

Containing and Resisting Masculinity: Narratives of Renegotiation Among Resilient Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

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Male childhood sexual abuse survivors face the same social pressures as other men to live up to the tenets of masculinity. However, they contend with a disjuncture between cultural definitions of manhood and the discordant experience of sexual victimization. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 16 resilient men varying in age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. The authors analyzed the men's narratives concerning male role socialization for toughness, stoicism, and aggressive sexuality, as well as the impact of childhood sexual abuse. Results indicate that in their paths toward recovery, the participants repeatedly described both containing and resisting traditional masculine roles and made conscious choices not to become perpetrators. The importance of raising awareness about masculinity myths in clinical interventions is discussed.

Keywords: childhood sexual abuse, resiliency, masculinity, masculine ideology, traumatic stress, human males

For growth to occur, men's pain cannot remain hidden or misunderstood. (G. R. Brooks, 2001, p. 294)

Historically, the issue of gender has interfered with the study of sexual abuse. Patriarchal notions about the rights of men to dominate, physically and sexually, the women and children in their households may have contributed to the difficulty of acknowledging that marital rapes and sexual abuse of girls was real, and fairly prevalent, until pressure from feminists brought legal reforms in the early 1970s. The sexual abuse of boys and men, unfortunately, has been even more difficult for society to ac-

cept or acknowledge, in part, because the experience stands in stark contrast to the notion of masculinity, damaging men's sense of power, control, and invulnerability.

Even when gender is considered, it is most often reduced to examinations of the different types of childhood traumatic experiences boys and girls may have or explorations in adulthood of differential outcomes for men and women. Nevertheless, research about the prevalence and impact of sexual abuse on boys has begun to grow (e.g., Finkelhor, 1993; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990; Holmes & Slap, 1998), coinciding with an increasing awareness reflected in clinical reports (e.g., Gartner, 1999; Lew, 1988) and in research (e.g., Bolton, Morris, & MacEachron, 1989; Lisak, 1994, 1995) that the childhood sexual abuse of boys significantly affects the development of their masculine identities.

Although the development of a masculine identity plays a fundamental role in male health and well-being, few studies have taken the time to examine in careful detail the issues of masculinity for male survivors of sexual abuse.

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(Gartner, 1999, and Rasheed and Rasheed, 1999, are important exceptions, and we draw heavily on their work.) In our study of male survivors, we investigated the conflicts and interactions between gender role socialization and the experience of significant childhood sexual abuse (CSA) in men who are resilient survivors. Because so little is yet known about these issues, and almost nothing has been written about how men understand these issues themselves, we chose to use a qualitative research approach, which is best designed to explore such questions. Specifically we interviewed 16 men heterogeneous for age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and specifics of their abuse history—all showing some evidence of resilient adaptation to adult life—to develop a theoretical framework explicating the ways in which these men have understood and endeavored to resolve these conflicts as part of their recovery processes.

Masculinity and Childhood Sexual Abuse

Characteristics of culturally sanctioned masculinity include aggression, rejection of “feminine” characteristics, stoicism, preoccupation with sex, being an economic provider, sexuality, and being the protector of home and family (O’Neil, 1990; Rasheed & Rasheed, 1999). There is an increasing awareness (e.g., Pleck, 1995; Gartner, 1999; Rasheed & Rasheed, 1999), at least in Western society, of the limitations of this socially constructed masculine style for all men. Stereotypical masculinity can be particularly problematic for male survivors of CSA.

The masculine role permits and, at times, requires expressions of aggression and power (David & Brannon, 1976). Traditional masculinity opposes anything associated remotely with femininity, equating it with passivity and helplessness (Hong, 2000; Lisak, 1994). Stoicism, homophobia, and dominance serve to prove one’s maleness (Hong, 2000). While gender socialization is often the main target of analysis in studies of masculinity, it is also important to distinguish the ways that racial and cultural expectations impose their weight on perpetuating masculine norms. Black men often express their masculinity in a “cool pose,” which emphasizes pride, strength, and control (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 4). Latino and Af-

rican American cultures emphasize the most traditional views of masculinity (Levant et al., 2003), putting more pressure on men from these groups to conform. Having received the brunt of aggression and power in the role of victim, one trajectory taken by a minority but significant number of abused men is to react by becoming hypermasculine; in other words, hyperaggressive, overcontrolled, unemotional, action oriented, and abusive to others (Gartner, 1999; Lisak, 1995). In one study, 31% of a sample of 26 sexually abused men carried the legacy of abuse and reported acting as perpetrators of violence at some point in their life (Lisak, 1994).

The masculine mystique also requires that men avoid emotions and vulnerabilities. Male survivors face enormous pressures from parents, peers, and the culture at large to acquire and demonstrate traditional modes of masculinity while contending with their sexual abuse histories. Traumatic experiences create unbearably intense feelings, and recovery requires learning to acknowledge and disclose them to others. In contrast, expectations of stoicism inhibit men from expressing and, not infrequently, from knowing, their own feelings (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Given their experience of early victimization, male survivors of CSA face a direct contradiction with the basic tenet of masculinity stating that they must be strong and invulnerable. The expectations and restrictions imposed by the Western construction of masculinity (Romano & De Luca, 2001) can make it especially difficult for male survivors to develop integrated and functional identities.

Parents and clinicians perpetuate these expectations by maintaining a code of silence, rarely asking about, and often not even considering, the possibility of boys as victims of sexual abuse; thus, CSA of boys has remained underreported and undertreated (Lab, Feigenbaum, & De Silva, 2000). Boys themselves are less likely than girls to disclose the abuse at the time that it occurs, and they often maintain their silence into adulthood. For example, out of a sample of 216 men who reported CSA, Risin and Koss (1987) discovered that 81% had never told anyone. In a national survey, of the men who reported sexual abuse, 42% had never previously disclosed it (Finkelhor et al., 1990). Boys who consider disclosure must be ready to

content with a high level of threat and likelihood for punishment (Froning & Mayman, 1990). Central to their abuse experience, male survivors often endure intense isolation during boyhood, in part because perpetrators work to keep them away from possible protective figures, as well as, more generally, the lack of societal awareness and resources for male survivors (Lab et al., 2000; Lew, 1988).

In accordance with masculine norms, men are taught that sexual activity validates their masculinity (Brooks, 2001); they are expected to act as sexual initiators and, with few exceptions, to always be interested in and available for sexual experiences and to be assertive, if not aggressive, in seeking them out (Bolton et al., 1989; Hong, 2000). Sexual abuse intrinsically undermines feelings of power and control for male victims and, therefore, imparts a stark contrast to the societal construction of the sexually virile male. For male survivors, who often report problems associated with their sexuality (reviewed in Dhaliwal, Gauzas, Antonowicz, & Ross, 1996), having sexual prowess be conditional to masculine achievement can be especially problematic (Bolton et al., 1989; Dhaliwal et al., 1996; Lisak, 1994).

Resiliency

The study of resiliency emerged out of an interest in how some people overcome traumatic events or severe hardship and find ways to function well in their lives. Rutter (1985, 1987) defined *resiliency operationally* as a term describing children who, despite two or more serious risk factors (e.g., parental mental illness or out of home placement), did not develop a mental illness. In refining this definition, many researchers, including Rutter (1990), have concluded that resiliency is better understood as a process rather than a static trait (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993). In other words, resiliency does not just exist, it evolves. For example, Lamar (1984) found that this process for survivors of CSA involved four steps: (a) the abusive childhood itself, filled with pain and loneliness; (b) a turning point, which involved some shift in their frame of reference and included three components—separation from their families, the decision not to be like their family, and a commitment to personal growth; (c) the development of coping skills, especially self-protection and

self-nurturing; and (d) handling the past, which includes feeling sadness, developing wisdom and understanding, and taking personal pride in their accomplishments.

In a longitudinal study of mothers from lower SES families who had been victims of abuse, Egeland, Jacobvitz, and Sroufe (1988) found that the women who were able to avoid passing on abuse to their children were those who had “an awareness of their own past history of abuse that was integrated into each mother’s view of herself” (p. 1087). Little and Hamby (1999) had a sample of 38 abused men and 93 abused women rate a list of possible healing experiences. One experience high on the survivors’ lists was “working through the abuse,” which included talking about it to others and experiencing their feelings about it. Individuals play a dynamic part in developing resiliency, through interpretations and meaning-making (e.g., Beardsley, 1989), adaptation (Sroufe, 1997), and ongoing interactions between the person and environment (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Little research has been conducted in the area of resiliency among male CSA survivors. For the purposes of this study, we included participants who were (a) doing surprisingly well in some domain(s) of their lives, given their histories of serious sexual abuse in childhood, and (b) at the time of the study were not abusing anyone; they were in some way able to change the cycle of abuse and neglect. Some research points to the fact that a small proportion of men with histories of CSA find ways to either avoid negative pathways entirely or move through them in the process of their recovery to becoming nonabusive, more whole, and caring men (Lisak, 1994, 1995); in other words, they were resilient in that they overcame significant barriers and pressures in developing more adaptive, more integrated, and nonperpetrating masculine identities. How they were able to overcome these pressures remains in question. Our choice to study male survivors who were resilient in these ways served to fill what we perceived as a research gap in understanding how some men successfully manage their experiences of childhood sexual abuse in the context of the pressures of masculine expectations; in particular, halting the transmission of violence and avoiding the route of becoming perpetrators themselves. Learning how these men have come to terms with these issues can illuminate the strug-

gles that many male survivors face, because little is yet known about the important and complex relationship between CSA and masculinity.

Method

Research Team

As Morrow and Smith (2000) suggested, qualitative research conclusions need to be understood within the context of the research, including social, historical, and cultural factors. Like other researchers, we have biases that influence our work and that are important to address (Gomez et al., 2001). Luttrell (2000) proposed that it is both possible and necessary to arrive at "good enough" methods, both by attending to one's own biases and contexts and by sharing them with the reader. Thus, it is important to note that this study originated as a derivation of a previous investigation of resilient female survivors of childhood sexual abuse (see Grossman, Cook, Kepkep, & Koenen, 1999), which informed the methodology and analyses of the current study.

Members of the research team included the principal investigator of both the men's and women's project, who is a clinical psychologist and a professor, another clinical psychologist and assistant professor, and a range of doctoral and undergraduate students. While the team members have varied in terms of clinical expertise, all members of the team have either backgrounds in psychology or an interest in approaching trauma from a developmental perspective. All except one member of the research team are women. It is important to note that, at the time of the initial screening, invited participants were told that the members of the research group were women, but we could provide a male interviewer if that would feel more comfortable for him. None of the participants chose that option. In terms of racial characteristics of the research team, one member is African Caribbean and the rest Caucasian from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Several have histories of childhood abuse.

Design and Procedure

Using criterion-based sampling (Patton, 1990), we recruited participants from a pool of

men responding to flyers posted at a variety of institutions and throughout the community; flyers were also sent to local therapists. The flyers indicated that the research group was seeking men with histories of childhood sexual abuse who were functioning well in at least one area of their life (e.g., relationships, work). Flyers directed specifically toward men of color were also distributed in an effort to increase the diversity of the sample. When participants initially contacted the research group, a brief telephone screening was conducted to ascertain whether they met our criteria for (a) a history of severe childhood sexual abuse and (b) resiliency. Severe CSA was operationalized by our team as (a) being incestuous or similar to incest (abuse by a caretaker, such as a babysitter or a teacher) and (b) included oral, anal, or genital intercourse or attempted intercourse. To determine resiliency, and to confirm that they were doing relatively well in at least one life domain, the men were each asked if they or someone such as their therapist considered themselves resilient. They were then asked to explain how they understood their resilience. All telephone interviews were conducted by the principal investigator.

Participants completed two in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 2 and 3 hr and taking place approximately a week apart. The interviews were largely based on the measures used in the women's resiliency study (Grossman et al., 1999), with minor adaptations. These measures were developed on the basis of clinical knowledge as well as knowledge of the research in the field and were designed to gather information about the family tree, current life functioning, relationship qualities, past experiences of physical and sexual abuse, psychopathology, and resiliency. All but one of the participants indicated that they found the experience very positive and important, and often significantly therapeutic. For a few, the interview marked their first experience disclosing their abuse. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim and verified for accuracy.

Following each meeting with a participant, each of the interviewers wrote a memo (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to keep an immediate account of impressions of the participant and reflections on the interview. Using the transcribed interviews, one member of the research team wrote

a detailed biographical review (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for each participant, summarizing the interview and key elements associated with that participant's history and resiliency. The review was then read and discussed by the entire research group and revised accordingly.

Participants

Our sample consisted of 11 Caucasian, 2 African American, 1 African Cuban, 1 Puerto Rican, 1 Mexican American, and 1 part-Native American men ($n = 16$) who ranged in age from 24 to 61 years. Table 1 describes the participants' demographics, using pseudonyms to identify each. Throughout this article, names and other identifying information about the participants have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

A high proportion of participants ($n = 7$; 44%) identified themselves as gay men. Because the study is focused on how men with histories of CSA came to understand and construct their masculinity, the high percentage of gay men respondents does have certain implications for this study. We considered several hypotheses regarding this issue. One hypothesis is that more men who are gay are more likely to be targeted for abuse as boys. Another hypothesis is that serious CSA causes men to review their sexuality, and as a result they are more likely to come to identify themselves as gay men. This hypothesis has some support in the literature. For example, Shrier and Johnson (1988) found the rate of homosexuality six times higher and bisexuality six times higher than the average population rate in a sample of 40 abused boys. A third hypothesis is that gay men are more likely to respond to invitations to talk about their histories. We found some support for each of these hypotheses in the interviews.

The participants reported a range of traumatic experiences in childhood, including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, as well as extreme neglect. They often described growing up in violent or disorganized surroundings. All participants reported childhood sexual abuse that included actual or attempted rape. Eight were sexually abused by members of their immediate family, 4 by members of their extended family, and 7 by people outside of the family. Because a majority of the participants reported sexual

abuse from more than one perpetrator, the total number of types of perpetrators was more than 16. These perpetrators included 5 fathers or older brothers, 5 mothers or older sisters, 6 male relatives from the extended family, and many nonfamily members. All but 3 were men.

Fourteen of these men also reported physical abuse as children, mostly perpetrated by their fathers but also by mothers, older siblings, and extended family; most of these men witnessed physical abuse of mothers, siblings, or both. The high rate of physical abuse was consistent with research findings: Considerable evidence exists that boys who are sexually abused are more likely than sexually abused girls to be physically abused (e.g., Garnefski & Diekstra, 1997; Kendall-Tackett & Simon, 1992; Lew, 1988; Wellman, 1993). All of the participants were emotionally abused and seriously neglected in one way or another. Although two of the men described having perpetrated physical abuse on younger siblings as children, none described having done this after the age of 18. While several men described being emotionally abusive to younger siblings when they were children, or to partners early in their recovery, none of these men reported having sexually abused anyone in their lifetime.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stiles, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), a qualitative method of generating theory by an inductive content analysis of narrative data, was carried out by collecting and coding data in tandem. Analysis took place according to the stages outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990): moving from open coding to axial coding and, ultimately, to selective coding. The initial process of open coding was mostly completed during the women's study (Grossman et al., 1999) when transcriptions were read by members of the research group and relevant codes were created on the basis of the first several interviews, our extensive knowledge of the literature on survivors and resiliency, and personal experience. For the men's study, based on previous experiences with these codes, literature on men's responses to trauma, personal clinical experiences working with traumatized men, and the first several interviews with these men, the codes were revised slightly. In the process of

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Age (in years)	Race	Descriptive details
Alejandro	38	Mexican American	Alejandro was born in the United States to a middle-class family with 5 children. Educated with an MSW, he worked for a social service agency and was also involved in social service volunteer work. He described himself as a gay man and was single.
Amhad	42	African American	Amhad grew up in a poor large family with a single mother. His neighborhood was violent, and drug dealers were visible. He completed some college work and worked as a security guard. He described himself as heterosexual and was in a long-term marriage with five children.
Bill	47	Caucasian	Bill came from a poor family. Both of his parents had major mental illnesses. He earned a college degree and supported himself by playing the violin in different venues. He identified himself as bisexual and was in a long-term relationship with a male partner.
Brad	34	Caucasian	Brad grew up in a chaotic, violent, and highly educated household with numerous foster children and homeless people living with the family at times. He had a high school diploma and owned his own business. He identified as heterosexual and was single.
Burt	52	Caucasian	Burt grew up in an emotionally barren, financially challenged family. He had a college degree. He worked as a handyman and was receiving disability. He volunteered for various AIDS-related health groups, mainly providing support for people who were HIV positive. Burt identified as a gay man and was single.
Christos	31	West Indian of African descent	Christos grew up as the son of a single mother who was a professional. He was raised in the West Indies, Europe, and the United States. He earned a PhD and worked as a professor. He identified as a heterosexual and was single at the time of the study, although he had been previously married and divorced.
Earl	37	Biracial: Caucasian and Native American	Earl came from a working-class "swamp family" in his words. He had a degree in nursing. He worked part time as a gardener and was receiving disability compensation. He volunteered for various AIDS-related health groups, mainly providing support for people who were HIV positive. He identified as a gay man and was single.
Malcolm	24	African American	Malcolm grew up in a divorced middle-class family. He had a college degree and worked at a software company. He identified as heterosexual and was single.
Martin	61	Caucasian	Martin was raised by his divorced and troubled mother. He had a PhD and was president of a nonprofit agency. He identified as heterosexual and was married with three children.
Morgan	43	Caucasian	Morgan grew up in an affluent and disturbed family. He had a business degree and was vice president of a company. He identified as heterosexual and was single.
Paul	40	Caucasian	Paul grew up in a wealthy family with a chronically ill mother. He was a graduate student, on the path towards obtaining a PhD. He identified as bisexual and lived with a long-term male partner.
Ron	43	Caucasian	Ron grew up in an upper-middle-class family. He had a law degree and owned his own business. He identified as heterosexual. After his first marriage ended in divorce, he remarried and had two children with his second wife.

Table 1 (continued)

Name	Age (in years)	Race	Descriptive details
Tomas	46	Puerto Rican	Tomas was born in Puerto Rico and immigrated to the United States when he was very young. His family was poor and had 11 children. He was studying for his GED, having previously completed the ninth grade. He was unemployed after having been laid off from an airport job (post-9/11). He identified as heterosexual and was single. He had one child from an ex-girlfriend.
Uhan	49	Caucasian	Uhan grew up in a violent and chaotic working-class divorced family. He had a high school diploma and completed some college work. He was employed in an administrative job and also received disability compensation. He was a serious artist whose work had been exhibited. He identified as heterosexual and was engaged to be married.
Web	48	Caucasian	Web grew up in an upper-middle-class family with disturbed, traumatized parents. He had a PhD and was employed as a psychologist. He identified himself as a gay man, and after his first long-term partner passed away he became involved in another long-term relationship with a male partner with whom he resided.
Will	29	Caucasian	Will grew up in a disturbed and unstable middle-class household. He had an AS degree and owned his own business. He identified himself as a gay man and lived with a long-term male partner.

Note. MSW = master of social work; GED = general equivalency diploma; AS = associate in science.

adapting codes from a study of women to a study of men, we tried to remain sensitive to the distinctive ways these men organized their thinking and feelings and to develop and refine codes to reflect their narratives.

To establish reliability, all members of the team coded the same interview, which was then reviewed in detail. This process was repeated for the more complicated codes referring to important processes of resiliency, such as *management of feelings*, *self-care*, or *meaning making*. Using these codes, two members of the research team separately coded each interview transcript, discussing and reconciling any differences in coding. The next step involved a number of discussions by the research team about what was emerging as the central issues. A hierarchy of categories and subcategories was developed. Here the phenomenon of interest, dimensions related to the men's construction of masculinity, was identified and the subcategories were uncovered.

Our focus on the participants' struggles with their masculinity identity in the context of strong gender role expectations and their histories of childhood sexual abuse emerged. Based on reports from HyperRESEARCH (1992),

three subcategories were identified and explored: proving masculine toughness, stoicism, and male sexuality. The validity of these findings was supported by memos and biographical reviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Results

Our analyses suggest that resilient male survivors struggled with the expectations of conventional masculinity, particularly in the domains of expected toughness, stoicism, and sexual prowess. At the same time, they often found important ways to renegotiate these experiences. The sexually abused men had to successfully engage with traditional expectations of masculinity and the need to allow themselves to be immersed by attributes and experiences that oppose masculine ideals; thus, they had to both contain and resist traditional roles in order to heal. These men ultimately renegotiated conventional masculine norms (see Figure 1). Moreover, the renegotiation of masculinity process that took place among the male survivors seemed to be very much in line with, and a necessary aspect of, healing from their histories of CSA. Figure 1 depicts the way renegotiations

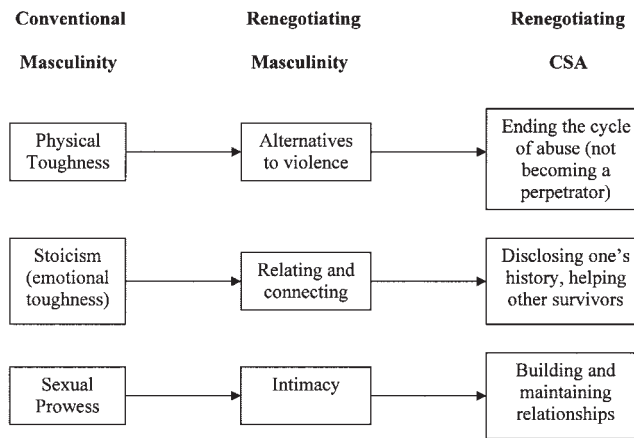


Figure 1. Renegotiating masculinity facilitates renegotiations of childhood sexual abuse (CSA).

of masculinity facilitate renegotiations of sexual abuse. The process of healing from CSA was thus similar to that of renegotiating gender constructs; the resilient survivor's pathway to recovery defied masculine tenets that impeded his ability to feel emotions and to connect with others. Most important, the male survivors were ultimately able to develop identities beyond the limited victim versus perpetrator roles, and thus end the transmission of abuse and violence.

Our emergent model took into account the ways in which the 16 participants first experienced pressures to become traditionally masculine (lessons in conventional masculinity) and even violent. Over time, they then renegotiated these issues (renegotiations of masculinity) to create an identity that integrated a sense of masculinity that was in accord with acknowledging and accepting their sexual abuse histories, as well as participating in a healing process.

Lessons in Conventional Masculinity

Men who are raised according to Western societal norms are judged by dominant gender ideologies. The participants in this study were no different; all described experiences of masculine socialization from nuclear and extended family members and peers.

Conventional masculinity: Proving masculine toughness. Fathers in particular were strong teachers of traditional rules of toughness

for their sons. Fathers challenged their sons in ways that both conformed to society's expectations and at times went beyond them in displays of violence and brutality, particularly when they sensed weakness or vulnerability in their sons. For example, Burt's father repeatedly told him that he did not view him as a "real boy" because he was born with displaced hips.

Several of the gay and bisexual men in our study seemed to face particularly harsh judgments from their fathers, who sensed that their sons were not stereotypical boys and who were both punitive and possibly desperate to turn them into real boys. Earl, a participant who identified himself as a gay man, explained that his relationship with his father was strained because of his father's disapproval of his so-called "feminine" ways and expectations that Earl prove his masculinity. His father was "constantly putting me down because I had feminine ways and feminine this. I did not like to do any manly things that he, his friends, and his friends' sons would do." To demonstrate his toughness and obtain his father's acceptance, Earl became involved in street-racing motorcycles. The racing was dangerous and ultimately led to a major injury when he ran his motorcycle into a wall. Despite having torn off his kneecaps, Earl continued racing after his accident in order to preserve his manifestation of toughness.

Fathers were not the only enforcers of masculine norms. When fathers were not present,

other male relatives and peers took over. Malcolm, an African American man raised by a single mother, went through what he referred to as “boot camp” training officiated by two older male cousins. This indoctrination occurred over several years, during which he was “forced to toughen up.” They accomplished their objectives by beating him up, forcing him to fight another cousin regularly, and humiliating him if he cried or complained. He explained that, as a result, “I lost my emotions. I was not emotional after that.”

Consistent with a recent study’s results that African American and Latino men and women endorsed a more traditional view of masculinity than Caucasian men and women from the United States (Levant et al., 2003), the men of color in our study particularly emphasized the need to appear tough and invulnerable within their racial/ethnic communities. The 3 Latino men and the 2 African Americans in the study all described cultures that had strong emphases on machismo, and they specifically attributed the greater emphasis on demonstrating male toughness to their culture and upbringing.

Almost all of these men had experienced violence in childhood, sometimes repeatedly. Moreover, the pressure to prove their toughness sometimes necessitated their own engagement in violent behavior, often for the sake of survival. The pressure to act violently was great, emanating mainly from fathers and peers. Being treated with violence and disrespect held the risk to breed more violence because violent adults, especially parents, were models for behavior; violent treatment evoked rage among other feelings. Our participants told us about the great extent to which they struggled with violent impulses and fantasies, which seemed to be derived internally, particularly during early points in their development and recovery and prior to any therapeutic intervention. A number had been violent toward peers or pets in their early development.

Conventional masculinity: Stoicism and self-sufficiency. Being tough was related to the capacity to remain stoic (in other words, emotionally tough), particularly in the face of danger or other emotional event; in other words, never acknowledging distress, fear, or a sense of helplessness. The participants experienced considerable pain and vulnerability because of their traumatic pasts; however, their enforced sto-

icism required that these feelings should not be shared. For example, Tomas, a Puerto Rican man, was routinely and cruelly humiliated by his oldest brother who branded him as “weak” if he tried to express his feelings. As an adolescent, Tomas told his father about the abuse, but his father “took it as a big joke” and did nothing.

As a result, the men became isolated, both from themselves and from others. The qualities of reserve and independence were idealized by masculine norms, suggesting to the men that they experienced aloneness as a natural aspect of the male experience and, furthermore, that this experience was necessary for demonstrating self-reliance. The participants in this study described a profound sense of isolation during childhood and adolescence. In one of the most extreme examples, Brad at age 12 spent a 3-month period truant from school because he thought people were trying to kill him. He spent each day by himself in a hideout without anyone knowing where he was all day. As he described during the interview, “I get safety through distance,” even as an adult. Yet distance did not provide a simple solution to his problems. Clarifying his tendency to “hide,” he said,

I’d be out roaming the streets a lot of times, or go out playing sports or you know, shoplifting or, I don’t know. Because I do have a need to be around people, I think, but just not with them. Surrounded sometimes.

His desire to be “around people” but not “with them” suggested tension between his desire for connection and his inability to be close, both because of fear of abuse but more because of a requirement that he be stoic about his own terror, outrage, and pain at what had happened to him.

For the participants, the conscious or unconscious yearning for relationships was often especially acute. The men in this sample often had neither stable caregiving relationships nor early friendships to help guide their development and maintenance of sustaining relationships. Most would have agreed with Earl, who called himself a “loner” who “stuck to himself.” Brad said poignantly about childhood, “It was a very despairing time. No friends. Nobody would stand by me. I couldn’t seem to make friends.” Yet the desire for relationships was clearly present. Brad, for example, added:

I would have wanted there to be somebody to go to. Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, a couple times they were trying to, in the community, they were trying to get a young man to connect with me, to be like a mentor, but it never worked out. So there was some real rejection there, I can tell you that. Yeah, this one guy in particular, and, I was so excited about it actually, didn't work out. I don't know why, he just said he didn't want to do it. (Sighs). So, maybe I was too needy or something.

The sense of pride in independence and individuality espoused by masculine norms indicated to Brad that it was unacceptable to be needy or clingy. Thus, the fact that he attributed his rejection to being "too needy" was quite significant.

As boys, the participants were isolated and alone; unavoidably, they developed into men who struggled with how to keep and enjoy satisfying close relationships. Martin, a 61-year-old father with four children, said, "Until I faced up to my alcoholism and the abuse, I was disconnected in many ways from my own family and from anybody around me. I could not let in as much of their affection."

The theme of aloneness was apparent throughout the narratives, and men struggled with how to understand their experiences. Although both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships were affected, the desire for male friends was particularly salient. Again from Martin:

Friendships have really suffered. Um, (long pause) I mean male friendships, as I say, it is a lot easier for me with women. I'm just more comfortable . . . and women are more open anyway than men, generally, so it is easier to, just to, for me to relax. My male friendships have been a real casualty of all of this, not that I don't have male friends, it is just that it has been very hard for me to sustain them and have them be close.

Because their experiences of childhood abuse were wrapped in feelings of powerlessness, which was conspicuously at odds with masculine ideals, confiding a history of abuse, not to mention the symptoms that may have developed in the aftermath, was particularly problematic. The influence of masculine ideology impeded the men (particularly the men of color) from reporting abuse and seeking professional assistance. Yet disclosure was often the key to relational development; the inability to talk about certain experiences or emotions, particularly experiences that were so essential to identity, cre-

ated severe disconnections in the men's relationships (e.g., Gartner, 1999). As Martin noted, the prohibition of any kind of significant disclosure interfered with the development of a supportive relationship, and both perpetuated and increased his sense of isolation:

And one of the issues there is that they haven't known, this is where I'm beginning to talk more about it with them, they haven't known about . . . they don't know that I'm in AA, they certainly don't know that I've been abused . . . and so there's been this disconnect, when it comes to friendship. . . . So that, so that (stumbles and stutters), how can you have a really close friend, when they don't know what's going on with you in the most important areas of your life? The answer is, you can't. That is a contradiction in terms.

Neither Christos, an African Cuban American man, nor Ahmad, an African American, had told anyone about their sexual abuse histories. Christos explained that Cuban culture "does not deal with emotions," and he worked very hard to control his thoughts and feelings. In both cases, their level of machismo continued in adulthood to interfere with their recovery. We viewed their volunteering for the study as an amazingly courageous act, particularly in light of the cultural ideals they were attempting to uphold. Ahmad laughed heartily when, at the end of the interview, he was asked if he might recommend the study to any friends of his with histories of CSA. He explained vehemently, "I do not know who they are. We do not talk about it!"

Conventional masculinity: Sexual prowess. The participants struggled against conventional norms that expected a high capacity for sexual prowess. In contrast, some avoided sexual contact altogether. For example, Alejandro described survival as all consuming, such that "I was just not sexual at all. I mean, I was just literally trying to survive." A number of the other men also avoided sexual activity until later in life. Burt recounted, "I was a virgin 'til I was 23. So. And the whole sex thing was like charged. I went out with one girl for 2 years, and in 2 years I never had sex." Once they did become intimate, sexual activity was difficult and sometimes unbearably painful for some men. For example, Bill expressed the challenges of sexual intimacy in his first relationship:

I remember the first time, my first love relationship. . . . I remember the first time that she touched my chest like

in a loving way and I just screamed in pain; it was like she had cut me with a knife. . . . It was a couple of years before we were able to move into a sexual relationship because it was just so painful for me.

Bill, who identified himself as bisexual and was in a long-term relationship with a male partner, explained,

I was raised in a household where my mother believed all men are rapists and therefore, fundamentally evil. My mother used genital torture as a day-to-day disciplinary device, as a result of that I've suffered almost my entire life with constant penile amputation fantasies. . . . Anyway, so if you're walking around with that, it is pretty hard to have a gender identity.

Gay and bisexual men, in comparison to heterosexual men, endure a significant additional developmental task around renegotiating their masculine identities and sexuality (e.g., Bohan, 1996). For male CSA survivors, confusion about sexual orientation is a frequently reported and major negative consequence of their sexual abuse history (Foster, 1993). On the basis of their intensive study of three men with histories of CSA (one homosexual, one heterosexual, and one undecided), as well as a review of the literature, Gilgun and Reiser (1990) suggested that most men who have been sexually abused fear they are homosexual, and homosexual men wonder if the abuse made them gay. The sexual problems of men sexually abused as boys, however, go beyond the questions of sexual orientation to the demands of physical and emotional intimacy.

The homosexual men often experienced extreme harassment and abuse about being gay. Alejandro did not identify himself as gay until he was older, but his father similarly harassed him at an early age:

There was not a day going by that he did not tell me that I was—at that point I was 10—and he would call me a faggot. I do not really see myself as a feminine kind of guy, but I guess he knew that. I guess they say parents know when their children are gay you know, they have an idea. So he would call me a faggot, he would pull my hair.

These men were taught the stereotypical male sexual role, but the experience of being victimized sexually made the traditional model very problematic. Bill said,

We [men] have an extra layer of shame and everything else because after all, we're supposed to enjoy [sexual intimacy] . . . and we're supposed to be strong enough to be able to just like fight it off or something.

On the basis of the tenets of masculinity demanding that boys enjoy all sexual experiences, Bill deduced that if he did not "enjoy it" then he should have been strong enough to "fight it off." Either way, their histories of sexual abuse forced the participants to suffer the consequences (e.g., "an extra layer of shame") of not fitting into the confines of conventional masculinity.

Many of the men in our sample struggled with issues around desire—too much or too little—and with being easily triggered by sexual approaches from others even when they wanted to be responsive. All of them had struggles above and beyond the normative dilemmas they had of boys growing into men and integrating their sexuality into their adult lives in a way that worked for them and that fit their own identity.

Renegotiating Masculinity

The men in our sample were all socialized to one degree or another to follow traditional masculine roles. As we have suggested, the fact that they had been victimized and helpless in the context of sexual abuse already brought them in violation of those roles. As a result of this, or perhaps despite it, all of the men in our sample made specific attempts to disassociate themselves from traditional roles. Even without being directly asked during interviews, the men deliberately inserted stories attesting to how they were different from "typical guys."

Renegotiating toughness: Seeking alternatives to violence. Many of the men in this sample engaged in activities that demonstrated their "tough" sides: participating in physical activities that required physical courage and endurance such as self-defense. At the same time, all of the men had realized that they had to renegotiate their tough act to put boundaries on the use of aggression or physical force. Specifically, they recounted episodes whereupon they did not allow others to pressure them into hypermasculine behavior, and made concerted decisions to find ways to avoid violence themselves. For example, Brad described his father still hitting him on the back so hard it hurts when they visit each other. When he complains, his dad says, "'Come on, be tough.' I am like, 'Dad, I rock climb, I can do pull-ups with you hanging on my back, I do karate, I am tough. Stop hitting my back.'"

Only 3 of the men in our study had children, and only 2 had participated in raising their children, but all of the men had opportunities for being abusive to animals or other people, including relatives and partners. These resilient survivors told us repeatedly how important it was for them not to become abusers themselves, which they had decided when they were quite young. Many struggled with violent pasts, fantasies of violence, or both.

Most saliently, the men also feared their potential for violence, expressing apprehension about the emotional experience of anger and the fear of their inability to contain it. Brad was at a retreat for male survivors and during the goodbye hugs, someone put their hand on him in an inappropriate way. Brad said,

I wanted to just beat the s*** out of him . . . and I could have creamed him. But I did not. I mean, I haven't hit anyone since I was 18 years old. I've always been afraid that if I let myself go, I will not stop. 'Cause of all the rage.

Uhan, who had previously abused his animals, said that between the medication and therapy, "I've been able to like work out a lot of my anger. . . . And I'm in transition right now. I'm going from being an angry f*** to being a serene f***!" He still struggled with anger at his fiancé, but he had many outlets, including therapy and painting and they appeared able to handle his anger in their discussions. He said that he was never abusive any more.

Will, a 29-year old man diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder, experienced severe physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. He identified himself as a gay man and lived with a long-term partner with whom he was planning a commitment ceremony. At the same time, he described a defensive need to limit intimacy in order to avoid triggering rage because he recognized that his anger was typically directed to those closest to him. He summarized, "I think I know I have the capacity to be a violent person and that sometimes scares me. So I think I tend to keep myself out of situations where that may occur." He had done that successfully since he was a young teenager.

Most of the men viewed their capacity for violence as a critical area of which they were acutely aware and actively working on improving. Brad, a conflict manager by profession, explained, "I do not want to cut corners and have it to deal with later. I do not want to be a

father at 37 years old and beat the shit out of my kid one time in a rage. That is not an acceptable option." His line of work served as a continual education and reminder to him about positive alternatives to anger and violence.

Some men referred to distinct choices to deviate from the path of their perpetrator. Ron referred to his older brother (who sexually abused him) as someone who

got real pleasure from abusing. I grew up and he would dissect live frogs and do all these other things and try to get us to join him doing it. And my [other] brother wanted to emulate him and he would, you know, try to follow that. It was kind of bizarre. I knew I did not want that. At the youngest age, I knew I did not want to be like [him].

Bill articulated that

people whose boundaries are repeatedly violated feel the need to violate other people's boundaries . . . as far as I can tell, everybody who's raped as a child, or the men who are, are all left with these feelings that could lead to repeating the patterns of behavior. . . . You ask me, what helps me, what saves me? Well, empathy saves me. . . . Some little piece of humanity inside me is left where I can empathize with what it would feel like to be violated in that way and so I would not do it. And so, I was able to hold onto those kinds of feelings until I could find safe places to deal with them.

It was striking to us that the men in this sample had not only managed the complex conflicts and contradictions in arriving at a workable model of masculine identity, but had also ended the cycle of violence and abuse. They told us of decisions they had made, sometimes in adolescence, to avoid violence. These men developed many cognitive methods to help them refrain from violence, including becoming consciously aware of the ways their abuse might predispose them to it, of finding safe outlets for their anger, and of using their relatedness to help them avoid hurting others.

Renegotiating stoicism and self-sufficiency: Learning to relate and connect. Despite the pressure to remain stoic and isolated from others, many of the men had worked successfully to be in relationships with friends, partners/spouses, children, and even parents. Part of this transformation involved becoming much more knowledgeable and open about their feelings, as well as developing their capacity for empathy. Brad viewed himself as

one of the few guys that complains that women do not seem to express their feelings well enough! Because

I've learned. . . . You know, some guys can take an engine apart and put it back together? I cannot even take it apart. To hell with fixing it! But I can, I know how people work. I know how to relate to people. So I can do that.

Several of the heterosexual men expressly complained about the conditions set forth by masculine ideologies around their relationships with women. Morgan, who had been sexually abused by his mother and by his older brother, described a relationship in which he upheld typically feminine values of relational connection and care. He reflected,

The actual physicality of sexuality was irrelevant. Everything, the entire experience was totally on the context. It was very, in our society, a very nonmale way of looking at sexuality. What experiences were best . . . that I like the person, that I feel safe, you know, like, trust, cute, cuddly, sweet.

Alejandro was very isolated and living with a partner who was HIV positive. He was very frightened he would contract HIV and then die all alone. His fear motivated him to learn everything he could about HIV and AIDS, particularly through volunteer work that connected him to "a network of friends that are associated with the agencies." That was the beginning of the breakdown of his isolation, which led him eventually to seek out therapists and to actively pursue his recovery. When asked what he had learned from his abuse, he said,

My thoughts first go to my relationships with other people. On some level I think my experiences have left me with an understanding of what for me really matters. And so people who are in my life know that I love them. . . . That is what really important to me.

At the same time, it was clear that embracing connection, empathy, and vulnerability continued to be a difficult renegotiation in many contexts. For example, Anthony, an African American man who grew up in a dangerous and drug-infested housing project and who was abused by a Big Brother (i.e., from the Big Brothers/Big Sisters social group), held fast to many traditional masculine values, such as being a patriarchal father. He said, "I'm Dad, you know . . . you do not mess around with d-a-d. Dangerous-Ass-Dude." He continued to refrain from telling others about his vulnerabilities and prior to the research interview, had never told anyone about his sexual abuse. However, when asked why he volunteered for the study, he said,

"Now I'm ready to just try to get it open, open up, just say it, because it did occur," suggesting that he was at an important crossroad in his recovery.

Similarly, Malcolm, who described losing access to his emotions when he was put through "boot camp" by two older cousins from the ages of 9 to 11, said he has been regaining them now, at age 24. He said he was "kind of coerced into doing that" by a girlfriend who wanted him to be more vulnerable and open, and he realized he needed to change a bit to sustain that relationship. Although he did not want to go back to being the very emotional little boy he had been, he wanted to and needed to reconnect with his own feelings.

Renegotiating sexuality: Striving for intimacy. All of these men were able to modify or renegotiate their own sexuality to some degree in the face of their abuse histories. For the most part, they upheld what have been seen as conventional feminine priorities in sexual relationships, which involve emotional intimacy and trust. As Morgan stated, he espoused "a very nonmale way of looking at sexuality." Four of the men (Alejandro, Bill, Paul, and Ron) talked about recognizing their problems with intimacy and the significant role of their intimate partners in healing and teaching them to love and connect. Alejandro described, "I had to really learn how to become . . . intimate because at one point, I couldn't really be with anyone unless, you know, unless it was just a one night stand. So gradually I had to learn how to become intimate." Much of this growth he attributes to his partner,

I would say my partner . . . changed my life literally because I was a mess, and for a long time I couldn't even let someone touch me. I mean I would jump, you know, when someone would try to caress my face. I would just do it automatically. I just, my body was just, I don't know. Constantly I would jump, and I had problems with that and he helped me. And he helped me, he gave me back, he showed me how to love, and he was able to help me to let go.

Paul met his current partner when he was 3 weeks into sobriety from life-threatening alcoholism. Paul explained that his partner's role in his transformation was critical, "He said to me one night, 'you are loved by God, by men, and a whole hell of a lot of other people.' I needed to hear that." Ron acknowledged that his wife

had been “very helpful in my ability to feel and to enjoy life.”

The second point of renegotiation was even more salient in the men’s narratives. Specifically, they worked hard to establish and enforce sexual boundaries. In a climate of masculine prowess being positively reinforced, and a limited language for men to reject offers of sexual activity, they found ways to say no. For example, Brad explained that he had learned to

say no to a woman as an adult. I mean I’ve gotten better with that; now I can set boundaries and stuff like that. . . . Now there’s a lot of things I can talk about or do that most men can’t do, and that tends to work out pretty well. And part of it is being able to say my boundaries and what I need. As long as a woman can handle those things, we’re ok.

Similarly, Alejandro described actively working to renegotiate intimacy in relationships. He said,

I still have an issue about intimacy. I’m intimate, but then again sometimes I have my bad days where I don’t want to be touched. I don’t want to be, I want to be left alone. If they’re ok with that, it is nothing. And I let them know it is not you, it has nothing to do with you. I’m just in one of those. . . . I just don’t want to be touched today.

Thus, an important part of recovery involves developing and communicating sexual boundaries.

Conclusion: Avoiding the Cycle of Violence

Male survivors of childhood sexual abuse are judged by dominant gender ideologies while contending with the incongruities and repercussions associated with sexual abuse. They tend to use stories of their fathers’ expectations to frame the pressures they feel, but gender socialization is also internalized. In addition, sexual abuse intrinsically undermines feelings of power and control for male victims. These contradictions force men to confront and negotiate with their masculine identities.

Rutter (1990) argued that “protection is not a matter of pleasant happenings or socially desirable qualities of the individual. . . . [Protection] resides not in the evasion of the risk but in successful engagement with it” (p. 186). Clearly, a sexual abuse survivor must contend with the risks brought about by the abuse itself. However, it is also useful to examine the role of

traditional expectations of masculinity in this framework. That is to say, the sexually abused male must successfully engage with traditional expectations of masculinity and the need to allow himself to be immersed by attributes and experiences that oppose masculine ideals; thus, he must both contain and resist traditional roles in order to heal.

We were particularly interested in how the resiliency we had identified in this group of male CSA survivors manifested itself in the ways they renegotiated masculine roles. The lessons in being tough often have a number of negative consequences for survivors, including forcing them to disconnect from their own feelings in order to survive rough (mis)treatment and to disconnect from others. Research on boys’ and men’s development has alerted us to the reality that men may not be as single focused in their interest in autonomy as has previously been believed (e.g., Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Pollack, 1998), suggesting that masculinity ideology imposes extreme self-reliance, rather than reflecting a natural desire. A large obstacle then for male survivors and a necessary one for recovery is reconnecting with others, asking for help, and accepting their feelings, including pain and vulnerability—both physical and emotional.

These men seemed to know intuitively that they needed to get connected with their feelings. In general, our participants had made significant strides in knowing about and finding ways of sharing their feelings with others, including their feelings about their trauma histories. They mostly accomplished this by making connections—with friends, members of their families, partners, therapists, and others in recovery—although a few also drew significant strength and insight from self-help books. The more recovery work they had done, whether in 12-step programs, psychotherapy groups, or individual therapy, the better they were at connecting with others and the richer they were in their relationships. As with the resilient Harvard men studied by Felsman and Valliant (1987), the more resilient men in this study “have access to their pasts and are able to bear that pain and sorrow, and in so doing, to draw upon it as a source of strength” (p. 55).

A male survivor is faced with the challenge of rejecting the traditional standards of masculinity to some degree in order to heal. Lisak

(1995) wrote, "The path to recovery winds straight through masculinity's forbidden territory: the conscious experience of those intense, overwhelming emotional states of fear, vulnerability, and helplessness" (p. 262). Resilient male survivors cope with masculine expectations through this very process. After an initial deconstruction of the masculine order, they are required to reconstruct what it means to be masculine. During this process, these men reject the role of the perpetrator. They search for effective ways to avoid perpetuating a cycle of violence. Ultimately, resilient men use their skills to amend problematic family patterns: correcting negative intergenerational patterns; healing from the violence and abuse in their pasts; and eventually finding stable, nonabusive, and supportive relationships.

Our findings support Lisak (1995) who argued that male survivors of childhood sexual abuse should be "given the tools to deconstruct the gender system and their own experience of gender socialization in order to fully engage in the process of healing from abuse" (p. 258). We take it a step further to argue that the deconstruction of the gender system can inform the process of deconstructing maladaptive intergenerational patterns, which is the critical next step toward healing, recovery, and resiliency.

The identification of gender identity construction empowers an individual to make meaning of his experience and gain control over it. Our data suggest some factors that hinder or facilitate this deconstruction. Certainly good psychotherapy, which of course requires access to services, is one major facilitator. Publicly identifying oneself as gay or bisexual often compels men to examine constructs of masculinity with a more critical eye. Traditional cultures with their emphasis on machismo make this exploration more difficult, but over time and with support, it can be accomplished. Loving partners can also help in a variety of ways.

Therapists can take on the role of helping men to see their experiences in the context of traditional expectations of masculinity, to critically assess gender roles, and to learn how to reformulate traditional codes based on their own provisions. It is important for therapists to acknowledge and support the process of gender deconstruction, with the understanding that it is necessary to inform the process of amending patterns of abuse and violence.

This study was limited by sample size and sampling procedures. The strategy of sending flyers to local therapists resulted in gathering only Caucasian participants who were clearly linked to mental health resources. To recruit a more diverse array of participants, flyers were posted in communities with higher percentages of minority residents. Although this approach had greater success in recruiting diverse participants during the second half of the study, the overall sample was biased by a greater emphasis on participants who were referred by therapists, as well as those who self-selected because they responded to a flyer inviting resilient male survivors to respond. Thus, the results of this study may or may not be applicable to other male survivors, and future research should draw from a larger and more diverse sample in order to better understand the masculine traditions and expectations in different racial and ethnic groups. The study was also limited by the lack of a control group, one in which the men have not experienced sexual abuse. Future research should include a control group in order to better clarify differences in masculine roles and developmental outcomes. Other studies might focus on using quantitative approaches to test the generalizability of the theory to different subgroups of sexually abused men in terms of SES, gender of the perpetrator, age at the time of the abuse, and sexual preference. Finally, drawing from a population of sexually abused men who become sexual offenders would be helpful in better understanding their experiences of masculinity. The result of such a study would be useful in developing comprehensive, preventive, and clinical interventions that successfully avert the intergenerational transmission of trauma and provide guidelines for therapists and others helping male survivors understand and transcend their own conflicts.

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