware of the implications of their participation within the research, both on themselves and possibly on society. In addition, the researcher attempted to take the participants' unique backgrounds into consideration, especially pertaining to the nature of



this study, so as to ensure that they did not at any point feel humiliated, disrespected, or exploited.

### **Research Approach**

In concurrence with the aim and rationale pertaining to this study, “honesty, openness of intent, respect for the participants, issues of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation...” (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 67) are incorporated into the core of this research approach.

The approach of this research study is one of co-creating individual interviews, whereby the researcher and the participants actively participate in the creation of their interviews. The participants are seen as being the experts in their own lives, and therefore, their experiences and stories are the base around which each interview is constructed, and themes established.

Once the interviews with the participants have been conducted, the data collected will be focused upon using a hermeneutic approach in order to obtain the results, and thus conclude the research. It becomes important though to note that the quotes and extracts used in this study are from the research interviews conducted with each participant of this research investigation; and therefore they may not represent the experiences of all the participants within this study or in general.

### ***Sampling***

*The ideal site for conducting a research programme is one where the researcher is able to gain easy access; where a high probability of the subject material of interest to the researcher is present; one that facilitates the researcher to build a trusting relationship with the participants in the study; and where the quality of data and credibility of the study will be assured (Marshall & Rossman, as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 68).*

Sampling may be defined as the “...process of systematically selecting cases for inclusion in a research project” (Neuman, 1997, p. 201). For this research study, it becomes important to primarily note the required criteria that the researcher deems necessary for the possible inclusion of a participant into this study. These criteria are as follows: The participant needs to be an adult male, being over the age of eighteen years old; he needs to have been sexually abused; and the sexual abuse needs to have occurred during childhood (before the age of eighteen years old). In addition to these aforementioned criteria, it is necessary for the participant to be a South African citizen, as this study wishes to focus on obtaining South African based information pertaining to this topic of investigation. Finally, due to expenditure and convenience, primarily only men who reside within the province of Gauteng will be considered for participation.

For the intention of this research, purposive sampling will be used in order to attain suitable candidates for this study. A purposive sample is a sample that is “...selected

nonrandomly but for some particular reason” (McBurney, 2001, p. 246). In other words, purposive sampling is conducted in order to gain a sample from the larger population, for a particular purpose. In this instance, the purpose is to ‘Break the Silence’ of male childhood sexual abuse, by exploring the stories of male sexual abuse survivors.

With purposive sampling it becomes difficult to know whether the participants that were selected represent the greater population (Neuman, 1997), but in the instance of this research topic, purposive sampling is viewed to be the most suitable method for acquiring the needed sample. This is because, although one may be uncertain as to whether or not this sample will be truly representative, the desired sample may be considered a “...difficult-to-reach, specialized population” (Neuman, 1997, p. 206). With such a desired population, it becomes very difficult to list all of the men who have been sexually abused in childhood, and sample randomly from the list. Therefore, the researcher, by using purposive sampling, will be able to use subjective information, along with other methods, in order to find the necessary participants.

Several differing methods pertaining to the finding of participants has been considered, each with its own pro’s (positives) and con’s (negatives). The primary method of probable sampling will be that of approaching psychologists, doctors, and social workers. A breakdown of the research will be given, with the aim of these professionals aiding the researcher in obtaining participants. One positive aspect pertaining to this method is that the professionals may already know of patients or clients that meet the criteria needed in order to possibly participate within this study. A respective negative implication may be

that the inquiry by one of the professionals to their client may affect their already established rapport. Such a sample may also be considered to be more of a clinical sample with a certain bias.

Another probable method of trying to find participants may be by using, and perhaps advertising on the Internet. This method allows for an extensive search of participants from broader regions, who may otherwise be inaccessible. A limitation may be though that interested individuals may be sceptical about enquiry over the Internet. Such individuals will also need to be computer literate and have access to the Internet. This may therefore narrow the scope of potential participants in a biased manner. In addition, one may also incur much higher costs due to possible travel arrangements that may need to be made, in order to have face-to-face interviews with each participant. For this reason, only prospective participants that live within the Gauteng region of South African will be considered, as previously mentioned.

A further option may be to advertise in the regional and local newspapers. This method would allow for many individuals to have access to participating in the research, and may attract a larger number of participants. However, a limitation may be, that due to the nature of the research, many individuals may assume that such an advertisement may be a hoax, or they may contact the researcher for prank purposes. The range of possible participants will also be limited to the access of the certain newspapers, in their corresponding areas.

A final option is a combination of the aforementioned sampling strategies, depending on the availability of viable participants. For the purpose of selecting participants for this study, this appears to be the more appropriate method, and the one that shall be implemented in order to acquire the necessary sample of participants.

As this research will be conducted from a qualitative perspective, only a small sample needs to be selected (three participants). For this research, the sample will be selected according to prerequisites that meet the aim and rationale of this research (i.e., men who were sexually abused in childhood), that have been previously mentioned.

Once the participants have been selected, each individual will be given a consent form, which will need to be signed (Appendix A), and the aim of the research will be explained to each participant. It is estimated that the interview will last approximately one hour; although adequate time will be allocated to each participant should there be a requirement for additional time. Thereafter, the data collection and analysing procedures will become the focus, whereby a thematic or hermeneutic approach will be followed in order to obtain results pertaining to each participants interview.

### ***Data Collection***

In qualitative research, the data collection process may comprise of one of many different methods, such as "...participation in the setting, direct observation, in-depth interviewing and document review" (Padgett, Marshall & Rossman, as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 70).

For this particular study, the data collection method that has been deemed the most appropriate is that of in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviewing appears to be a common data collection method in qualitative research, as it tends to focus more on participant's self-perceptions, self-expression, and life experiences. As in-depth interviewing is also considered to be useful in relation to researching both the experiences and events surrounding child abuse (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006), it has become the chosen method for data collection for this particular research investigation.

According to Marshall and Rossman (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006), in-depth interviewing is considered to be more conversational than a formal interview where predetermined responses are predicted. Thus, when conducting in-depth interviews, the focus shifts somewhat from the more typical interview format where resolute questions and answers appear central (structured interview), to one where the conversation between the researcher and each participant is allowed more flexibility and natural flow, as the interview tends to follow a less structured format (semi-structured or unstructured interview).

Due to the nature of this research study, the semi-structured interview appears to be the most fitting as, according to Kellehear (as cited in Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 70), it "...promotes the uncovering of the participant's meanings and perspective". Thus, each participant is able to direct the flow of their interview, by being able to discuss issues and

themes that they deem relevant to their own lives, as well as to the study (The semi-structured interview schedule has been included – Appendix B).

As the semi-structured interview format appears most suited to this research study, it becomes important to mention the different ways in which such an interview may commence. There tend to be two ways in which such an interview may begin:

*The first is where the researcher provides little information about the research to avoid bias. The second approach is one where the researcher believes that collaborative research requires the participant to be armed with knowledge about the nature of the research, how the research will be conducted, and about confidentiality and anonymity issues, among others. It allows for the researcher and the researched to be involved in a process of negotiation and renegotiation on how the interview should and will proceed (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, p. 70).*

The second approach appears to be well-matched to the nature of this study, as each participant should have a clear understanding of the important aspects of the research enquiry, so as to promote their informed participation. As childhood sexual abuse is a topic that has difficulties in relation to silence, secrecy, and of not wanting to tell, which may impact on a persons ability to be able to recount their experience or experiences (Durham, 2003a), it becomes important to ensure an open and trusting relationship from the beginning, between the participant and the researcher, to promote disclosure.

Due to this appearance of secrecy surrounding sexual abuse, and even more so pertaining to men who have been sexually abused, another important aspect to take into account during the data collection process is for the researcher to not rely solely on verbal accounts (Durham, 2003a). This is because the participants may have difficulty in recalling details of their abuse. Therefore, in addition, it becomes important to be open to using other forms of communication should it be necessary, and where appropriate, such as communicating through poetry, drawings, music, and so on. The inclusion of such other forms of communication will be added into this study, should it be deemed necessary and appropriate.

*The life-story/narrative approach.* As this research aims at focusing on the *stories* of men who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the life-story or narrative approach appears to fit in well within the data collection aspect of this study, as well as with the framework of this research. According to White and Denborough (1998, p. 3):

*Narrative ways of working are based on the ideas that people's lives and relationships are shaped by the 'stories' which individuals and communities of people develop in order to give meaning to their experiences. These 'narratives of meaning' do not simply reflect or represent our lives – they actually shape and constitute our lives.*



The life-story or narrative approach focuses on storytelling, whereby the creation of new meanings begins to emerge (Ivey & Ivey, 2003), and in addition, it "...seeks equality and closeness and gives primacy to human action and lived experiences..." (Durham, 2003a, p. 33).

Plummer (as cited in Durham, 2003a, p. 33) describes life stories as "...being like 'snowflakes'...unique and never of the same design". Thus, the story that each participant will reveal, through his recollection, will be a uniquely rich and personal source of information. This method also appears appropriate due to the sensitive nature of this study, as it allows the researcher to be able to come close to the lives of the participants (Durham, 2003a). Thus, within the in-depth, semi-structured interview with each participant, each participant's life story in relation to his sexual abuse experience or experiences will be focused upon.

*Interviewing sexually abused men.* As this research focuses on men who have been sexually abused in childhood, it becomes important to briefly mention certain factors of importance that should be considered when interviewing these men. As the central theme pertaining to this study is a sensitive one, it becomes important to consider it a priority to allow each participant to feel as comfortable and in control of the process as possible (Durham, 2003a). Thus, by allowing the men partaking in this study to set the pace of the interview, as well as allowing them the opportunity to lead the discussion to areas that they may feel are of importance, the researcher will be able to provide a setting for the participants in which they may feel somewhat secure and in control.

It becomes vital to assume nothing when interviewing male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and in addition, to constantly assess their comfort levels (Bolton et al., 1989). Many men may become closed and cut-off if they perceive that the researcher assumes that they know how they are feeling or what they have experienced. It becomes increasingly important that the researcher take even trivial factors into account when interviewing sexually abused men, such as the researcher's effect on each participant, her proximity to the participants, and so on. This is because such factors are "...often important concerns for males who struggle with trust and personal safety issues" (Bolton et al., 1989, p. 98).

### *Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutics is an integrative research analysis approach, which fits well within qualitative research, postmodernism and social constructionism, due to its focus on 'understanding' (Sarantakos, 2005). Hermeneutics is therefore the chosen approach for analysing this research data. The word 'Hermeneutics' was derived from the term 'Hermes', who was a mythological Greek god, who "...had the job of communicating the desires of the gods to the mortals" (Neuman, 1997, p. 68). Hermeneutics therefore has to do with communication, whereby its aim is to achieve understanding and discover meaning (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Hermeneutics aims to make sense of different forms of communication, by giving meaning to the "...immediate context, social structures, personal histories, shared practices, and language" (Addison, 1992, p. 112),

through "...a detailed reading or examination of *text*, which could refer to a conversation, written words, or pictures" (Neuman, 1997, p. 68).

For the purpose of this research study, the following method of hermeneutic analysis has been adapted from Addison, Terre Blanche and Kelly, and Wilson and Hutchinson (as cited in Rapmund, 2005, pp. 10-11), and will be utilised within the analysis of the study:

:

***Step 1: Familiarisation and Immersion:*** *In this stage the researcher is working with texts rather than with the lived experience. The researcher needs to immerse herself in the world created by the text so that she can make sense of that world.*

***Step 2: Thematising:*** *Step 2 requires the researcher to infer themes that underlie the research material.*

***Step 3: Coding:*** *occurs when similar instances are grouped together under the same theme.*

***Step 4: Elaboration:*** *In this stage the researcher explores the generated themes more closely... to gain a fresh view and deeper meaning...and might entail changes in the coding system. Dialoguing occurs between what the researcher reads and the contexts...The researcher maintains a constantly questioning attitude, looking for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings, deeper meanings, alternative meanings, and changes over time...*

*Step 5: Interpretation and Checking: This refers to the final account or narrative that relates to the research question or phenomenon studied. It is also good practice for the researcher to reflect on her role in the whole process.*

### **Concluding Words**

This research study wishes to create a suitable space in which the sexual abuse of males in childhood may be openly discussed and extensively explored. In an attempt to do so, an appropriate methodology for this investigation is fundamental. Thus, many factors have been taken into consideration in the compilation of this chapter, which include those such as: The sensitive and silent nature of this subject matter; the gender of the participants; the participants' personal histories; the impact of social influences on the participants and their wish to express their memories; the desire of the researcher to listen to the participants lived experiences through the narration of their own lives; and so on.

In focusing on these dynamics, the researcher is of the opinion that the chosen aforementioned methodology for this research study fits in well with this enquiry. Thus, in following the approaches that have been described within this chapter, the participants' interviews and stories become the focal point within the next chapter.

And so, "At last, the cottage came in sight. Knock! Knock! The wolf rapped on the door" (Little Red", n.d., ¶ 16).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “WHAT BIG EYES YOU HAVE”: THE RESULTS

Three male participants contributed their stories relating to being sexually abused in childhood to this research study. The intention of acquiring these stories is to investigate the silence pertaining to male childhood sexual abuse, along with other factors that may arise. As each participant's story and lived experience is unique, each participant's story in relation to their individual results that were obtained using a hermeneutic approach, shall be focused on separately.

In addition, as the uniqueness of each participant's story is central within this research, similar themes that have been identified amongst the participants have been given different names and headings for each participant within this chapter. However, within the final chapter whereby the results are further discussed and conclusions drawn, these themes have been grouped into categories that are common, as well as distinct from each other, as is typically done when using a hermeneutic approach.

#### **Ronnie's Story**

The participant, Ronnie, is a thirty six year old man who lives in the east of Johannesburg. Ronnie's first language is Afrikaans. He is the youngest of five children, and has two older brothers, and two older sisters. Ronnie is currently employed as a Chaplin. He is also in a committed relationship.

Ronnie was accessed through a counselling psychologist, who knew both of the researcher's intended study, and of Ronnie and his past experiences. Ronnie was invited to participate in this research study due to his history of childhood sexual abuse, through the assistance of his counselling psychologist.

Ronnie was fully informed about the research, and insisted and consented on his true identity being used, when the topic of confidentiality was spoken of.

At the commencement of the interview, Ronnie appeared relaxed, comfortable and confident. Ronnie was forthcoming to all the questions that were posed to him, and he did not show any hesitancy or reluctance in relation to telling his story of being sexually abused.

Ronnie disclosed that he was sexually abused for several years, from around the age of six, by several of his father's male work colleagues. From the age of ten, Ronnie was sexually abused by his one older brother, who was five years older than him (fifteen at the time), for approximately three years. It would appear through Ronnie's story that on some occasions his abuse would be initiated more subtly (in a befriending way), and on other occasions in a more attacking manner.

Additionally, Ronnie disclosed that he is homosexual, and is HIV positive.

Following a Hermeneutic approach, and thematising, coding and elaborating on the content of the transcribed interview, several dominant themes and sub-themes appeared to run through Ronnie's story. Each shall be discussed.

### ***Secrecy versus Truth***

For Ronnie, the notion of secrecy, in relation to his being sexually abused, appeared apparent from the onset of the interview:

*You never told the truth...you always kept it from them...so from an early age I was actually thrown with this secrecy...um...because you had to keep it a secret...you don't want people to know about it....*

As Ronnie's story began to unfold, it became apparent that several factors appear linked to why he decided to keep his abuse to himself, and not tell a soul. These factors are further discussed.

***Social Sway.*** Secrecy appears to be a fundamental theme in Ronnie's story. He spoke of how child sexual abuse, especially during the 1980s – when it was happening to him – was something that was never spoken about. Ronnie appears to believe that this is why he kept his secret of abuse, as society claimed that sexual abuse was not to be spoken about:

*Who do you think your parents are going to believe, a little 'lighty'...like you or a grown up boy or a grown up man...And...in the 1980s...as such...as a...as a young boy...boys never talked about sexual abuse...it was not allowed... so...you...tend to bottle it up and keep it to yourself...Than actually having the...the openness to talk about it...You don't feel comfortable talking about it because you...got a smack in the face... 'what the hell are you talking about?'*

Ronnie's shame and perhaps embarrassment about being sexually abused, as well as his worry about what other people may think of him, appear to be factors in why the secrecy of his abusive encounters were maintained. Ronnie revealed:

*Even then I didn't even talk about it because I was ashamed...I was ashamed of me...I was ashamed of...allowing it.*

The notion of Ronnie "allowing it" appears to add a layer of self-blame and responsibility to his story. This notion may be linked to how he believed, and may continue to believe, society would judge him, if it were to emerge that he had been a part of such disturbing sexual acts. Ronnie went on further to state:

*Um...I never talked about it to anyone...it was...you feel ashamed...um...my...my...my mom always asked 'Ja why are you so dirty'... 'Oh no I played there at the house'...and you never told the*



*truth...you always kept it from them...so from an early age I was actually thrown with this secrecy...um...because you had to keep it a secret...you don't want people to know about it...you don't want your mom and dad...what are they going to think about you...what's your friends and family gonna [going to] think of you....*

Ronnie appears to believe that society, especially a patriarchal society in which men are held to specific standards, has a lot of influence in relation to why both boys and men do not come forward with their stories of being sexually abused. Society expects certain behaviours from men, and when men are then seen to be victims or being over-powered and weak, society may reject those men, as they do not fit in with the prescribed norms of the society. Thus, the notion of being judged and criticised by the very society in which one lives, appeared to silence Ronnie from the onset of his abuse. Ronnie further stated:

*Young boys today still don't speak...because it's a ego thing...they can't deal with it because its... 'what's that person going to think about me', 'are they going to think less of me'...and...it's actually quite frightening...we as a society are not doing anything about it.*

Not only does Ronnie appear to believe that boys are so afraid of what society may think of them if they were to come forward and report their sexual abuse, but in addition, Ronnie appears to believe that society does not do enough regarding informing people about the reality of boys being sexually abused. Therefore, according to Ronnie, it is the

society in which we live and are a part of, that further solidifies the cycle of silence, through its persecutory judgements and naïveté.

**Fear.** Ronnie appears to link fear to his secrecy, and why he was never able to tell anyone about his repeated sexual abuse. Ronnie mentioned that he believed that if he were to have spoken about the abuse he endured, he would have been physically reprimanded and most probably not believed by his family. Ronnie stated:

*...my father used to beat me....*

And:

*As a young boy...and you too scared to talk about it, because you're not allowed to talk about it...so you are very fragile as well...so...there's that time that you would rather keep it to yourself...than sharing it...because you know what other people are gonna think...cause it's gonna be a big 'hoe-haa'... 'you don't know what you're talking about'...So that's why you also keep it as a secret as a young guy....*

The consequences that Ronnie conjured up in his mind pertaining to what he thought would happen if he were to tell the truth about being sexually abused, appeared to create an intense fear within him. Ultimately, this fear within Ronnie may have led him to

believe that it would be easier to live with, and deal with his sexual abuse in complete silence and secrecy, than to come forward and disclose his suffering.

*Exchanges.* The notion of having his body exchanged for gifts, and gifts given in exchange for his silence, were very real concepts to Ronnie:

*The child abusers always give you something in exchange to keep your mouth shut...Nobody had to know....*

Ronnie recalled how his older brother would give him toys in exchange for his silence, during the time that Ronnie was sexually abused by him:

*He started playing games, buying gifts and...It was only sexual.*

Ronnie further explained:

*When my oldest brother abused me...He worked for [shop] at that time...Then he would buy me, like toys...He gave me that to like compensate for what he was doing...So you're carrying that...Its like you got this expectation of...The only way you will love me is if I give you this and this and this....*

The notion of exchanges for Ronnie, and particularly in relation to being sexually abused, appear prominent within his life. Ronnie mentioned:

*You have to do something...Just to keep everybody happy...That's what most of the child abusers do...Because...You had to do something in return...To show that they care for you...That they love you...And that's how you actually start feeling that...The only way they are gonna love you, if you give something in return...*

Thus, for Ronnie, the circle of silence continued in an attempt to feel loved. He appeared to believe that because his abusers' (in the above instance, his older brother) were giving him something as a 'sign' of their love for him; the only way that he would be able to continue obtaining their love, would to be by giving them something in return – his innocence and his silence.

***Facing the Truth.*** The truth though always seems to seep out somehow, and for Ronnie, it was when he was nineteen years old. Ronnie's one brother told their mother, of how their oldest brother had molested Ronnie. Ronnie recalled:

*My mom said 'You're just like your oldest brother'...And then my other brother...jumped up and said "How can you compare him to a child molester?'...I thought I was going to die...I thought that...if there was a hole where I could put my head in or my whole body and just cover*

*myself...That I would do it...Bury myself and nobody must even find me...I walked out the flat...And I just cried...I felt hurt....*

For so many years, Ronnie had held on tightly to the secret of his abuse, and so, when the truth eventually did surface, Ronnie's emotions appeared to overwhelm him. Ronnie continued and stated:

*And...here you think nobody knows about it...And yet they knew about it...My mom's first reaction was 'Why didn't you tell me?'...I was so young...How could I?...I kept quiet...I know...in a sense I've always known I've got to talk...but you know...you don't.*

It would appear that the foreseen pain associated with confronting and of being confronted with the truth of his sexual abuse, led Ronnie to want to keep his abuse secret; and when the truth did eventually come out, Ronnie was overcome with emotion.

The notion of how everyone around him would probably judge him, blame him, and punish him, appeared to be a pivotal reason as to why Ronnie was able to keep his sexual abuse a secret from his family for thirteen years, since it began when he was just six years old. However, if it were not for the comparison made by Ronnie's mother in the presence of his family, and the subsequent blurting out of the truth by one of Ronnie's brothers, one may never know when or if Ronnie's secret past would have ever been brought to light.

### ***Feelings of Ambivalence***

Throughout Ronnie's story, contradictions are apparent. Ronnie appears to contradict himself in several ways, which may possibly suggest that he has ambivalent feelings when speaking about his experiences of being sexually abused. A few of these ambivalent themes will be further discussed.

***Self-blame and guilt versus forgiveness and acceptance.*** Self-blame and guilt appear to be tied together throughout Ronnie's story. Ronnie appears to blame himself for being sexually abused as a child. In doing so, he takes responsibility and liability for what happened to him, even though he was not in the position of power and control, but was rather in the position of vulnerability and helplessness. Ronnie recalled:

*You always ask yourself...is it me, what have I done...is it the clothes I'm wearing, is it my way, the way I talk, is it any thing about my personality or me as a person that actually gives them that...urge to pin you down and have their way....*

The guilt about what was done to him, and the responsibility that he places on himself regarding being sexually abused, appears to have riddled Ronnie from within. In addition, the sense of always being compared to others, to society, and to society's norms, as well as the fear of not being believed, appeared to evoke memories within Ronnie, of as a child thinking:

*I didn't open up to them, I didn't tell them about it because that thing, 'what are they going to think about me', 'what's the girls gonna think about me'...those types of things. So...for a girl to tell, it's more like people will reach out. A boy's got this thing about what are people going to think, what if, what's it going to be like...Are they going to still see me as...the rugby player...or the sportsman...What are they going to think of me if I tell them I've been sexually abused. People are going to think 'Ag man, he's just talking nonsense'.*

Perhaps for Ronnie the notion that his story might not be believed may have fed into the abyss of blame he held; further causing his guilt to escalate, and his secret to be maintained.

Ronnie's guilt also appeared to have plenty to do with the ambivalence of his feelings, especially pertaining to sex. Ronnie mentioned:

*Like I said, the one incident is like one in a million...when it happened, that you actually feel the compassion, the tenderness of that person...um...you can feel the tender heart of that person...um...the rest was more like...you feel...you...you...you actually feel quite dirty afterwards....*

It seems Ronnie believed that on occasion there was tenderness expressed in his abusive encounters. Perhaps a sense of being held by someone who showed him compassion and love added, and may continue to add to Ronnie's sense of guilt. He may have entered into some of these relationships and situations seeking tenderness, and not realising what was to ensue. As an adult, Ronnie may now recall these desires for compassion that he craved when he was a child, which may lead Ronnie to believe that, because he yearned for the compassion that his abusers gave him, it was he who pursued his abusers. Ultimately, Ronnie may feel that this 'pursuit' may have then led to his being sexually abused. This could amplify Ronnie's sense of self-blame and guilt, whereby he may feel responsible for being molested.

A comment Ronnie made in relation to how God forgives, appears to suggest that there is still some blame and guilt that Ronnie holds deep within. Ronnie mentioned:

*If you want God to forgive you, you must learn to forgive....*

There is a notion in this statement that God needs to forgive him – perhaps for what he may believe was his role in his repetitive abusive encounters. Therefore, if God is able to forgive him for his part in the abuse, then he too should be able to forgive those who abused him. Forgiveness appears to be crucial for Ronnie, as he spoke about it with intensity, and almost brushed off any notion that one cannot forgive:



*I have accepted that I was abused...I've made peace, I have forgiven. I've moved on...Because for me to have actually have moved on from child abuse, I had to forgive...I want to love, like everybody else...and that's what I want in my life...that is why I want to forgive...because for me to live, I need to forgive them...and forgive the hurt....*

It is uncertain whether Ronnie has truly been able to forgive his abusers, although the notion of forgiveness appears to be imperative to him. Perhaps forgiveness may be seen on a spiritual level for Ronnie, such as when he spoke of how God forgives. As a result, Ronnie may believe that he has truly forgiven his abusers, in order for him to feel closer to God.

In addition, Ronnie appears to still carry immense amounts of self-blame and guilt, even though he tends to act on the contrary to this. Ronnie's story shows much ambiguity, especially regarding his feelings about the abuse and his abusers. This suggests that Ronnie may still be very confused about his abusive encounters, and thus it may still be a while before Ronnie will be able to truly deal with and move on from his abusive past.

***A loving family versus a non-supportive family.*** Ronnie began his story with the following:

*I am a 36-year-old male...and I was born in 1972. My father was a miner...um...I grew up in a very loving home...family.*

Such a statement appears to suggest that Ronnie has a supportive and loving family, with whom he probably has a good relationship. However, as Ronnie continued to tell his story, contradictions began to become apparent as Ronnie started to change his description of his family. Ronnie stated:

*That feeling of being rejected by your family...um...because of the secret that you kept, that they are rejecting you....*

Ronnie then went on to mention that his family was unsupportive of him. He spoke about how he enjoyed participating in school plays, and then mentioned:

*It was there...and it was awesome, and yet nobody of my family went to see one of my performances....*

This may suggest that Ronnie's family was not supportive of his school play participation, and perhaps, not supportive towards him in general. Further into Ronnie's story, he spoke about being physically abused within his family, as well as how favouritism appeared to be a theme within his family. Ronnie stated:

*It could also be physical abuse from family...um...It can be your mom and dad and three kids...And if there was always trouble or sometimes one would get a hiding...Either the oldest or the youngest, because the parents*

*will always have favouritism with the two boys and not with the third one...Like in my family my mom said 'Oh no there is no favouritism with my five kids.'...But what I have seen and what I have experienced, what I felt....*

The ambiguity that arose when Ronnie described his family may suggest that he has conflicting thoughts regarding his family unit. This may cause him a great deal of confusion. It appears that initially Ronnie tried to present both himself and his family in a positive way. This may suggest that perhaps when trust began to build within the interview, Ronnie may have become comfortable enough to reveal his real perception of his family, which may have led to the ambivalence that emerged regarding them.

***Being quiet versus being proactive.*** Ronnie showed ambiguity when he described himself. Primarily Ronnie described himself as being a quiet individual:

*As a child I was actually a very placid child...hardly made a noise always the quiet one there....*

Ronnie then went on to be rather assertive and proactive, when he stated:

*I am a survivor, I am a fighter...With child abuse...You actually learn to do things by yourself...To be there for yourself...Because if you not gonna be there, nobody else is gonna be there...If you not gonna make it work,*

*nobody else is gonna make it work, because life is not guaranteed...you  
have to stand up and fight....*

Here Ronnie suggests that he is both a reserved person who is quiet and placid, and then he goes on to say that he is a fighter and a survivor, and that he has to stand up for himself. This is suggestive of a person who is proactive. Both of these descriptions that Ronnie used to speak about himself are contradictory, and suggest his ambivalence when defining himself. This may suggest that Ronnie still struggles in trying to identify who he is as an individual. In addition, it may also show how Ronnie's interactional style has shifted since he was a child. As a child Ronnie may have been more reserved and placid, but now as an adult he may find himself to be more outgoing. Such a shift in his interactional style may cause Ronnie to feel ambivalent about who he is as an individual, and which part of himself he is able to identify better with.

***Angry versus calm.*** On several occasions Ronnie spoke about how he felt and may continue to feel angry regarding numerous aspects of his life, such as:

*If somebody made a joke with me I would get angry, go to my room, slam  
the door, literally lock myself into my room to isolate myself from getting  
hurt....*

Further on he mentioned:

*Its like you have been walking with that anger..for so many years...because before there were so many times you'd just want to take out that anger...on anybody else...even yourself....*

Ronnie expressed that there has been and is anger within him, however, then when he was asked if his anger was related to his abuse, Ronnie answered:

*No, because I've actually learnt to recover....*

This statement appears to suggest that Ronnie believes that he does not have any anger pertaining to being molested, as he believes that he has dealt with his sexual abuse experiences. Once again, Ronnie contradicts himself in this statement, which further adds to the theme of ambiguity.

### ***Coping Strategies***

In the midst of Ronnie's sexual abuse as a child, he appears to have devised strategies in order to protect himself, as well as in an attempt to cope. Coping strategies appear to be a vital theme within Ronnie's story, and emerge in numerous ways. Several coping strategies that appear to be used by Ronnie are further discussed.

***Escapism.*** In speaking with Ronnie about his life and the abuse he endured, a distinct word began to reoccur – escaping. Ronnie described time and time again of the

different ways in which he would attempt to escape the reality of his life in order to cope with his abuse:

*Drawing...was my way of escaping...the same as with the school play, the school play or drama in school gave me the ability...to be...to escape reality...to escape the reality of being the child abused...It was a way of escaping my family, escaping the abuse...So to do drama and you on stage and you someone else, you can escape that hour or two hours and you can just be what you want to be.*

Ronnie went on further to state:

*I wanted to party all the time...That was actually my way of escaping my family...because you went to clubs, went to friends every weekend...just to escape the family...Not being in the same room as your oldest brother...not being around the people that make you feel worth nothing. You'd rather go and be with friends that make you feel...loved... But that was also the time when I was heavy on drugs...because you wanted to escape the reality, you wanted to get away from all the problems...all the abuse, all the negative thinking...you want to be around people who are happy all the time...because drugs make you happy....*

The theme of wanting to escape the reality of the world that he has been forced to live in, appears to be a way in which Ronnie attempts to cope with his memories and experiences. Even in talking, Ronnie refers to himself as 'you' instead of 'I', further suggesting an attempt on Ronnie's behalf to separate the reality of what has happened to him from his actual being:

*Because you have withdrawn from everybody...that everybody doesn't know your abilities. And you rise above all the little remarks... If you feel that you are in a relationship...You feel used...You sense that the only reason they speak to you is because they want something....*

Drawing, school plays, clubs, drugs, and depersonalisation, all appear to be ways in which Ronnie tried to escape, and perhaps continues to try and escape, both his family and his memories of being sexually abused.

**Cutting-off.** Ronnie appeared to try and cope with his sexual abuse by utilising as many different coping strategies as possible. Cutting-off emotionally from those around him appeared to protect Ronnie to some degree from being hurt:

*I shut down...That is when my system malfunctions, you cut off...Because I can do that very conveniently...That if I don't want to talk about something I can just cut off immediately, I can even change the subject very quickly.*

Ronnie went on further to state:

*I think in my sub-conscious mind I just cut it off...Just cut it off, like it's not happening...This is not real...*

By doing this, Ronnie appears to be able to distance himself from anything and anyone that he perceives as being threatening or harmful to him. It is possible that Ronnie might have acquired this coping technique during the times when he was being sexually abused, as a way of trying to escape the actual incidences, however, Ronnie did not further elaborate on this.

***Being a loner.*** Ronnie also appears to cope with his sexual abuse by physically separating himself from all of those around him and preferring to be alone. Ronnie stated:

*Um...you withdraw from your friends, from family, from anybody that comes near you. You'd rather be a loner...than getting hurt. Because you'd rather be on your own, before allowing yourself or putting yourself out there to get hurt....*

Ronnie went on to mention:



*...Because I withdrew...But I was more a loner, because like I said...to avoid hurt or exploiting myself to that...um...and that's what kept me safe....*

Ronnie appeared to withdraw and be alone so that he could protect himself from being hurt from those around him, as his abusers had hurt him. It appears that Ronnie believed that if he were able to make sure that there was no one around him, then there would be nobody there that could potentially hurt him. Being alone was a strategy that Ronnie devised in order to keep himself safe.

**Religion.** Ronnie appears to be a spiritual individual, and religion and God appear to play central roles in helping him cope with his sexually abusive past. Ronnie mentioned:

*I think with God in my life...um...he's helping me to cope with this...because that's the way...God doesn't like to see his kids hurt...so what can I do about it...they didn't realise what they were doing...so...I forgive them...because...you know what...I feel sorry for people like that.*

Ronnie went on further to state:

*...Because many times when I read my Bible, it states that... 'If you want God to forgive you, you must learn to forgive others.' ...You read it in the context that it's supposed to be....*

This suggests that Ronnie may want to follow in the way that God teaches, and may therefore want to forgive his abusers as God forgives all people. Ronnie also appears to use his faith in a constructive and tangible way in attempting to cope with his abuse:

*When I pray...It's not just praying to God...It's a conversation with God. I've got a journal that I write in, and normally a journal is just like a journal...My journal...I have a recorder...a conversation with God...And its more like a prayer that I write in my journal...That has helped me especially as well...Because...I've now realised what I've got in life, what I have to be grateful for...For my health, my family and my friends....*

Ronnie appears to be able to express himself through his religious beliefs, by using prayer as a form of expression. By being able to express himself through journaling his prayers, Ronnie appears to have found a way of coping, through a written conversation with God.

**Seeking support.** Even though Ronnie sought to be alone, in order to protect himself, he also appears to seek support from several people around him. These people

appear to have had positive and supportive influences in Ronnie's life. Ronnie first mentioned his oldest sister:

*My oldest sister, ag, she was my guardian angel...she was always there...she was always on the lookout....*

It appears that within his household, Ronnie's oldest sister was someone who he knew would be there for him. It becomes important to note the way in which Ronnie spoke of his sister being 'on the lookout'. This comment suggests that perhaps she also knew of Ronnie's abuse, although Ronnie never went into detail about this.

Ronnie also spoke fondly of his grandmother, and how he felt that she was always there for him:

*And...then we started when I can go for holidays...go to my gran...I took every opportunity I get...because I didn't want to be at home...or near those people, on school holidays...so when...when ever I had the opportunity to go visit my gran, I did...and going to my gran...ag...it was awesome, because there, they allowed me to be a child...Nobody interfered, nobody bothered me...nobody tried to...fiddle with me....*

In addition Ronnie mentioned:

*I always had comfort with my gran...With my father's cousin...They were more my anchors...They gave me...They gave me a reason to fight....*

Ronnie appeared to draw strength from these aforementioned individuals. These relationships may have also added to Ronnie's ability to attempt to cope with his sexual abuse. It would appear that Ronnie only found comfort with a few individuals, as he was perhaps afraid of being hurt. This may have caused Ronnie to be unable to trust other people easily, for he may have feared that others might harm him. Subsequently, Ronnie appeared to have only sought out a few avenues of support.

### ***Weakness versus Strength***

The picture of a grown adult towering over an innocent child, forcing him into helplessness and vulnerability, so that he may cower away, distinctly evokes an image of power – the strong sexual predator against the weak defenceless victim. This depiction appears rather relevant for Ronnie, for as a child, Ronnie described himself as being:

*...bullied by everybody else... being as tiny as what I was...you had no chance...because they...everybody was...they look like they could be giants next to me....*

This places Ronnie in the distinct position of being defenceless and weak. Further on when speaking about his abusers, the image of Ronnie being weak was further emphasised by how his abusers would overpower him:

*He always like...approaches without me seeing him...from behind so that I couldn't run anywhere....*

And:

*They [sic] had their ways of pinning me down or...to play around...just to get their kick out of it....*

Weakness appears to be something that Ronnie fights now, perhaps so that he can attempt to gain some control, over himself and over his memories. Ronnie appears to be coping by over-compensating for his childhood weakness and vulnerability, by presenting himself as a strong and self-sufficient individual. Ronnie mentioned:

*Everything in life is a lesson...and it makes us either stronger or weaker...And after everything that happened in my life, it just made me stronger....*

Ronnie then went on to say:

*I am a survivor, I am a fighter...With child abuse...You actually learn to do things by yourself...To be there for yourself...Because if you not gonna be there, nobody else is gonna be there...If you not gonna make it work,*

*nobody else is gonna make it work, because life is not guaranteed...you  
have to stand up and fight....*

And:

*I'm not going to be a statistic...I'm not going to be another poor victim....*

In Ronnie's story, a power struggle between himself as a defenceless child, and his strong abusers, appears blatant. However, there also appears to be a vivid image of a power struggle related directly to Ronnie as an individual; both internally within Ronnie's mind – where he mentally fights the memories of his abuse; and externally – where Ronnie has transformed from a timid and uncertain child, into an assertive and out-spoken man. This in itself testifies to Ronnie's strength in character.

### ***Ongoing Effects***

For years to come, the effects of being sexually abused in childhood are felt by those who have lived and experienced it. Within Ronnie's story, it became evident that the effects of his abuse have spilled over into other areas of his life. A few of these areas that were spoken about within the interview will be further discussed.

***Trust equals hurt.*** Trust appears to be a difficult concept for Ronnie and he appears to equate his difficulty with his being sexually abused. According to Ronnie:

*Boys find it very difficult to trust somebody...they would rather trust somebody as a friend...but they...don't trust them enough to open up to them...*

Being able to trust someone appears to be a concept that so many people take for granted.

However, for Ronnie, trust does not come that easy:

*It's tough...People don't realise the severity...that one goes through...that you can't trust...and when you do trust...I still have the sense that I'm going to get hurt. I don't know what's giving me this idea...I don't want to get hurt anymore.*

By recalling how he had trusted all those men who had sexually abused him, Ronnie simultaneously recalled the pain that trusting someone elicits in him. Ronnie went on to state:

*Sexual abuse doesn't ask 'who, why?' It can be your grandfather...it can be your best friend's father...it can be anybody that you actually trust...that you put faith in...*

Ronnie appears to directly relate trust to being victimised and hurt. The concept of trust and faith being equated to abuse appears to be something that has wedged itself deep into

Ronnie's being. For him, to put his trust into someone completely, appears to only have one outcome – hurt.

*Desperate measures.* At the time of his abuse as well as afterwards, Ronnie admitted that he felt very depressed due to all the physical and emotional pain that he was enduring:

*There is depression involved... I think what made me depressed is the child abuse...*

Ronnie mentioned that he was so tired of the hurt that the sexual abuse had caused him, and so tired of feeling depressed, that he had contemplated suicide:

*It's like...you know what...if you all know what's going on in my mind...there was times that I wanted to commit suicide because of it...The thought went through my head like you wont believe. Um...you always ask yourself...maybe things will be different if I am not here. Maybe...people would leave me alone. Maybe the hurt will stop.*

Ronnie went on to explain how the turmoil within himself made him seek desperate measures, just in an attempt to stop the emotional and physical pain that he was experiencing as a result of being sexually abused:



*From about standard six to Matric. Each year I took my mom's 9mm [gun]...and I would go sit on a bed...loaded everything...and every time I just couldn't do it...Every time when I look at myself in the mirror, I couldn't do it....*

When asked why he was unable to kill himself whilst he sat with a loaded gun in his hand, time and time again, Ronnie simply replied:

*My guardian angel.*

Ronnie added:

*Because who am I to take a life that's not mine...its not my right to take my life... Now though that I'm older I realise why. I can say that there is a problem and I can give up, but...there's bigger things waiting for me...and I believe it. And I'm going to make a mark not only in my life but in many people's lives. Um...When I actually sat the last time with a 9mm on my mom's bed, I was actually looking through her dressing table. And I was looking in the mirror and I started laughing... I started laughing, and I thought to myself... 'you coward...do you think this is the way out?' Then you give everybody what they wanted, all those people that hurt you, all the aggravation, all the remarks, and they say, 'Hmm, I knew it. Typical, he couldn't cope with life'.*

The society in which Ronnie lives appears to have deeply impacted him in many areas of his life. As previously mentioned, when discussing possible reasons as to why Ronnie kept his sexual abuse secret, the fear of being judged by society appears to have seeped its way into another realm of Ronnie's life. Similarly, with regards to his silence, Ronnie appears to be fearful of what society may think of him, regarding his desire to commit suicide. Ultimately, this fear of being judged by others appeared to lead to Ronnie not taking his own life.

***Questioning sexual identity.*** With regards to his sexuality and sexual identity, Ronnie stated:

*I knew I was gay...at a young age, because I just didn't fancy girls...even my dreams were always about boys....*

Ronnie appeared to be sure of who he was as an individual from an early age. Ronnie even implied that he believes that perhaps he might have been a target for his abusers due to the fact that he knew that he was gay (homosexual) from a very young age:

*Those few who actually abused me... I still think 'why did you do that'... 'why'...and then you think, did this, that I'm gay, show from an early age...that people just took advantage....*

Ronnie though admitted that he did begin to question his sexual identity after he was sexually abused. Ronnie began to question whether or not he was homosexual – for he always believed that he was. Ronnie spoke of his first intimate encounter with a female:

*All my girlfriends that I had, they were just girl-friends, no kissing or anything...I see you as a girl-friend, that's it...and then I thought, well, 'maybe I'm straight'...so I pulled [kissed] her, and I got so sick...I promise you I actually went to vomit...I couldn't handle it. I actually started throwing-up, I got so violently ill.*

During this stage of his life, Ronnie then realised that he was in fact gay and he stopped questioning his sexuality:

*When I actually accepted being gay, fully accepted it...it was like a big load going from my shoulders...and I started getting more comfortable within my own skin....*

From Ronnie's story, it becomes apparent that he believes that he was always gay, and that it was probably due to his being sexually abused by men, that made him question his sexuality.

### *Conclusion*

Ronnie's childhood of being sexually abused by several different men appears to have led him down a path of secrecy; fear; ambivalence; self-blame and guilt; attempting to escape reality through drug use; cutting-off from those around him; contemplating suicide; a desire to find God; and ultimately, attempting to be strong.

Ronnie's story appears to epitomise the idea of tenacity, as even though his sexually abusive past still appears to be at the forefront of his mind, Ronnie appears to have chosen to be a survivor. Ronnie seems to be open in discussing his sexual abuse, and has mentioned that he has come forward and told others about his past experiences. This though has not always been the case for Ronnie, as until the abuse that he had endured at the hand of his brother came out when Ronnie was nineteen years old, Ronnie spoke of how he lived a life of tormented secrecy.

Currently, Ronnie is attending psychotherapy in an attempt to help him cope and deal with his abusive past. Furthermore, Ronnie stated that he journals many of his thoughts about his abuse into prayers and poems; and he has even thought of writing a book about his ordeals. These actions may be contributing factors as to Ronnie's positive attitude towards trying to overcome his sexual abuse.

### **Ashley's Story**

The participant, Ashley, is a twenty two year old man who lives in the east of Johannesburg. Ashley's first language is English. He is the oldest of three children, and has a younger brother and younger sister. Currently Ashley is unemployed. Ashley is in a long-term relationship.

Ashley was accessed through a counselling psychologist, who knew of the researcher's intended study, and of Ashley's mother who was in therapy at the time. Ashley's mother had commented to the counselling psychologist that her son had been sexually abused as a child. Through the assistance of this counselling psychologist and Ashley's mother, Ashley was invited to participate in this research study due to his history of childhood sexual abuse.

Ashley was informed about the research, and insisted and consented on his true identity being used, when the topic of confidentiality was spoken of.

Within his interview, Ashley appeared somewhat nervous and apprehensive. Ashley was forthcoming with the information that he could recall, however, on many occasions Ashley appeared to close up and claim that he could not recall much of his abuse. This though will be a focus further on within this chapter. As Ashley's interview continued, he began to relax more and subsequently he was able to open up regarding telling his story of sexual abuse.

Ashley disclosed that he was sexually abused when he was around thirteen or fourteen years old. Ashley's abuser was his male choir teacher, who was approximately sixteen years older than Ashley. The abuse continued for several months. Ashley revealed that his abuser did not attack him, but rather, through the use of alcohol, was able to sexually abuse Ashley when Ashley was in a drunken state. Upon further discussion, Ashley disclosed that his abuser was later arrested on molestation charges that were brought about by several of Ashley's peers. Ashley stated that he never came forward about his being abused to the authorities.

Following a Hermeneutic approach, and thematising, coding and elaborating on the content of the transcribed interview, several dominant themes and sub-themes appear to run through Ashley's story. Each shall be further discussed.

### ***Silent Secrecy***

The notion of the 'unspoken'; the silence of abuse that leads to a life of secrecy, appears embedded throughout Ashley's story. This theme emerged when Ashley spoke of the first time his abuser 'crossed the line':

*...the next morning I woke up and he was laying next to me, but pretty close. I kind of got freaked out. So I woke up, I jumped out of bed and I was like 'shit', and he was like 'no relax, relax'. So I didn't say like*

*‘What you doing in the bed next to me’ or anything, I just said ‘Okay cool, can you take me home?’*

Such a statement may lead to the overarching question that is weaved throughout this research: “Why do these boys or men not tell? Why did Ashley ignore his initial ‘freaked out’ response, and instead replace it with silence?” Several themes appeared to emerge within Ashley’s story as to possible reasons why he found it difficult to come forward and tell the truth. These are further discussed.

**Privileges.** By being ‘bought’, ‘bribed’, and ‘given’, Ashley sheds some insight into why he never acknowledged the fear he had for his abuser and of being sexually abused, and why instead he was led down a path of silence:

*I got freaked out...on a few occasions, but I never ever said anything about it... I don’t know, I was like kind of, to be honest, I don’t know why. I didn’t want to make him feel guilty if he hasn’t done anything. You know like ‘what are you doing next to me in the bed?’ I didn’t want to bring up ... he’s allowing me to sleep in his house, in his bed, looking after me. I just felt I was not in the right place to say something...everything was always on his account....*

Ashley’s abuser appeared to lavish him with all the things that he knew Ashley could not afford. In addition to this, Ashley’s abuser would ‘bend the rules’ for Ashley, allowing

him to do what he pleased, which might be one of the things that a teenage boy may desire the most:

*Ya [Yes], we were never that rich, we had money and stuff in our family, but then you get to a place and you got plasma screens all over. It's a different kind of thing, and you get there and you kind of feel excited, you know, we're in this house, we're eating good food, we're drinking, we're doing what we want because there were no rules. He didn't tell us to do anything.*

By bending the rules, not only did Ashley not have to do anything, but he was also allowed to do things that society did not even permit, such as under-aged drinking, which Ashley appeared to enjoy:

*...the alcohol was always there. We didn't start with it but once ... I think he waited for that mood to kick in. And once we were on that level then he'd start with the alcohol... I thought I was having a jol [party; fun time].*

Ashley went on further to say:

*He even let me take his car out, I mean I was 14 years old and I go down to the shop and whatever. He had a lot of trust in me.*



Trust – perhaps another dynamic in a teenage boy’s life that he may so desperately have craved. Trust was something that appeared to have been given so freely to Ashley by his abuser.

However, even more than just the ‘fun things’ that Ashley’s abuser offered him, he also offered Ashley those things that could change his life. At one point, Ashley stated:

*...my father had lost his job or something and we couldn't afford [school] anymore, so I went to a public school here in [area]...But he knew about this, I told him about it previously and I said I'll still come to the choir and whatever. He even offered to keep me in [school], he said he'll pay my education there.*

Ashley then went on to state that he refused this offer:

*I thought 'cool' but I thought 'no'. I was at that stage when I was like, all boys school, now I want to check girls, and a lot of my friends were in that school. So I thought 'do I stay and let him take over', but then I thought about my mom and them, and I thought it would kind of like be the wrong thing towards my dad. My dad feels like he wants to be able to pay for my education, if you can't afford it you can't afford it, I must accept it as it is.*

When asked whether he ever worried about having any of these privileges that his abuser had bestowed upon him, taken away, Ashley responded:

*That's what I thought....*

Thus, in fear of having his privileges taken away, Ashley kept quiet. Ashley's abuser appeared to give him everything he wanted. In return, Ashley gave his abuser his loyalty, his trust, his innocence, his silence.

***Muting mentor.*** Ashley appeared to have the utmost respect for his abuser and this respect may have impacted on Ashley's decision to keep his abuse secret:

*...with the bed situation I didn't want to freak him out, I was heading in a path where I was learning a lot and I didn't want to say 'now why are you sleeping next to me, you're freaking me out'. It was kind of not my place to talk about that.*

Ashley's abuser was a man Ashley revered; a man he respected; a man he admired. Ashley described his abuser as being:

*...powerful around his peers, as well around the teachers, he showed a presence. He wasn't a withdrawn type of person, he was very loud as well but he had such a skill in music, he could play a piano like Beethoven. He*

*had that side of him, which I admired, that's why I used to go to him. I thought 'what can I learn from this guy'.*

Ashley then stated:

*Ya, I looked up to him in a way and things carried on and carried on....*

Ashley's abuser appeared to be his mentor and he held a position of power in Ashley's life. This role appeared to have enhanced Ashley's inability to break the silence about being abused by the very man he looked to for guidance.

***Society-a-judging.*** Society appeared, and may continue to appear to play an extremely important role in initiating and maintaining Ashley's silence regarding his abuse. Ashley stated:

*I feel inhumane. How could it have happened to me?*

The effects that society, especially a patriarchal society, has on little boys and grown men, can cause them to believe that they are less than human, less than men, less than what's expected of them. What would happen if these boys and men were to confess that they had been 'inappropriately touched in a sexual manner' or 'molested'? Perhaps even the thought of being sexually abused as a male is such a shock, as society chooses to keep its existence in the shadows, that these males are caught off guard. Such boys and men

might not even be able to comprehend how to deal with their situation, as they have no 'training' in how to manage such experiences. Pure disbelief – which could often be followed by silence.

Ashley made mention of how embarrassed he felt and continues to feel about being sexually abused, particularly in relation to how he believes and perceives society views men who have been sexually abused in childhood:

*...you know, a man is a man, I mean, like you say, it happens often to woman and they're coming to counselling and get it sorted out, but when it happens to a man it's like you taking away his manhood, you're taking away what a man is, he actually becomes like a woman. With no guard, no courage to stand up, and when something like that has happened to you, you're too embarrassed to talk about it or speak to anyone about it because he's actually taken away your manhood in a sense. It's like so embarrassing to even think about it....*

Ashley went on further to state:

*I'm embarrassed, I wouldn't like to talk about it... people would turn around and say 'but how could you drink with this guy, how could you sleep in the same bed as him and the next morning wake up and not tell*

*him 'What you're doing next to me'. I never used to say things like that, I would just keep quiet....*

The thought of having others know about him being sexually abused appeared to be more than Ashley could handle, as being judged by society appears to be incomprehensible to him. Ashley mentioned:

*Like I say, it doesn't make you feel manly if you have to really go and let everyone know about it...I don't even want to imagine...It would have been a thing I wouldn't be able to handle.*

In society, men are regarded as 'the strong problem-solvers' who should not be dependent on others for help. Men should fix. Men should sort out and mend their own problems in isolation. Men should not need assistance. Perhaps such a view is another reason as to why Ashley was unable to come forward about his abuse. He stated:

*I didn't tell anyone because it's no one's business, if I have to put it that way. I thought it was my own situation to deal with and I must just live with it, grow with it, and try block it out.*

In addition, Ashley went on to say:

*There's a lot of things that I don't mention. Something would happen...*

*Like I say I feel that I have to deal with it on my own. If I don't deal with it on my own who's going to help me?*

It appears that for Ashley, the thought of someone being able to help him raises some questions. This comment appears to have an underlying tone that suggests that Ashley might believe that no one is be able to understand him and his experiences, which may lead to the deduction that he therefore has to attempt to deal with it on his own. Additionally, society appears to have instilled in men, and particularly in Ashley, that men need to deal with whatever challenges they face on their own; otherwise they become less than men.

### ***Ambivalence and Ambiguity***

As Ashley spoke, ambivalence and ambiguity appeared to emerge. Contradictions and negations became apparent, which suggest that Ashley may have ambivalent thoughts and feelings with regards to his being sexually abused. The following sub-themes tend to suggest ambivalence and ambiguity within Ashley's story.

***'Maybe, maybe not'***. When Ashley began recalling the first time that he 'spent the night' at his abusers house, questions were raised as to whether or not he had in fact been sexually abused:

*I don't know if anything happened, I wouldn't know. To this day I don't know. I hope something didn't happen, but if it did I wouldn't have known. He could've touched me, he could've done whatever because I was completely out of it. I passed out literally. I was gone.*

Ashley appeared uncertain, yet almost insistent that he did not believe anything 'really' happened. However, as Ashley's story began to unfold, it became more evident that he did believe and in fact know that his choir teacher had sexually abused him:

*... there was inappropriate touching, lots of vulgar language....*

And:

*I'm sure things did happen and when it was confirmed, that he has been caught out, it kind of gave me a fright because then I thought something must have happened. It can't be a 'if' or a 'maybe', something must have happened. I was around him for a long time....*

Ashley also stated that:

*...he was taking advantage of me while I was sleeping and passed out. Because I'll be honest, I can't feel anything when I've been drinking, for at least four or five hours I'm dead out.*

The reason for Ashley's ambiguity regarding being sexually abused remains somewhat unclear. Ashley volunteered to participate within this research study, openly stating that he had been sexually abused when he was younger. Then, after the interview began, he became somewhat hesitant in providing the details, some of which had been spoken about prior to the recorded interview, which were extreme. As the interview progressed though, Ashley appeared to open up and admit to his being sexually abused – 'on the record'.

This ambiguity may have been a form of defensive behaviour, so as to protect himself from reaching back and reflecting on many of his childhood memories of abuse. In addition (as discussed in the theme of 'Ways of Coping'), Ashley appears to have blocked out many of his childhood memories. Also, during the occasions when he was at his abuser's house, he stated that he had drunk alcohol excessively, and past out drunk; waking up without his clothes on and not remembering a thing. This may have led to Ashley not being able to vividly recall each encounter with his abuser, which may have made it difficult for him to be open regarding many of the abuse incidences.

Another possible reason for Ashley taking some time to admit to his being abused – 'on the record' – may have been regarding trust. Ashley appears to struggle with trusting those around him (as discussed in the theme of 'Trust'), which may have lead him to be cautious at the beginning of the interview. Perhaps though, as he and the researcher began to build a closer rapport, he may have begun to feel comfortable enough to disclose more information pertaining to his sexual abuse.



*Being 'freaked out' versus being 'okay'*. Ashley's ambiguity appeared to arise at several points during his story, especially in relation to how he felt throughout the times when he was being abused. On many occasions Ashley described waking up in his abuser's bed the next morning:

*I woke up and he was lying next to me... I kind of got freaked out....*

Ashley would then continue with statements such as:

*I didn't say like 'What you doing in the bed next to me' or anything, I just said 'Okay cool, can you take me home?'*

At another point Ashley stated:

*I always get that shock and that freak out, but then I kind of forget about it because then I carry on.*

Ashley's statements appear ambiguous, as at one point he would state how 'freaked out' he felt, and then he would almost nullify what he had said with a comment relating to it being 'okay'. This ambiguity may relate to how Ashley has tried to cope with his abuse:

*I felt a bit uncomfortable about it so, I just went to put my pants back on and then I was cool, then I was fine after that.*

Ashley spoke about when his abuser was arrested for molestation charges, laid by other boys (not by Ashley). Ashley stated:

*I cried about it for some nights and I kind of just thought its life, it happens.*

Once again Ashley's comments suggest ambivalence with regards to how he felt, and perhaps with regards to how he still feels about being sexually abused. Whenever the notion of a 'negative' feeling is suggested, Ashley appears to shrug it off by eliminating his 'true' feelings, and instead replacing it with the idea of it being 'okay'.

**'Who to blame'**. When speaking about being abused, and relating it to why he had never told anyone, Ashley commented that:

*I didn't want to make him feel guilty....*

Such a comment appears to suggest that Ashley took responsibility for being sexually abused. By not wanting to "make him feel guilty", it is implied that Ashley had control within the situation, suggesting self-blame. Thus, if he were responsible for the abuse to some degree, technically, he would be to blame.

Ashley went on to mention:

*People would say and judge me, and why didn't I do things differently, when I could have done things differently than what I had done it.*

And:

*...for hurting myself, for actually not being woken up.*

Self-blame is once again implied in these comments, along with the notion of societies influence, through social norms and rules, into why he may have blamed himself to some extent. Such statements imply how Ashley appears to have taken the responsibility and accountability for his being abused, from his abuser; and rather internalised it and directed it at himself. Thus in his mind it may be evident that, if he were to blame, he could never tell.

At a later stage though, when he was asked about whether at any time he blamed himself for the abuse, Ashley stated:

*I don't. No, I never blame myself. That's one good thing I can say. I blame him, of course I blame him, but like I say, I'm embarrassed.*

Such a statement contradicts the notion of him having control within the abusive relationship, and taking the blame. Ashley stated that he does not blame himself, but that he does in fact blame his abuser. However, the “but” that Ashley continues his statement with, tends to suggest that once again he may have feelings of ambivalence with regards to his being abused and his role within the abuse; as previously he had taken responsibility and thus suggested self-blame.

As previously mentioned, Ashley appeared to show much ambivalence with regards to blame and responsibility. This ambiguity that appeared to come across within his interview, may suggest that Ashley appears uncertain about his feelings regarding his being sexually abused.

*Feeling versus not feeling.* Emotions and feelings appear to be other areas in which Ashley shows ambiguity and ambivalence. At one point Ashley commented:

*...there is no emotion. Let me tell you honest, there is no emotion for me.*

And:

*I got no emotions....*

Ashley appears to believe that he is not an emotional person. By stating this, it is inferred that Ashley may believe that he is someone who is able to control what he feels, both

internally and externally, therefore believing that he portrays an individual who does not show others how he feels, hence, “I got no emotions”. However, at other points with the interview, Ashley stated:

*I got that upset and I got depressed....*

And:

*I've got a very quick temper, like volatile, very on the edge. All the time, I've always been like that.*

Ashley then further mentioned:

*I'm very volatile; I'm very easily... If something is wrong ... I don't even know it, I can come in and I'm happy and something will just be off and it will change my whole mood. And I'll completely become the worst person you've ever seen, seriously.*

By stating this, Ashley contradicted himself and made it apparent that he does in fact believe that he gets, and is ‘emotional’ – stating feelings such as “upset”, “depressed”, “angry”, “quick temper”, “on the edge”, and at times, “happy”. Furthermore, Ashley’s emotions essentially appear rather extreme, in the sense of them being either very

positive or very negative, which is the opposite of how he stated that he believes that he has no emotions at all.

Ashley further expressed his extreme range of emotions when he spoke about an argument he had with his sister:

*...she said whatever and she started trying to get more involved and I lost it. I started hitting the doors and cupboards, starting throwing things around ... I lifted her up and I threw her down on the floor and I started hitting her in her legs because I will never hit my sister in her face. I'm not an abuser or a freaked out guy who just can't control himself, but I hit her in her legs, I gave her like serious, she had like bruises all over her legs. I swear, I get very vulgar and I tell you exactly the worst thing, the things that you do which are bad....*

The ambiguity within this text moves beyond Ashley's feelings of ambivalence regarding his emotions; it goes further to show that he may actually have ambivalent feelings towards his self-control as well. At one point he stated that he is "not an abuser", and then he continued on to mention that he "hit her" and gave her "bruises all over her legs". Such comments contradict each other by stating the opposite. In addition, Ashley stated that he believes that he is not a person who "can't control himself", yet the context in the story in which he stated this suggests that he was unable to control himself as he "lost it" and began hitting his sister, the doors, and the cupboards.

### ***Ways of Coping***

Throughout Ashley's story, it became evident that he has developed several different ways of attempting to cope with his past sexual abuse, in order to protect himself and attempt to move on. Several of the ways in which he attempts to cope will be further discussed.

**'Blocking'**. By blocking his thoughts, feelings, and memories from his conscious mind, Ashley appears to believe that he is able to adequately 'deal' with his past:

*I've blocked most of that 'shit' out. If I have a bad experience, my coping mechanism is to block it out and that's what I do, it's automatic... I just found it was the easy way out, I didn't have to worry....*

Ashley went on further to explain:

*...at the end of the day the pain from the actual time I was with him, blocking it out was so much easier than sitting and thinking about it and dealing with it, because I'm, like I said before, I block things out. I don't sit and deal with it, which is going to affect me later in life, I know that, but right now for this moment in time I'd rather just block it out. I got other things I must focus on.*

Although Ashley appears to have some insight into the problems that may be associated with him blocking his memories, he clearly prefers to ‘block’ them out anyway, and would rather escape from them than deal with them. He may perhaps even pretend that they did not happen at all.

*Escaping reality.* All through Ashley’s story the notion of escaping his past was unmistakable – in order to be able to cope with the memories of his abuse. Ashley recalled that on several occasions he could not remember a lot about his abuse, due to many reasons. The most pertinent one being:

*I can’t remember because I was drunk....*

Ashley spoke of how his abuser would always ensure that he (Ashley) was drunk. It would be after these alcohol binging sessions that Ashley would wake up the next day without his clothes on, having not remembered what had happened the previous evening:

*I woke up and I was in my boxers, and all my clothes was packed neatly there. I don’t pack my clothes neatly, I just throw them, so that’s when I knew he maybe took off my clothes for me.*



Perhaps learning from experience, and realising how alcohol affected him, Ashley turned to other forms of escaping reality by using substances in order to ‘forget’ the memories of his past:

*It [sic] was a lot to deal with and I turned to drugs.*

And:

*I didn't have to worry...I just thought it's 'lekker' [nice] to have drugs every now and again.*

Drugs appeared to become a ‘crutch’ for Ashley. By being ‘high’, Ashley was then ‘incapable’ of thinking about his past. The drugs would numb the pain, and ‘take away’ all of his painful memories to another place – a place he would only need to worry about if he was sober. Thus, for Ashley, drugs were a way of escaping everything around him that pertained to his being abused; in addition to any other factors within his life that he felt brought him pain.

### ***‘The Ripple Effect’***

Being sexually abused has taken more from Ashley than just his sexual innocence. There appears to be so many areas within his life that have been affected, as a result of his being sexually abused. Those areas that arose within Ashley’s story are further discussed.

**Trust.** When the topic of trust slowly began to weave into Ashley's story, he recalled:

*When I was younger I didn't know trust and this and that...Only once it started...I struggle a lot with trust... I cannot trust.*

The effects of being abused appear to have played a vital role in Ashley's ability, or rather inability, to trust those around him. Prior to his being abused, Ashley appeared to not have any difficulty in being able to trust, however, as sexual abuse became a part of his reality, trust appeared to be taken out of it. Ashley added:

*It was a big thing for me. Like I say, a lot of anger, trust issues, insecurities, I'm very insecure, that's one of the things. Trust is one of the main ones. I cannot trust.*

After trusting completely in the man who sexually abused him, Ashley appears to measure all his other relationships to that one. Thus, if such a man – his role model and mentor – could break his trust in the most inexcusable and explicit way, then how could he trust anyone else?

**Self-esteem.** As Ashley continued to reveal his story, the notion of how insecure he has become, since he was sexually abused, became evident:

*I think I've got a very low self-confidence.*

Ashley then went on to add:

*I was a very trusting person before and happy, always quite cool, never angry, I never lost my temper, things like that didn't happen. Then afterwards I started getting very upset and angry with myself, because I'm not what I think I should be.*

Such a comment suggests how being sexually abused has affected Ashley's self-esteem. Currently, it would appear that Ashley believes that he does not meet his own standards for who he thinks he should be – he feels he is not good enough. Thus, the belief that he is not good enough may be linked directly to the previous comment of him stating that he has “low self-confidence”.

**Intimacy.** Ashley made mention of how he has for many years struggled, and continues to struggle with intimacy and being intimate. Currently, Ashley is involved in a relationship, and he candidly explained his struggle:

*... I can't give her what she wants if I can put it that way. That emotional support, intimate support. I don't even want to sleep with her. It's not that I don't want to, it's that I can't, it's, I'm programmed, this whole time on this other mission.*

To this Ashley added:

*...she's like my really first serious girlfriend and she's been the only one...When I was younger and drugging and stuff, it was kind of easy for me. I didn't get intimate or anything, we did whatever we had to do, but it wasn't anything like real love and emotion involved.*

It would appear that since his abuse, Ashley has been unable to have a loving and intimate relationship. Even currently, where he discussed being in a committed relationship, he believes that he is unable to allow himself to be intimate. This may be as the only intimacy that he has ever possibly known, was one that was entangled with abuse, lies, and distortion.

### ***Conclusion***

Being sexually abused for Ashley appears to have brought about a life of secrecy; ambivalence and ambiguity; attempts of trying to cope by blocking his memories from his mind, as well as using drugs; a difficulty in trusting others; poor self-esteem; and a lack of intimacy.

Secrecy appears to be a central theme within Ashley's story. Ashley even struggled to admit to his being sexually abused within the interview, and it was only once a trusting rapport was built between Ashley and the researcher, that he was able to more readily

discuss his abusive past. In addition, Ashley mentioned that he has only ever spoken of his abuse to his mother, who herself had been sexually abused, and now to the researcher. This further emphasises the extent to which silence and secrecy appear present within his life. Ashley appears to attempt to block out any thoughts pertaining to his abuse, as a way of trying to cope.

Furthermore, besides for attending a rehabilitation centre for his drug addiction a few years ago, Ashley commented that he has not received any form of therapy in order to assist him in working through his abusive past. Although Ashley stated that he realises that he needs to work through and deal with his past, he appears somewhat unperturbed with the idea of not dealing with his sexual abuse at present.

### **George's Story**

This participant – so as to protect his identity, and maintain confidentiality – chose the pseudo-name of George Parker to be used throughout this research. George is a twenty one year old man who lives in Pretoria. George's first language is Afrikaans. He has one younger sister. George is a full time student who is currently completing his degree in the field of accountancy. George is currently single.

George was accessed through the *UNISA (University of South Africa) Psychotherapy Clinic*, in Pretoria. A therapist at the clinic was aware of the researcher's intended study, and of George's past sexual abuse. Through the therapist's assistance, George was invited

to participate in this research study due to his history of childhood sexual abuse. George was fully informed about this research.

During his interview, George appeared nervous and somewhat rigid. George was able to answer all the questions that were posed to him; however, he did appear to be conscious of what he was prepared to disclose. Subsequently, George showed some hesitancy when he was telling his story of being sexually abused. Nearing the end of the interview though, George appeared to become more comfortable, relaxed and open.

George disclosed that two different males sexually abused him, at different times in his life. The first time that George was sexually abused was when he was eight years old. George's abuser was a friend of his, who was approximately thirteen or fourteen at the time (five to six years older than George). At the age of sixteen, George was once again sexually abused. This time George's abuser was a music teacher (pianist) within the church that George attended. In addition, George's abuser was also a close friend of George's family. His abuser was sixteen years older than George (thirty two at the time). George made no reference to any of his abusive encounters being violent attacks on him.

Following a Hermeneutic approach, and thematising, coding and elaborating on the content of the transcribed interview, several dominant themes and sub-themes appear to run through George's story. These will be further discussed.

***Being Silent versus Telling***

George's story appears to be filled with silence, yet simultaneously, he appears to be able to tell a select few about his past. However, even in George's telling, he remained somewhat silent, carefully selecting that which he wished to disclose. Silence therefore appears to be weaved throughout George's story, and throughout his life. George made several references to why he believes he remained silent regarding his sexual abuse. These references are further discussed.

***Social Influences.*** As children, society teaches what it has predetermined to be acceptable and appropriate. If something should occur outside of society's boundaries and rules, confusion and guilt may creep into the lives of those who have crossed the border. Society's influence appears to be so engrained within the lives of its occupants, that for many, to even question why they may keep certain aspects of themselves secret, causes confusion:

*I just lay there the whole night and I didn't actually think of anything – I just felt it was not right. But I didn't even speak about it, or the thing I actually thought about was like this week, why I didn't speak about it. And I think the whole thing was I knew it was wrong back then because I had to know it was wrong.*

When asked how he could have possibly known it was wrong, George replied by stating:

*Because I didn't tell anybody.*

Society appears to dictate to the majority of individuals what is and is not acceptable, in relation to its specific culture, social norms and so on. Therefore, according to George, if he did not tell anyone about what had happened to him, what had happened to him was wrong. Subsequently, if he was a part of what had happened, then he too must have been in the wrong. Thus, guilt and self-blame appear to have seeped into George's life through the presence of social appropriateness and social norms. Therefore, this appears to link to why George never came forward when he was first abused at the age of eight.

In addition, George appeared to be acutely aware of how others may perceive and judge him if he were to tell. George made particular reference to his father:

*I thought that it was like wrong, I thought that if I tell my dad, he's going to like smack me or something, and tell me it was my fault that it happened....*

Fear about what others – in this instance his father – would think about him, appeared to motivate George into keeping the truth a secret. The idea of being blamed by others appears to be a further factor that motivated George's silence.

***Trusting friends.*** As George began to disclose the several incidences of his abuse, it became evident that both of his abusers had initially been his friends. They had been



people with whom George had built up relationships, and ultimately, people whom he trusted and respected.

George recalled the relationship that he had had with his first abuser, before the sexual abuse began to take place:

*We were friends because we were neighbours growing up, it was like we were together for like every day, and we played – we had like a little dollhouse thing on stilts. It was so cool. We played over at each other's houses every day, we lived on plots so it's like really ... it's not like in town where you have houses with walls and stuff.*

With his second abuser, George recalled:

*He was friends with the family, or like my father and my mother, and he's sixteen years older than me. It started out as friends. We liked the same stuff....*

George went on further to elaborate on his relationship with his second abuser:

*We played in a band together but ya, it was weird because we were friends....*

And:

*...we were friends, really good friends. I met his whole family and we were all friends, because like Sundays we went normally to his brother or his brother came to his parents and we were braaiing together and eating and stuff, so I really knew them well.*

With both of his abusers, George had respectful, trusting and friend-based relationships. In addition to George trusting his abusers, he also made mention of how his family trusted them as well – in this instance, his second abuser in particular:

*Ya, ya, they trusted him like really.*

This appears to link to why George may have felt that he was unable to tell anyone of what was being done to him, as if he were to disclose, he would be betraying his friends.

**Offerings.** What became particularly apparent by what George recalled in relation to his second abuser, was that he was bought and given all the things that he desired. George mentioned how at the time of his abuse, he really enjoyed playing the piano, and how this linked to his abuse:

*When I was a little boy I can remember he always played so beautiful. And he does, he has got a really good talent. And ya, the one day he phoned*

*me, I think it was in April or something. He phoned me and ask me do I want to come see his piano because he's got a grand, a baby grand piano and it's like really beautiful...Like it's one of my dreams, I want to have one and he has one. Then I said to him 'okay it's fine, my mom and dad will come and drop me and I can play a bit on the piano'.*

It was through music that George and his abuser's friendship truly began to develop.

George recalled:

*...we were just talking about stuff and then we realised I liked symphonic stuff or classical music, and he does too, and a few thing that we have in common.*

George's abuser then appeared to enhance his friendship with George by taking him to the places that George really enjoyed:

*We just started being friends going to symphonic orchestra...We went to see them a few times and it's beautiful, it's really beautiful. So we went seeing all this stuff and he bought me like a lot of stuff.*

In addition, George was also bought the things that he really desired:

*Like my favourite thing in life is pens, I love pens, and he bought me like a few nice really expensive pens, stuff that I can't afford. And he just bought me like chocolates, like the best chocolate ever, Toblorone and Lindt and all these expansive chocolates...and everywhere that we went he paid for it, like everywhere, even the shows that we saw.*

For George, a teenage boy at the time, being spoilt with everything that he desired, perhaps the idea of having everything taken away from him may have led him down the alley of secrecy for several years. This notion was proven true for George, as ultimately when he did confront his second abuser about what had been happening, his abuser took everything that he had given George away, including himself. To this George stated:

*...he said to me that day 'okay it's fine but you will never see me again as from today'. And then he said to me okay 'climb out of the car' and he dropped me at school and he didn't even say goodbye. Then he just left.*

George went on to mention that when this happened he felt terrible for having said anything:

*Terrible. That morning even when he dropped me at school I was crying because he was one of my best friends leaving just like that.*

Perhaps having experienced what he had feared come true, George may have decided to continue to keep his abuse secret – a small price to pay so as not to be abandoned by anyone else.

**Telling.** Although George's story appears to be soaked in silence and secrecy, there were times when he appeared safe and strong enough to be able to tell a select few about his abuse. The first person that George told was his best friend:

*The actual first person that I told was one of my best friends in first year... we became like really good friends and then he told me that he was molested, and then I told him. That was the first person I told.*

In addition, George told his mother:

...she said she asked God to tell her what's wrong with me because, she can see there's something wrong, something is bothering me like really badly. And okay, I was like in the spot now. So now you have to tell her what's wrong and what's happened... now I have to tell my mom.

George went on to state:

*So I told her about the first time it happened, not about the second time. And she was shocked.*

It becomes important to note how George stated that he told his mother about the first incident of sexual abuse – which occurred when he was eight – and not about the second incident – which occurred when he was sixteen. When questioned about this, George stated:

Because the second one was still really raw.

Thus, George may have decided to only tell his mother about the first incident, and kept the second incident secret, as he may have still been struggling to cope with his ordeal. However, there has been no indication that George has told his mother of the second abuse since that time, which may lead to the question of whether it is still too painful for him to deal with, or if there are other factors – perhaps self-blame or the fear of being judged – that may be contributing to his continuing silence.

Interestingly enough, a year prior to George telling his mother about his sexual abuse, George mentioned:

*... my mom told me that she was sexually abused....*

George was then asked if he had felt that he was able to tell both his mother and his friend about his sexual abuse, because they themselves had also been sexually abused.

George agreed and stated:

*Ya, when I told my mom I knew that she would understand what I'm going through.*

The idea may therefore emerge that George was able to tell his secret to these people because he believed that those whom he told would be able to truly understand how he felt, and he may have believed that they would not judge him – as they had experienced similar events.

In addition, George mentioned that he had also told another friend, as well as his previous girlfriend. However, George mentioned that his previous girlfriend, although initially supportive, broke up with him three weeks later and George recalled that she stated:

*... 'okay you're going to be better then we can get together again'.*

Such a statement suggests yet another negative impact upon George, relating to him telling his secret, as ultimately George was rejected by his girlfriend after he had relayed to her that he had been sexually abused. This may be a further factor that may have caused, and continue to cause George to be hesitant in telling others of his abuse in the future.

### *Ambiguous Feelings*

Within George's story, the concept of ambiguity arose at several times, especially pertaining to his feelings regarding blame and guilt. This is further discussed.

*'To blame or not to blame'*. The idea that being sexually abused as a child due to ones own on-bringing can cause such internal conflict, despair, guilt, and self-blame, that one might never wish to face the outside world again. When this notion arose, George stated:

*I think I felt shameful though, like that it happened and it was my fault.  
And that's why I thought ... I think I never spoke about it because, I  
thought really hard about it this week, because I never thought about it,  
why I actually didn't tell anybody.*

George appears to identify with the notion of self-blame and shame, suggesting that he feels responsible and liable for being sexually abused, time and time again.

At one point George mentioned an email that he had sent his second abuser, after he had confronted him about the abuse:

*Two years ago I mailed him in November [2007] and I told him I'm sorry  
for everything that happened and I'm trying to forgive you; I'm really*



*trying to and I hope you can forgive me for [sic] what I've done in this whole thing. I don't know why I said that though.*

Such a comment clearly indicates how George feels responsible for the abuse that was incurred upon him by his abuser. There is also much ambiguity within this statement, as even though George mentioned that he is attempting to forgive his abuser, he too apologised to his abuser for his own part in the ordeal. The closing comment also suggests ambiguous feelings, as George appears to be unable to identify why he apologised.

When further discussing the concept of blame, George commented:

*I thought that it was my fault, but it wasn't my fault.*

George went on further to state:

*It's not my fault; I'm going on with it, being stronger....*

These comments appear to contradict the notion of self-blame that George previously admitted too. Once again, this tends to indicate the impression of ambiguity with regards to responsibility of the abuse.

***Learning to Cope***

In attempting to deal with painful and unexplainable memories, coping strategies and techniques appear to become vitally important. Within George's recollection of his memories of childhood sexual abuse, several aspects around the notion of coping appeared evident. Those coping strategies that emerged within George's story are further discussed.

***Separating body and mind.*** George recalled that whilst the abuse was occurring, he developed a way of trying to deal with it:

*I thought this wasn't happening to me, it's like a dream or thingy.*

When asked if he had felt separated from his body, George agreed and stated:

*Ya, like happening to somebody else.*

Thus, it appears that from the moment that the abuse began to take place, George was trying to cope with it in different ways. He attempted to separate what was going on in his head, from what was happening to his body. George appeared to adopt a coping mechanism of separating his body and mind during the abuse. George began a process of trying to deal with his thoughts and memories, so as to lessen the impact of what he was physically experiencing – for if it did not 'feel' as if it were happening to him, and it

'felt' as if it were happening to somebody else, then perhaps he would be better able to cope with it.

***Mental blocks.*** By mentally blocking out his thoughts, memories, feelings, and experiences, George attempted to cope with his sexual abuse. George recalled how he had begun to realise that he had blocked his memories of being sexually abused:

*I felt like I know something is wrong, something happened but I can't remember it. And then it started coming back. I was molested when I was, I think, in grade two.*

George had placed a mental barrier within his mind as an attempt to 'forget' what had happened to him when he was a child. George mentioned:

*I didn't think that I'm a person that packs away stuff in a closet and never think about it again, feel like it's dealt with....*

When George was asked if blocking his memories was a way of coping with his abuse, George went on to say:

*Ya. It is in this box and I put it away, and then the cupboard fell open with all the boxes.*

Such a statement appears to suggest that, although George attempted to ‘block’ his memories from surfacing by ‘packing them away’, his attempts have not been very successful. As even though this appeared to be a temporary solution, he was unable to keep the memories of his experiences totally suppressed.

***Trying to escape.*** The desire to escape the trauma of his abusive past appears to be an important aspect in George’s life. To flee, to run away, to separate himself from the memories of his abusers, led George down a path of trying to numb the pain in order to escape:

*I was really depressed. I started drinking. I started using painkillers as well. It just like numbed me. It’s nice. I love the feeling. I don’t do it anymore because it is really dangerous... it was totally escaping.*

George went on further to say:

*I went sitting on the roof... like every night. Like 20:00 I would go and I would sit there until 01:00. Just every night, just to be high and just get away from everything. Just sitting there watching the city lights. That’s what I would do.*

Although George claimed that he no longer uses painkillers to numb the pain, alcohol appears to have a similar effect for him, and one that he still uses in order to try and cope:

*I struggle with it still; it's still there. Sometimes I still drink over it, but it's really in times of stress. I'll say it's the devil; he brings up these memories when it's just the wrong time, and then it's really hard.*

In addition, George also mentioned that he began smoking as a way of attempting to cope and escape from his memories of being sexually abused:

*...this is why I'm smoking, because I'm trying to cope with it and I don't know how to cope with it.*

Smoking, drinking alcohol, and taking painkillers (prescription drugs) all appear to be methods that George has utilised, and may continue to utilise, in order to attempt to escape the reality of his sexual abuse in an effort to cope.

**Faith.** Religion and faith appear to be important to George, especially in an attempt to cope with his abusive past. However, this was not always the case, and there was a time where George questioned his faith in God:

*I said to myself 'there can't be a God. How can there be a God in this whole place? It's ridiculous, the whole thought of it is ridiculous, because how can this ... it happened to me'. It's like a starting of a small thing that you think of and then it just grows, like big. And then I just stopped*

*believing and I said to one of my friends I stopped believing... he said to me 'you're insane, come to me'. And we spoke a bit and he told me about 'look where we are now, how are you here, how did you come here'. And then I realised 'no there must be a God, there must be some super being up there helping me every day to cope'.*

George went on to speak about how he relies on his faith in God to help him deal with his past and attempt to move on:

*I believe I can be healed. I just think that you know, God works in different ways with different people, I just don't know what's the purpose of mine....*

With this in mind, George attempts to deal with the memories of his past, and find a way in which he can be healed with God's help.

### ***Long Lasting Consequences***

The physical act of being sexually abused by a person, or persons, that one trusts, have long lasting consequences, and affect more areas of one's life than merely one's body. Being sexually abused has appeared to affect many different areas within George's life, in which he still struggles to cope. Those that arose are further discussed.

**Flashbacks.** Associated with the mental blocking of his memories of being sexually abused, George appears to find that many places, instances, and situations trigger memories and flashbacks of the times when he was abused:

*In Matric I loved watching 'Special Assignment' ... And I loved watching it because I was alone in the house or not alone that time, but my mom and dad had been sleeping, just as well, and that was 'me-time', 'TV time', and I watched 'Special Assignment' and '3<sup>rd</sup> Degree', either one of the two programs. And I saw this ... it was about a teacher giving extra classes to this boy, and he bought the boy gifts and everything. It was like my story....*

From that moment onwards, the memories that George attempted to block from his conscious thoughts, started to flood back into his mind. George began to have many flashbacks regarding his being sexually abused. The most vivid that he recalled was on the day when his dorm room, at the university he was studying at, was vandalised and set on fire. Subsequently, it was the same afternoon when his mother admitted to him that she had been sexually abused:

*On the door there was written all these ugly words – gay and all this ... it was really ugly, it was really, really ugly. And when my mom told me; that triggered it. When we sat there and she told me I was like 'okay this is*

*something to think about because I think there is more to this story'. That triggered it. It was a terrible day.*

For George, flashbacks appear to be a common occurrence since the memories of his abuse was triggered:

Flashbacks. Still today when I see places or go places I'll actually remember 'oh, this happened here'.

And:

*...it's actually the flashbacks that I get the most because we were like everywhere.*

Haunting images flashing within his mind appear to be a constant reminder of the suffering that George has incurred. Triggers appear to surround him ensuring that his memories are never forgotten.

**'All trust is lost'**. Trust, conviction, and reliance appear to have disappeared from George's life since the first time he was sexually abused by a person he trusted:



*I don't trust anybody, like really, I don't trust anybody. So I won't tell anybody anything unless I trust them. And it takes a long time to build up trust.*

After placing his trust in two men who he considered to be his friends, and subsequently having that trust ripped from his soul by the atrocious acts of being sexually violated, George lost more than his innocence. By being sexually abused, George lost his ability to connect with, depend on, and trust in people.

**Sexuality.** George appears to have questioned his sexual identity since he was sexually abused. George recalled:

*I was teased that I was gay and I never knew why, why they said that. I played rugby till standard four. I was a nice person and I had a lot of friends, but there was guys who teased me that said I was gay. Even my sister said that and that hurt like really.*

When asked if he ever questioned his sexuality and sexual orientation, George responded by stating:

*Yes. That happened a lot.*

George went on further to state:

*Ya, because I think maybe okay this happens – It could make me gay ...  
okay, people say I'm gay.*

The notion of who he was and is as a sexual being appears to have been thrown into turmoil by his being sexually abused. What may have even further exacerbated George's sexual questioning and confusion is that he was sexually abused by males. Such a tribulation may raise many questions with regards to his sexuality, as well as with regards to blaming himself. However, George appears somewhat adamant that he knows that he is not gay, and that currently he does not question who he is as a sexual being. George stated:

*I've always had a girlfriend; you know that, I'm not gay.*

**Male fear.** George appears to have an ongoing 'battle of the sexes' within himself. Perhaps as it relates to the gender of his abusers, George made mention of how he struggles to befriend, or even maintain relationships with male individuals:

*Another stuff that it really affected was my social life and the way to connect with guy friends, I really struggled to make friends with guys. I can make friends with girls....*

When asked as to why he believes that he struggles to make friends with 'guys' or men, George responded:

*I don't know, I think I'm just scared of them.*

When further questioned about his fear towards men, George went on to state:

*Because of what happened. And it's so stupid though because they can't do that to me again but I'm still scared of the male figure....*

The gender of his abusers in relation to his own has appeared to have instilled a fear within George with regards to men. This has subsequently affected his ability to interact with, and make male friends, which further impacts on his social interactions.

**Physical intimacy.** The lack of physical intimacy within George's life appears evident when he spoke of his relationship with his ex-girlfriend:

One really big, big thing, I should've told this already, is in my relationship with my girlfriend, we couldn't go further than kissing. I couldn't kiss, like even French kissing, the open mouth thing. I can't do that; it's like 'get away from me'. The whole intimacy thing is not there. I can be intimate with her, like psychologically we can share deep memories

and share our lives and stuff, but the whole physical intimacy thing is not there. It's just gone.

When George was asked if he believes that his lack of desire for physical intimacy is related directly to his being sexually abused, George replied:

*It must be.*

When he recalled the moments within his life where there were opportunities for physical intimacy, George proclaimed:

*I just don't try to go to that point.*

He then stated:

*I never felt the need. It's like, 'I don't want it'. It's just ... 'don't get near me'.*

Clearly for George, physical intimacy remains an issue for him, and he believes it is a consequence of being sexually abused. Thus, when George's sexual innocence was snatched from him as a child, his subsequent desire for anything sexual and intimate appears to have been taken as well.

### *Conclusion*

George's sexual abuse brings forward the themes within his life of being silent versus wanting to tell; of attempting to cope by separating his mind from his body; escaping through alcohol, nicotine, prescription drugs, and mental blocks; putting his faith in God; feelings of responsibility and self-blame; flashbacks; a fear of men; and a lack of desire for physical intimacy.

Although George professed to confide in his mother and a few close friends about some of his sexual abuse encounters, it appears somewhat evident that George does not wish for others to know. George also appeared hesitant in providing details regarding the actual incidences of his sexual abuse. This may suggest that there might be several details regarding his abuse that he wishes to remain secret. In addition, of all three participants that partook in this study, George was the only one who wished for his identity to remain anonymous. While this is not a determining factor regarding wanting to keep his abuse secret, it does appear to play some sort of a role in his continuing silence.

Recently though, George did attend therapy in order to attempt to work through and deal with his sexual abuse. However, George ended therapy after several sessions, stating that the issues that were being raised within the therapy, pertaining to his sexual abuse, were causing him to lose focus on his academic studying. This he believed, led him to fail several examinations during the time of his therapy. Although George stated that he has not ruled out returning to therapy, he claimed that he would only be able to do so once he has finished his degree, so that therapy does not interfere with his academic success. This

might suggest that George may currently feel unready to truly deal with, and work through the trauma of his sexually abusive past.

And so, “Without making a sound, the hunter carefully loaded his gun and gently opened the window. He pointed the barrel straight at the wolf’s head and BANG! The wolf was dead” (“Little Red”, n.d., ¶ 32).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### “GOT YOU AT LAST”: A DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In taking a closer look into the lives of the three male participants who were sexually abused in childhood, the stories of their secret abusive pasts and the torment that they had to endure at the hands of their abusers, has begun to unfold and slowly allow the truth to seep out. As each of these men's stories is so specific and unique, their memories and recollections of their pasts remain pertinent to their own lives. Therefore, how each man feels may be completely different, or uncannily similar, to how other men who have been sexually abused in childhood, may feel or may have felt.

Upon focusing on the uniqueness of Ronnie, Ashley, and George's stories, a thread of similarities appears to be subtly weaved in between the differences of each man's narrative. This thread though is unique to these three men, as it is their individual stories that have been the sole focus within this research study, and thus their stories alone from where this thread of similarities was derived. These apparent similarities, as well as the individual distinctions that have emerged from this study, are further discussed.

#### **Similarities**

Many themes appear to run through each of the participant's stories. For Ronnie, secrecy, fear, society's judgements, escapism, religion, and the possibility of suicide as a way out, are several of the many themes that appeared pertinent to him when he recalled his

abusive childhood. With Ashley, silence, respect, poor self-esteem, privileges, intimacy issues, and many more themes, appear rife. For George, the fear of men, flashbacks, mental blocks, constant silence, and blame, are a fraction of the themes evident within his recollection. However, given all of the aforementioned themes that appear evident within each of the participants' stories, several dominant themes appear to be similar within each of their stories. These similar themes shall be further discussed.

### ***Secrecy***

The notion of secrecy appears embedded within each of the participants' stories. In relation to the secrecy and silence that each participant endured as a result of his being sexually abused in childhood, several sub-themes appear apparent in relation to why each participant believes he remained silent. These will be mentioned briefly.

***Societal Fear.*** Society appears to have an "...influence on the private and personal experiences of those surviving the impact of sexual abuse" (Durham, 2003a, p. 3). Society's influence, power, and rules, especially with a patriarchal society, appear to be governing factors as to why Ronnie, Ashley, and George have remained silent about their sexual abuse for so many years.

Nasjleti (as cited in Mendel, 2003, p. 17) reckons that "...the belief that boys are strong and responsible leads male victims not to report because they fear they will be blamed or disbelieved". For this reason, it may be appropriate to state that the fear of being judged and subsequently blamed by society, which may include being blamed by their own



family members, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers – appears to be more than Ronnie, Ashley, and George could bare to deal with. Subsequently, this ensured their silence.

*Privileges and gifts for silence.* According to Durham (2003a), by giving access to privileges and protection, many abusers are able to ensure their victims silence. Fontes (2005) states that by accepting the gifts that they are given from their abuser or abusers, the child may feel especially shameful, which ultimately leads to their silence.

Within each of the participants' stories, the theme of having their silence exchanged for privileges and physical gifts was blatantly evident. In order for their abusers' to ensure that Ronnie, Ashley, and George would not disclose 'their secret', each exchanged some form of reward with the participants. These rewards were given by means of either privileges, such as Ashley's abuser allowing him to drink alcohol at an underage level, or George being taken on expensive outings; or the giving of physical gifts, such as Ronnie and George receiving elaborate presents and gifts from their respective abusers.

*Fear.* A majority of sexually abused boys and men do not disclose their abuse out of fear of negative consequences (Spiegel, 2003). Thus, the fear regarding what might happen as a result of them telling the truth may 'force' any boy or man into keeping their past a secret.

Within each of the participants' recollections of the why they have remained silent about their respective abuse for so many years, and even decades, the notion of fear appears to be prominently evident.

For Ronnie, his silence appeared to be manifested by several fears: the fear of his actual abusers, who towered over and dominated him in an authoritarian manner; the fear of being physically reprimanded by his father, if his father were to have found out of his abuse; the fear of not being believed by those whom he may tell; and the fear of being judged and blamed by everyone around him.

Ashley's fear appeared to be precipitated from the respect and awe that he held for his abuser. He appeared to look up to his authoritative abuser so much that he feared that if he were to have told anyone, he would lose the opportunity to learn from his abuser – in the context of musical knowledge. Ashley also appeared to fear that those around him would judge him for his part in the abuse, and subsequently blame him. Additionally, he commented that he feared that if he were to tell, his abuser would take away everything that he had been given; especially the freedom that Ashley had – to do what ever he wanted at his abusers house.

George's fears appeared to come from the trusting relationships that he held with his abusers. He described that both of his abusers were initially his friends, and that he feared losing them as friends if he were to expose the truth. George also appeared to fear what others would say if they were to find out. Additionally, another fear that may have led to

George's silence appears to be his proclaimed fear of men. George spoke of how he has struggled in interacting with men since he was abused, as both of his abusers were male.

### ***Ambivalence and Ambiguity***

Within each participant's story, there appears to be a strong theme of ambivalence and ambiguity, which appears to be present in several different ways: mainly through contradictions within each of the participants stories, where each may have stated one aspect at one point and then contradicted themselves at another point; and through the notion of self-blame, as on several occasions blame was directed towards themselves, although often denied when asked directly about it. According to Allender (1995), this appears to be the greatest difficulty regarding ambivalence, as it is capable of potentially producing immense amounts of shame and even contempt in those who have been sexually abused.

### ***Coping Mechanisms***

Finding a way of attempting to cope with the memories and physicality of being sexually abused as a child is found within each participant's story. In addition to aiding these participants to cope with their pasts, these coping strategies have also become a way of protecting each participant from pain – physical, emotional, and psychological. As each participant attempted to find a way of coping with their respective sexual abuse in their own way, several coping sub-themes began to emerge, that appeared similar in nature. These are further discussed.

*Escapism.* The term ‘escape’ arose on many occasions within the interviews conducted with Ronnie, Ashley, and George. Each of them attempted to find a way in which they could escape from reality – if not long term, then at least momentarily.

For Ronnie, the desire to escape the repetitive sexual abuse that he endured as a child, culminated in him finding different ways of trying to ‘escape’ his reality. Ronnie used art, drama, going out and partying with his friends at clubs, and drugs, as tools in his attempt to flee his past experiences.

Ashley too had the desire to escape from his reality, and attempted to do so through the use of alcohol and drugs. These coping tools that Ashley adopted though only momentarily numbed his pain and dissolved his memories; yet even for momentary relief, they seemed useful to him.

George also attempted to escape his past by using alcohol and prescription drugs, and in addition to these, George stated that he also relies on nicotine as a way of coping with, and detaching from his past abusive experiences.

Thus, within their desire to escape their pasts and attempt to cope with their memories and the trauma of their childhood sexual abuse, it becomes important to make the link that each of the three participants attempted to do so by, at some point or another, using drugs (either prescription or recreational). This appears to link to the belief that those

who have been sexually abused tend to have more addictive behaviour styles (Mendel, 1995). This may be an important topic for future study.

***Mental Blocking.*** According to Allender (1995, p. 167), “It is as if the body is warring against the soul by blocking the memories or dreams that would unleash a torrent of anguish”.

In seeking to cope with their sexual abuse experiences, it became apparent that endeavouring to ‘block’ their thoughts and memories of their abuse became a well used technique, especially for Ashley and George. Both Ashley and George spoke openly of how they each attempted to escape their pasts by initially attempting to block their memories and emotions pertaining to their abuse.

Furthermore, Ashley was able to block his memories so effectively that he currently continues to have difficulty in remembering a large portion of the actual abuse incidences that he experienced. George was also able to block the majority of his memories that were associated with his being sexually abused; and it was not until he saw a documentary on television regarding sexually abused boys, in conjunction with his mother confiding in him that she was sexually abused as a child, that his memories began to return in a flood of vivid flashbacks.

***Religion.*** Those who are able to find the opportunity to discuss their experiences of childhood sexual abuse, and simultaneously receive support, appear to be

more likely to be able to deal with their experiences (Durham, 2003a). As many individuals appear to find different aspects and people within their lives to be supportive of them, support may come from many places, such as from family members, friends, counsellors, and even faith, religion, and God.

Religion was also made a focal point when discussing alternative ways that the participants of this study used in order to cope with their abusive pasts, and those in which they felt supported. Ronnie and George in particular made mention of how they sought refuge and support in God and religion when attempting to cope with being sexually abused. Ronnie even made mention of how he has conversations with God, both in prayer and through poetry, in order to help himself cope with his abusive past. Each appear to seek comfort in their respective faiths, and God has become a significant factor in their attempts at moving on.

### ***Long-Lasting Effects***

At first glance, sexual abuse appears to be a phenomenon that effects an individual's physical being, as it is the abusee's body that is being sexually molested by the abuser. However, it becomes important to emphasize that sexual abuse reaches far beyond a person's physical being, and it spills over into every aspect of the abused person's life. This becomes transparently evident in the stories of the three participants of this study. The effects that Ronnie, Ashley, and George have experienced as a result of their sexual abuse have had long-lasting effects on each of them. The major effects that appear relevant to most, if not all of the participants, shall be further discussed.

*A lack of trust.* For men who have been sexually abused, “Their ability to trust is often so limited that they are sure that others [*sic*] could never accept the “evil” they feel is theirs” (Tower, 1989, p. 338).

The inability to trust others appears to be a central theme within each of the participants’ stories. The contrast between Ronnie, Ashley, and George’s abilities to be able to trust those around them before they were abused, versus their inability to be able to trust those around them since they were abused, is blatant. Each of the three participants made it clear that they have immense difficulty when it comes to trust, on any level. This appears to be related to the betrayal that each participant experienced through their trusting their abusers prior to, and at the time of their abuse.

According to Allender (1995, p. 137), “The damage of betrayal is the deepening conviction that relationships [*sic*] can neither be enjoyed, trusted, nor expected to last”. Therefore, due to the blatant betrayal of their trust by their abusers, Ronnie, Ashley, and George may struggle to trust in, and maintain relationships with those people in their lives that they hold dear. For if they were to trust in anyone, they might become even more vulnerable (Tower, 1989).

*The absence of intimacy.* Lew and Dimock (as cited in Mendel, 1995) believe that the absence of intimacy in men appears to be a trademark of these men’s probability of being sexually abused. Therefore, the desire for intimacy that appears lacking within

the participants' lives, especially for Ashley and George, appears to link directly to their being sexually abused. Both made it openly clear that they have difficulty in desiring intimacy, or even being intimate at all – especially physically intimate with their partners.

As they were young when their abuse took place, it becomes difficult to determine whether they desired intimacy prior to their being sexually abused. However, as both sexual abuse and intimacy fall within the sexual realm, and as “intimacy was probably [*sic*] used to open the door to abuse” (Allender, 1995, p. 137), it may be deduced that their being sexually abused as children has impacted on their past and current lack of desire for intimacy.

***Sexuality Questioning.*** Being confident in who one is as a sexual being is something that many people appear to take for granted. However, for Ronnie and George, understanding who they are as sexual beings has not been simple. Although both are currently ‘certain’ of their sexuality, both appeared to have at some point, questioned their sexual identities. According to Mendel (1995), the long-term effects of sexual abuse on men appears to have a considerable impact on, and lead these men to question their sexual orientation.

In George's case, his sexual abuse appeared to make him question whether or not he might be homosexual, believing that he was, prior to the abuse, heterosexual. By being sexually abused by two different males, the notion appeared to enter George's thoughts



about whether or not he may be homosexual. Although these doubts had entered George's mind, he currently believes that he is, and has always been, heterosexual.

The opposite though appeared evident within Ronnie's story. He too questioned his sexuality, but he believed that he was, and currently is, homosexual. Ronnie appears to believe that the incidences of being sexually abused led him to question whether or not he might be heterosexual, perhaps as his abuser's were all male.

Questioning one's sexuality, whether one is heterosexual or homosexual, may be an important topic for further investigation.

*Unresolved emotions.* Each of the participants appear to have unresolved emotions on some level, in relation to their abuse, which may at times lead them to feel ambivalent with regards to their feelings.

For Ashley and Ronnie though, their unresolved emotional issues have appeared to spill over into other domains, causing them to have emotional outbursts at times. Emotional outbursts, especially pertaining to anger, appear to be related to male victims of abuse (Tower, 1989). What becomes striking in this respect is that both of them appear to be ambivalent when they discussed their emotions. Ashley spoke of being unemotional, and then went on to speak of how angry and volatile he gets on occasion. Ronnie on the other hand spoke of how much anger he carries within himself, yet when questioned about his anger, he made mention of how he is no longer angry as he has 'learnt to recover'. The

emotionality of men who have been sexually abused may therefore be an important topic for further research.

### *Similar Abusers*

Although the sexual abuse that Ronnie, Ashley, and George incurred were all different, it becomes important to note that from the three participants that were interviewed for this research, their abusers' profiles appeared somewhat similar in certain aspects.

Each of the participants' respective abusers were primarily individuals whom the participants trusted and knew. Each abuser was also seen to be in a position of power over the participants, either in relation to authority, dominance, size, or age. In addition, although female abusers are known of in relation to the sexual abuse of boys (Mendel, 1995), in the instances of Ronnie, Ashley, and George, all of their abusers were male.

In relation specifically to Ashley and George, both were sexually abused by their respective music teachers – one being a choir teacher at a Christian school, and the other being the pianist for the church choir. Thus, the notion of religion and authority figures may have led to Ashley and George inextricably trusting these men, who ultimately betrayed them by sexually abusing them. Such a notion may be an important topic for future study.

### ***Generations of Abuse***

An interesting aspect that began to emerge, particularly in the stories of Ashley and George, is that both of their mother's were also sexually abused in childhood. Although Ronnie never made it explicit if any one else in his family had been sexually abused, Ronnie did make mention of how he and his siblings were physically abused. This may somehow link the notion of there being 'Generations of Abuse' present in these men's lives – particularly sexual abuse in the cases of Ashley and George. This aspect may be important for further investigation.

### ***'Know who I am'***

As this study wishes to maintain optimum ethical standards, each participant was given the opportunity to provide the researcher with a pseudo-name or 'fake name', so as to ensure anonymity, which enhances confidentiality. However, of the three participants, two – namely Ronnie and Ashley – wished for, and consented too, their true names being used within this research. George on the other hand wished for a pseudo-name to be used, however, he stated that this was only to protect the people he discussed within the research. The fact that Ronnie and Ashley requested to have their real names used appears incongruent with the nature of this study.

At this point it becomes interesting to note the following pertaining to this study: Firstly, the difficulty with which the sample group of participants were obtained for this study – the researcher used all the proposed methods for obtaining a sample group of participants (as discussed within the 'Research Approach' section in 'Chapter Three') over a period

of several months, in order to obtain three participants; second, the sensitive nature of this research study; third, the themes of silence and of not wanting people to know of their being sexually abused, which emanated from this study; fourth, the lack of research that has been conducted on sexually abused men within the South African context – the researcher had difficulty in obtaining current research pertaining to this field of study especially within South Africa; and fifth, the request from Ronnie and Ashley for their true identities to be used.

It may be deduced that a possible reason for Ronnie and Ashley wishing for their true identities to be used, is that they no longer wish to keep their childhood sexual abuse a secret. In addition, they may wish to stop ‘living a lie’ and possibly educate other men and boys. For Ronnie, this notion appears somewhat true, as he had stated within his interview that he wishes to tell people of his abuse, so as to inform and educate them about male child molestation. However, Ashley has only confided in his mother and the researcher about his sexual abuse, and never made any reference to wanting to let others know of his ordeals. His request though for his identity to be made public, may be an attempt for him to reach out and break the cycle of silence. This notion, of men who have been sexually abused in childhood and who want their true-identities to be disclosed in such a study, may be an important topic for future study.

### **Individual Distinctions**

Along with several similarities that arose pertaining to Ronnie, Ashley, and George, several distinct and individual differences also appeared to emerge from this study. These individual distinctions suggest the uniqueness of each of their abusive encounters, and the personal ways in which they have attempted to cope with, and move on from their ordeals.

It is important to note though that there may be a possibility that each participant has experienced, or may continue to experience, the themes that appear individually distinct to other participants, from those that arose within their own story. For example, as Ronnie and Ashley made no mention of having ‘flashbacks’ pertaining to their respective abuse, it has been described as an individual distinction with regards to George – as he did make mention of flashbacks. However, this does not mean that neither Ronnie nor Ashley have experienced flashbacks, only that they never discussed them within their interviews. Thus, only the themes that were mentioned by each participant within their individual interviews were those that have been reported on within this section.

Each of these apparent distinctions will be further discussed, in relation to each of the participants.

**Ronnie**

For Ronnie, two main distinctions appeared apparent as his story began to unfold. Firstly, his desire to seek support from those around him during the time of his abuse; and secondly, the desire to commit suicide on several occasions. Each shall be further discussed.

*Seeking Support.* Several studies have highlighted the importance of having personal and social support in trying to deal with the aftermath of childhood sexual abuse (Durham, 2003a).

Throughout Ronnie's story, the notion of seeking support from others as a way of attempting to cope during his abuse, and with his abusive past, appears evident. Even though Ronnie desired to be alone as a child, especially during the period of his repetitive abuse, he was able to seek support from a select few. These individuals he believed helped him to better cope with his ordeals. These individuals appear to be those whom Ronnie felt that he was still able to confide in, yet not with his secret of abuse, such as his one sister, his grandmother, and his father's cousin. Ronnie made no mention of any of these individuals knowing of his sexual abuse at the time.

*Suicidal ideation.* "Suicidality is reported nearly 5 times more often among males with histories of CSA (childhood sexual abuse) [sic] than among abused females...." (Spiegel, 2003, p. 74).

The notion of suicide arose within Ronnie's story. Although Ronnie currently appears to believe that he would never kill himself, Ronnie spoke of how there were many times in his life whereby he felt suicidal, and believed that the only way in which he would be able to make the pain stop – both physically and psychologically – was if he were dead.

Ronnie spoke of how he had for many years, thought of shooting himself with his mother's gun. However, he made mention of how on each occasion when he had held his mother's gun, a feeling would rush over him and he would be unable to pull the trigger. Ronnie explained this inability to follow through with committing suicide, as his guardian angel looking out for him. The notion of suicide in relation to men who have been sexually abused in childhood, may be a significant topic for further study.

### *Ashley*

As Ashley told his story, two distinct themes appeared to arise that were somewhat different from the other participants' stories. Each shall be further discussed.

***Denial.*** Denial may be seen as a coping strategy that is commonly associated with males who have a history of being sexually abused, through not wanting to talk about their abuse, or by not wanting to be identified with the abuse in any way (Spiegel, 2003).

For Ashley, his ambivalence regarding whether or not he wanted to even try and remember his abuse appeared to be a pertinent factor. In the beginning of his interview, Ashley struggled to even admit to being sexually abused and he somewhat denied the

idea of it, even though he volunteered to participate within the research study knowing of the criteria for participation. Initially, Ashley came across as stating that he was not abused, yet as the conversation between himself and the researcher evolved, he ultimately ‘confessed’ to being repetitively sexually abused by his choir teacher. Ashley showed a lot of ambivalence when trying to explain his abuse, and especially his feelings related to this. This may suggest that Ashley is still struggling to cope with, and admit to the existence of his past and his experiences.

*Low self-esteem.* “Changes in a boy’s self-concept during and following CSA (childhood sexual abuse) [sic] are overwhelmingly negative” (Adams-Tucker, as cited in Spiegel, 2003, p. 83), and these boys and men experience a significantly lowered level of self-esteem, than abused females, or non-abused males (Finkelhor, as cited in Spiegel, 2003).

Ashley made mention of how he has a low self-esteem and very little confidence in himself. According to Allender (1995), low self-esteem appears to be a common characteristic in those who have been sexually abused. This may therefore lead to the assumption that prior to the abuse, self-esteem and perhaps self-worth, may not have been an issue for the child. Ashley appears to relate to this assumption, as he believes that prior to his being sexually abused, his self-esteem and self-confidence were high. Ashley has therefore appeared to link his sexual abuse to his current feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-worth, and poor self-image.



**George**

George's story of being sexually abused on numerous occasions brings forth three distinct themes. Each of these shall be briefly discussed.

**Flashbacks.** An adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse is often regressed back into his victimised role, when seemingly neutral stimuli trigger past memories (Frawley-O'Dea & Goldner, 2007).

For George, his past memories of being abused are brought about through vivid flashbacks of his sexual abusers; the physical acts of his being sexually abused; and the places in which he was sexually abused. These flashbacks are constant reminders of his tormented past. Initially George spoke of how he had managed to 'block' the memories of his abuse from his conscious mind, but how, since his memories were triggered by both a television documentary on sexually abused boys, and by his mother's confession to him of being sexually abused herself, he has been haunted by constant flashbacks of the many times that his abusers 'took advantage' of him.

**Fear of men.** George spoke of how he fears men. He stated that he struggles to make friends with, as well as trust men, since both of his sexual abusers were men. George therefore appears to link his 'male-fear' to the gender and subsequent sexual abuse that he experienced by both his abusers. This may be an important theme for further research.

*Mind-body separation.* According to Adams-Tucker (as cited in Spiegel, 2003, p. 78), “Peridissociation is a common coping strategy unconsciously employed during the abuse and shortly thereafter”. This is a way of depersonalising and dissociating the physical act of being sexually abused, from the thoughts and memories pertaining to it.

As George spoke of his sexual abuse encounters, a distinct theme of ‘mind-body separation’ became apparent. George stated that he found that he was better able to cope during his sexual abuse, by separating his thoughts and mind from the physical act of being sexually violated, while it was happening. George made mention of how, whilst he was being sexually abused, it ‘felt’ as though it were happening to somebody else. This appears to depersonalise and dissociate George’s experiences, and place them on a level whereby he believes it was, and is, ‘easier’ to cope with.

### **Research Strengths, Limitations and Recommendations**

#### ***Strengths***

The focus of this study, as mentioned within the title, is to ‘Break the Silence’ pertaining to men who have been sexually abused in childhood. As silence appears to be enmeshed in male childhood sexual abuse, according to this study, the notion of breaking the silence and allowing the ‘truth’ to emerge through the stories of the participants, appears to be an initial strength of this research.

In addition, another possible strength of this study appears to be in the notion of ‘benefit to the participants’. Although growth, insight, and change of the participants was never promised to them if they were to participate within this study, each participant appears to have found their inclusion in this study as allowing them the freedom to express their pent up stories of abuse. The participants were given the opportunity for expression, which may have aided them in possibly facing their fears of being judged and not believed. In addition, they were afforded the chance to break their own silence and express their emotions and thoughts pertaining to their abuse, both to the researcher and to society, through the publication of this research study. However, it becomes important to mention that the participants participation within this study may at some point in the future, cause them a flood of new memories and emotions, which may need to be dealt with on a psychological level. In anticipation of this, the researcher provided each participant with the contact details of a registered psychologist, should they require therapeutic assistance in order to further work through and deal with their sexually abusive pasts.

A further proposed strength of this study is that of ‘benefit to the field of psychology’. An intention of this study was to create awareness, both to the field of psychology and science, as well as to the general public and society, regarding the sexual abuse of men in childhood. It is the researchers opinion that this study has shed some light on, and created awareness regarding some of the issues that sexually abused males experience; their experiences of their abuse; and their feelings pertaining to their place within society. The researcher believes that this study has also helped create further questions and avenues

for future research, which may further expand the scope and knowledge pertaining to the field of psychology. This in turn may assist in the creation of appropriate male-specific therapeutic programmes, which may be designed to focus on the specific issues that sexually abused boys and men may have.

Furthermore, a possible strength of this qualitative study is that it appears to show reliability. Firstly, reliability appears to be evident through the ‘disclosure of orientation’, made apparent in the aim and rationale regarding what the intention of this study is. Secondly, the ‘grounding of the interpretations’ suggests reliability, whereby the interpretations have been linked to the content of the transcribed interview. Thirdly, the ‘description of the internal processes of the investigation’ has also been mentioned, whereby the impact of the research on the researcher has been discussed (with the ‘Recommendations’ section of this chapter). In addition, the ‘context’ has also been taken into account throughout the research study. Finally, ‘trust’ was also attained between the participants and the researcher through engagement with the material.

An additional strength of this qualitative study is that it appears to show validity. Firstly, this study shows validity through ‘triangulation’, whereby multiple information sources were used in order to investigate this topic and acquire participants. ‘Coherence’ of the results and the information also suggests validity, whereby the quality of fit of the interpretation appears to have been made in relation to each interview. Finally, the ‘testimonial’, ‘catalytic’, and ‘reflexive’ validities all appear to have been met, which appears evident through the participants understanding and growth pertaining to the

research, as well as the change that has occurred within the researcher's thinking with regards to male childhood sexual abuse.

### *Limitations*

As this qualitative research focuses on the uniquely individual stories of three specific men who were sexually abused in childhood, it becomes impossible to be able to generalise the findings of this research to a larger population. Even though different themes and aspects have been drawn from the results, each of these themes remains distinctive to the individuals who partook in this study, and therefore cannot be blindly applied to all men who have been sexually abused in childhood.

In order to select the participants for this research, purposive sampling was used. This may be considered to be a second limitation, as purposive sampling selects participants who meet specific criteria, nonrandomly. Therefore, it does not allow for all the probable participants to stand a chance of being selected. In addition, only participants who live within the geographical region of Gauteng, within South Africa, were considered. This further limits the inclusion of possible participants that may have met the criteria for participation in this study, based on their place of residency.

A further limitation may be that the participants who were selected for this research study, were open and prepared to tell their stories. As this research focuses on 'Breaking the Silence' of male childhood sexual abuse, the information obtained from these participants may be somewhat different than what might have been obtained from

participants who are struggling to open up enough to tell their stories, thus those who are still engrossed within their silence.

Due to the qualitative approach of this research, and subsequently the holistic nature of this study, the researcher herself, due to being immersed within the process, has become a part of the study. This may be a further possible limitation to this study, as the subjective interpretation of the findings of this research by the researcher, cannot be eradicated. Each individual has their own biases, preferences, lived experiences, and beliefs, and so too does the researcher. Additionally, as the researcher does not fall within the demographics of this particular research (that is, being male or sexually abused in childhood), her interpretation of the data comes more from a place of trying to understand, than personal knowledge. Such aforementioned factors may have influenced the outcomes of this study, the themes that were focused upon, and the way in which the information was conveyed.

Moreover, the results of this study may have also been impacted upon, due to the nature of the study, in relation to the gender of the researcher. As each of the participants who partook in this study were sexually abused by male perpetrators, the notion that if the researcher had been male, there could have been differing effects on the participation of the participants, their candidness in relaying their stories, and the outcomes that have emerged. This may be a topic for further investigation.

***Recommendations***

This research wishes to lay a foundation for additional investigation into male childhood sexual abuse. Throughout the discussion of the results, the researcher has mentioned and recommended where she feels further study should be conducted. The topic of this study lays itself open to be further explored in many areas, such as across different cultures, age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and so on. Focus may also be directed towards different aspects of male childhood sexual abuse, such as religion, sexuality, psychological effects (i.e.: Depression, drug addiction), relational aspects, male versus female abusers, and much more.

Additionally, it becomes imperative to note the impact of this research upon the researcher. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, the stories that were told by the participants within the interviews were deeply emotive. This thus had an emotional impact upon the researcher. As a result, the researcher of this study ensured that she underwent regular debriefing sessions with a trained psychologist. It is therefore recommended that any research that is to be done with male survivors of childhood sexual abuse (or with any case of sexual abuse), that the opportunity of the researcher to be debriefed at times, be built in to the process of the research (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006). This is to ensure that the researcher is able to adequately cope on an emotional level with the information that he or she is enquiring about. In addition, it is to ensure that the researcher remains ethical in relation to his or her own presentation, both with the participants, and in the relay of his or her findings.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Society's naivety and unawareness of issues pertaining to sexually abused boys tends to be prominent. As a society, people appear to fight for humanitarian concerns – such as sexual abuse – yet we continue to discriminate against those very individuals who have been mistreated. The researcher of this study has come to realise that stereotypes and fear govern what we, as a society, choose to acknowledge or decide to ignore. The more difficult the problem that we as society is faced with, such as male child sexual abuse, the more we pretend that we do not see it.

This research is aimed at becoming a tool in further shedding light on the secrecy of the sexual abuse of boys, and to bring a shift within society, to the acknowledgement of the heinous crimes being committed right under our noses. This study hopes to create a focal point within the field of psychology, to show a need for further study.

According to Ronnie, this research appears to have given him a voice to express himself and his experiences. Ronnie also mentioned that he believes this research will aid others:

*Well, I think it's gonna help...because if people are gonna hear it from one...you know, because guys don't want to talk about it...and you are...you're doing something...I actually take my hat off to you, for actually taking this as a...as a project...because I think many people won't*



*do it. It's like not many people want to deal with HIV or child abuse.*

*You...maybe we...maybe I can help you to be a voice....*

For Ashley, the incorporation of this research into society appears to be of vital importance to him. This is so that it can create awareness; not only societal awareness, but in addition, awareness for those boys who have been sexually abused:

*I think that it's very good because there are a lot of guys out there that have been molested badly that won't come forward because they kind of, they've got so much pride, could be one of the reasons, pride and embarrassment. You get a lot of fathers and mothers they hear about stuff like that, they completely disown you, they treat you differently. I think it's just the fact of being a man, you don't hear it, you don't ever hear it, you hear about women and that, but you never hear a man being in a situation like that or getting raped. A man getting raped ... the first time I heard about that I thought 'are you serious?' Because it's something new, and for a man it's completely demoralising. I think that's why we keep it a secret and carry on with our lives, because it happened. You can't linger in the past; get over it. But I believe things need to get sorted out. I have to sort it out and I know I have to. There are a lot of things in my life I have to sort out, but getting in to that is another situation.*

George's view on partaking in this research, and the necessity for it to be done, was highlighted when he was asked about what his hope for this research might be:

*I'm really hoping that it could help men, because I think there's a lot... really I think it's half discriminating towards men that there's only this women and child abuse line and there's not a 'men of abuse' line or whatever, campaigns and stuff... because nobody knows about it. And I think it really happens a lot.*

In taking Ronnie, Ashley, and George's comments into consideration, it becomes evident that the need for more research and focus should to be given to men who have been sexually abused in childhood.

And so,

*Little Red Riding Hoods pay dearly for their naïveté. These boys experience, through their molestation, one more betrayal and one more abandonment. The person [sic] they believed would love them, in the deepest sense of the word, has exploited their deep need and their eagerness for affection. How can one possibly trust any other adult after that? (Dorais, 2002, p. 29).*

After everything that sexually abused boys and men have experienced, and all the secrecy that they have had to endure, the tenacity of the human spirit appears to prevail, as it does for Ronnie, Ashley and George. These men's stories of perseverance are incredible examples of how, no matter what situation one is placed in, giving up is not an option.

“It's safe to go home now,” the hunter told Little Red Riding Hood. “The big bad wolf is dead and gone, and there is no danger on the path...” (“Little Red”, n.d., ¶ 36).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Consent Forms

#### **Original Consent Form – Participant Copy**

My name is Hayley Medurić and I am registered as a Master's student in Clinical Psychology at the University of South Africa (UNISA). As part of the Master's course I am required to complete a mini dissertation. I am conducting research regarding the experiences of men who were sexually abused as children. I am interested in finding out more about the experiences and effects of child abuse, from the viewpoint of the individual who was abused. I therefore require individuals willing to participate in my research study, who would be prepared to discuss their own personal experiences in relation to being sexually abused when they were children. My hope is that this research may benefit each participant, though this cannot be guaranteed, and may be helpful to professionals and lay people who deal with such clients.

The interview will be available to my supervisor, Prof. Juan Nel. No personally identifiable details will be given; only general information so as to protect your anonymity.

Your name will not be recorded anywhere on the transcribed interview, and no one will be able to link it to you. All personal information will remain confidential.

The interview will last around 60 minutes. I would like you to be as open and honest as possible in answering the questions I put to you. Some questions may be of a personal and/or sensitive nature. I will also ask some questions that you may not have thought about before, and which involve thinking about the past or the future. Even if you are not absolutely certain about the answers to these questions, try to think about them and

answer as best you can. When it comes to answering these questions, there are no right or wrong answers.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. If you do not wish to answer a question, you may refrain from doing so. Even if you agreed to participate initially, you may stop at a later stage and discontinue your participation. If you refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage, you will not be prejudiced in any way.

If I ask you a question that makes you feel sad or upset, we can stop the interview and discuss it. There are also people to whom I can refer you who are willing and able to talk it through with you if you so wish. If you need to speak with anyone at a later stage, a professional person, Mrs. Liezel Gericke, who is a Counselling Psychologist, can be reached at the following telephone number: (011) 822 2959.

I may require (an) additional interview/s at a later stage, and may also like to discuss my findings and proposals around the research with you, once I have completed my study. An electronic copy of my findings will also be made available once the research has been completed.

## Original Consent Form – Researcher Copy

I hereby agree to participate in the research regarding the experiences of men who were sexually abused as children. I understand that I am participating freely and voluntarily. I also understand that I can stop this interview at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not prejudice me in any way.

The purpose of the study has been explained to me, and I understand what is expected of me.

I understand that this is a research project, which may or may not necessarily benefit me personally. I have received the telephone number of a person to contact should I need to speak about any issues that may arise as a result of this interview. I understand that this consent form will not be linked to the research documentation, and that my personal information will remain confidential. I understand that, if possible, feedback will be given to me on the findings of the completed research.

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_, on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

**Additional consent to audio and/or video recording:**

In addition to the above, I hereby agree to the audio and/or video recording of this interview for the purposes of data capture. I understand that no personally identifying information or recording concerning me will be released in any form. I understand that these recordings will be kept securely in a locked environment and will be destroyed or erased once data capture and analysis are complete.

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_, on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

**Additional consent for transcription of the interview:**

Additionally, I hereby agree to the transcription of this interview by a professional transcriber, for the purposes of data capture. I understand that no personally identifying information concerning me will be released in any form to the transcriber. I understand that these recordings will be kept securely in a locked environment and will be destroyed or erased once data capture and analysis are complete.

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_, on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

### ***Appendix B: Interview Schedule***

As this research has a qualitative base, this interview schedule will remain flexible with regards to which questions may or may not be asked, and in which order. The researcher intends for the interview process to flow as naturally as possible, and thus this interview schedule acts only as a rough guideline.

#### **1. Introduction**

The introduction of the interview session has four basic aims: establishment of rapport; discussing the purpose of the interview and the related research; motivation as to how the research data may be used; and the establishment of an approximate timeline. A brief overview regarding the aim and rationale of the research topic will be given, along with thanking the individual for their participation. The participant may be asked if they have any questions pertaining to the research, or if anything needs to be clarified.

#### **2. Demographics**

*The participants' demographic details need to be taken so as to identify each participant individually. The demographic details may also hold value when the interview is at a later stage, analysed.*

- Full Name (This will remain confidential)
- Age
- Ethnicity/Race
- Sexual orientation



- Relationship status
- Contact details (This will remain confidential)
- Occupation
- Languages
- Level of education

### **3. Individual Life History**

*An individual life history of each participant will be enquired about. This is to create a context in which each participant's story of their child sexual abuse can be heard and interpreted.*

- Family/Home lifestyle (parents, siblings, extended family, upbringing, roles of family members) – “Could you tell me about your family life when you were growing up? How is your family life now? What were the roles of the people in your family when you were growing up? What are their roles now?”
- Major family events (births, deaths, marriages, divorces) – “Have there been any major family events that have occurred in your family; like perhaps births, deaths, marriages, or divorces? Could you tell me about them and how you and your family dealt with them?”
- Scholastic and educational qualifications/achievements – “Could you tell me a little about your scholastic or educational qualifications or achievements?”
- Friends (current and/or previous) – “Could you tell me a little about the friends that you had when you were a child/that you have now?”

- Partner/s (current and/or previous) – “Could you tell me about your partners/relationships that you have had/have now?”
- Public roles the individual participated in (social, religious, occupationally) – “Are there any other roles that you have/are participated/participating in? Could you tell me about them?”
- Struggles and/or achievements – “Can you recall any particular struggles or achievements in your life? Could you tell me about them?”
- Major themes that may deserve special attention
- Other

#### **4. Sexual Abuse**

*Once a context pertaining to the individual has been created, the interview needs to shift to that of the child sexual abuse.*

- Age when the sexual abuse started
- Period of sexual abuse
- Where the sexual abuse took place
- Perpetrator/s
- Details pertaining to the perpetrator/s
- The sexual abuse itself (Those details that the participant is willing to disclose)
- Was the sexual abuse once-off or repeated
- Was legal action taken against the perpetrator/s
- Have they received treatment pertaining to the sexual abuse

- Were there other victims of sexual abuse by the same perpetrator/s that they know of  
(If yes, details, attitudes and feelings regarding these other incidences)
- Memories and/or feelings related to the sexual abuse (then and now)
- Memories and/or feelings related to the perpetrator/s (then and now)
- Memories and/or feelings related to themselves (then and now)
- Memories and/or feelings related to others who may have known about the abuse  
(then and now)
- Other

## 5. Silence

*As silence is the intended central theme within this research, themes pertaining to silence should follow/or be included in the questioning pertaining to the participants' child sexual abuse.*

- Silence – at the time of the sexual abuse?
- Silence – directly after the abuse?
- Silence – repeating the cycle of sexual abuse?
- Silence – secrecy?
- Silence – disclosure?
- Silence – family?
- Silence – friends?
- Silence – relationships?
- Silence – then and now?
- Silence – other areas of silence within their life?

## **6. Other**

*Any other important information that arises that may pertain to the research may be discussed. The participant may be asked if there are any additional aspects that they may wish to discuss, that may not have already been mentioned. The participant may be asked if there are any further questions that they may wish to ask before the interview is concluded.*

## **7. Conclusion**

*A summary of the interview should be used as to bring the interview session to an end. The participant may be asked if there are any concluding comments that they may wish to add. The participant may be asked what they think about both the interview process and/or the research topic. The participant will then be informed about when the research should be completed, and how they will be able to obtain an electronic copy of the completed research. Finally, the participant will once again be thanked for participating in the research.*