Victims and Survivors' Own Stories of Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse

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This book is dedicated to Bertie, with love.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE, SCOPE AND IMPACT OF INTRAFAMILIAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

ANNA GEKOSKI, STEVE BROOME & MIRANDA A.H. HORVATH

While discourses surrounding child sexual abuse (CSA) can be seen as cyclical and in a constant state of flux, over recent years the idea of the very existence of CSA has arguably started to shift more fundamentally from societal denial towards societal acceptance, as partly evidenced by changes in policy, guidance, legislation and law (Lovett et al., 2018). This increasing recognition of CSA as a widespread global phenomenon is a result of various factors, including the proliferation of reporting of high profile cases in the media, public accounts from victims and survivors, feminist activism and research, the emergence of social and political counter-discourses surrounding belief and power, and the way in which language and terminology relating to CSA has evolved. In this introduction, we endeavour to give an overview of the nature, scope, prevalence and impact of CSA, drawing on historic, seminal, and recent research.

The current definition of CSA from the Department for Education for England, which will be used in this book, involves:

> "forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in

> sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse" (Department for Education, 2018).

However, as there is no universal definition of CSA across the literature, nor any widely agreed upon and utilised measurement tools and approaches, it can be challenging to assess prevalence rates with any degree of precision (Gekoski et al., 2016). For example, The Crime Survey for England and Wales reports that around one in 14 adults (seven per cent) has been sexually abused as a child (Office for National Statistics, 2016). While a UK study which interviewed thousands of children and parents found that 17 per cent of 11-17-year-olds reported having experienced contact or non-contact sexual abuse (Radford et al., 2011). However, even at the conservative end of the scale, such statistics suggest that several million children and adults in England and Wales have been subjected to CSA (Fisher et al., 2017).

This veritable epidemic of CSA, which for years remained largely absent or denied in the public lexicon, has recently been reported on extensively in the UK media. The cases of rock star Gary Glitter, entertainer Rolf Harris, and media personality Jimmy Savile were all front page news (Gekoski et al., 2016). While scandals in the Catholic and Anglican Church, councils, residential schools and custodial institutions, have not only been splashed across the media but are now being formally investigated by a statutory inquiry–the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)–set up by the government in 2015. Such cases have partly been so heavily reported upon as they contain key influential news values, which include: novelty and rarity; celebrities, officials, and authority figures; exposes and scandals; violence; political connotations; multiple victims; institutional failure; high drama and sensationalism; "stranger-danger"; and "perfect victims" (e.g. Chibnall, 1977; Roshier, 1973; Surette, 1998; Rojek, 2001; Chiet, 2003; Greer & Jewkes, 2005; Greer, 2007; Gekoski et al., 2012).

In contrast, sparser in the public narrative–remaining shrouded in silence, shame and stigma–are accounts of CSA within the family environment; committed by those who are loved and trusted by victims and survivors. These include biological and non-biological relatives, immediate and extended family, and family friends and acquaintances (Csorba et al., 2012). This phenomenon is known as intrafamilial CSA, or incest, which we define here as "child sexual abuse perpetrated by a family member or that takes place within a family context or environment, whether or not by a family member" (Horvath et al., 2014). Such cases continue to remain under-recognised and taboo (Atwood, 2007), compared

to more sensational, rare, and scandalous cases committed by strangers, known as extrafamilial child sexual abuse (Cheit et al., 2010).

While there is clear evidence that intrafamilial CSA is overwhelmingly more frequent than extrafamilial CSA in the UK (Horvath et al., 2014), it is hard to determine precisely just how much more frequent, with prevalence rates varying widely according to different research methodologies and definitions (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010; Pereda et al., 2009). Disclosure is also a significant barrier to establishing prevalence rates, with research finding that intrafamilial CSA is under-reported as compared to extrafamilial CSA, with victims and survivors being more reluctant, unable, or unwilling to disclose their abuse as both children and adults (Jensen et al., 2005). This may be due to fear for their own safety, shame and self-blame, anticipated futility, impact upon the family, feelings of loyalty to the offender, and issues surrounding the abuse of trust (Roesler & Wind, 1994; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). This frequently means that such abuse is never formally reported to statutory agencies, leading to under-estimations of the real scale of the problem in crime statistics and official figures. Indeed, it is thought that only one in eight victims and survivors of intrafamilial CSA come to the attention of statutory authorities and agencies (Children's Commissioner for England, 2015).

With these caveats in mind, what can we say about the scale of the problem of intrafamilial CSA? According to official figures, intrafamilial CSA makes up around two thirds of all CSA reported to the police (Children's Commissioner for England, 2015). However, estimates that do not rely on crimes which are reported to official agencies–such as the police, child protection services, or social services–and which strive to uncover the "hidden" or "dark" figure of intrafamilial CSA, report higher rates. For example, in the UK, Radford et al.'s (2011) study found that nine out of ten child victims are abused by someone they know, while Ussher and Dewberry (1995) found that 80 per cent of 775 adult female survivors who responded to a survey reported that their abuse was intrafamilial. Similarly high rates are reported in international studies (e.g. Anderson et al., 1993; Pineda-Lucatero et al., 2009; Bahali et al., 2010; Perdahli Fis et al., 2010).

Looking at the circumstances under which intrafamilial CSA occurs, research suggests that it takes place in families from all socio-economic, educational, ethnic and religious backgrounds (Mey & Neff, 1982). However, although some literature describes families in which CSA occurs as "intact" or "normal" (Rudd & Herzberger, 1999), most label such families as "chaotic", "dysfunctional", "disturbed" or "disrupted" (Hartley, 2001). These families are typically characterised by disorder,

often with parental substance abuse and psychiatric issues (Beitchman et al., 1991); with parents and children experiencing role reversals (Randolph & Nagle, 1989); and high rates of parental separation and divorce, resulting in the absence of one or both parents and a lack of family cohesion (Perdahli Fis et al., 2010).

While intrafamilial CSA can be perpetrated by a range of family members–including (step)parents, (step)siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces–it is (step)fathers who are the most studied in the literature (Adler & Schutz, 1995) and have historically been found to be the most frequent offenders (e.g. Peirce & Peirce, 1985; Newman et al., 1998; Atwood, 2007). However, while CSA committed by siblings comes to the attention of the authorities far less than that perpetrated by (step)fathers (Cyr et al., 2002), and is the least investigated in the literature (Adler & Schutz, 1995), recent research points to "sibling-incest" as being more frequent than father-daughter incest (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005). Indeed, as noted by Krienert and Walsh (2011), the limited research in this area has found sibling-abuse to be up to five times as common as parental abuse. Reasons for sibling-abuse remaining unrecognised, under-reported, and often avoided in the empirical literature, may include the perception that it is an exploratory phase of development (Phillips-Green, 2002) and is benign and normal (Adler & Schutz, 1995). More recent research has also found that there is a strong taboo that still surrounds the phenomenon of sibling-abuse (Yates, 2017).

Similarly, abuse by female caregivers has historically been a taboo subject–an act seen as unnatural and going against all societal moral norms of females as the gentler sex–and has thus been given scant attention in the literature (Boroughs, 2004; Miller, 2013). However, although CSA is predominantly perpetrated by males, female CSA is a genuine problem (Turton, 2010), with female offenders usually operating in an intrafamilial environment (Giguere & Bumby, 2007). However, it is hard to determine prevalence rates of such abuse, as cultural and societal taboos towards female perpetrated CSA may obscure its' scope. For example, victims and survivors of parental sexual abuse may find it harder to disclose that the perpetrator was their mother (Denov, 2003). Additionally, child protection professionals are often not trained adequately in this area; are less likely to treat allegations of CSA by females seriously; and may be incredulous, disbelieving, and dismissive of children's disclosures (Bunting, 2005).

The onset of CSA can occur from any age from infancy to later teenage years; however research generally finds lower prevalence rates for preschool children (0 to six-years-old) (e.g. Anderson et al., 1993), followed by school age (over six-years-old) (e.g. Ussher and Dewberry

(1995), with early adolescence (ten to 14-years-old) being the most at risk period (e.g. Negriff et al., 2013). However, there is some evidence that victims and survivors of intrafamilial CSA, specifically, are likely to be younger at the age of first abuse than those of extrafamilial CSA, which may be attributed to them spending more time in the family environment (e.g. Fisher & McDonald, 1998). The same study found that boys tend to be approximately two years younger than girls when first abused.

Higher rates of CSA have consistently been reported among girls than boys, both nationally and internationally (e.g. Goldman & Padayachi, 1997; Pineda-Lucatero et al., 2009; Priebe & Svedin, 2008; Perdahli Fis et al., 2010). For example, a recent UK study estimated that 15–20% of girls and 7–8% of boys experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16 (Kelly & Karsna, 2017). However, although the literature is fairly unanimous in such findings, it is possible that the figures are closer than such estimates suggest. This discrepancy may be due to common societal stereotypes of girls being more likely to be sexually abused than boys, which may result in those such as parents, teachers, and doctors being less likely to suspect or pick up on signs of sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1994). Males may also be less likely to disclose abuse, think it "unmanly" to seek help, or have concerns about the stigma of homosexuality (Pereda et al., 2009).

It is observed by Fisher et al. (2017) that victims and survivors of CSA are not a homogeneous group who all suffer the same effects from their victimisation. Impacts may be mediated by various factors, such as victim and survivor characteristics (e.g. levels of resilience, personality traits, backgrounds, demographic profiles, and other adverse life events); the circumstances and nature of the abuse (e.g. age of onset, the identity of the abuser, and the severity of the abuse); and interpersonal relationships and immediate environment (e.g. the attitude of victim and survivors' caregivers and their experiences of childhood). There is evidence, for example, to suggest that victims and survivors of intrafamilial CSA may suffer worse physical and emotional symptoms than victims and survivors of extrafamilial CSA (Fischer & McDonald, 1998), which may be due to the typically longer duration of the abuse and a greater sense of trauma due to feelings of mistrust and self-blame (Perdahli Fis et al., 2010).

Although there is evidence of post-traumatic growth and positive adaptation for some victims and survivors of CSA (Hartley et al., 2016), there is an incontrovertibly large body of research documenting the extreme trauma and severe consequences of such victimisation. These effects may be short- and/or long-term, with victims and survivors suffering from a range of adverse emotional, psychological, behavioural,

physical, cognitive, sexual and financial impacts, which may manifest in child- and/or adulthood (Gekoski et al., 2016). For example, psychological and emotional impacts may include feelings of confusion, humiliation, disbelief, fear, sadness, guilt, anger, low self-esteem, lack of self-respect, self-blame, powerlessness and worthlessness (e.g. Mey and Neff, 1982; Phelan, 1995; DiGiorgio-Miller 1998; Nelson, 2009; Young, Riggs & Robinson, 2011; Salter, 2013; Foster & Hagendorn, 2014; One in Four, 2015; Sanderson, 2006; Fisher et al., 2017; Warrington et al., 2017).

Furthermore, while establishing a causal relationship between mental illness and CSA is notoriously problematic due to confounding variables–which include low social class, parental psychopathology, poor parenting and reporting bias (Kendler & Aggen, 2014)–there is extensive evidence supporting higher levels of mental health problems in victims and survivors. These include anxiety, post-traumatic-stress disorder (PTSD), mood disorders, depression, suicidal tendencies, self-harm, eating disorders, adjustment disorders, disruptive behaviour disorders and personality disorders (e.g. Beitchman et al, 1992; Roesler & Wind, 1994; Rudd & Herzberger, 1999; Maniglio, 2009; Perdahli Fis et al., 2010; Stroebel et al., 2012; Health Working Group on Child Sexual Exploitation, 2014; Mills et al., 2016; Kendler & Aggen, 2014; Easton & Kong, 2017). This is true across research designs, including those such as this which use retrospective adult samples (e.g. Fergusson & Mullen, 1999; Kendler et al. 2000; Cong et al. 2011).

A recent Rapid Evidence Assessment (Fisher et al., 2017)–which analysed over 200 pieces of research on CSA–found impacts on every aspect of victims and survivors' lives, which were grouped into seven categories: (1) Physical health problems, including: injuries from the abuse, sexually transmitted infections, high BMI, childbirth issues, heart problems, chronic pain, non-epileptic seizures, and unexplained medical problems; (2) Emotional/mental health problems, including: distress, low self-esteem, loss of confidence, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide; (3) Externalising behaviours, including: substance abuse, risky sexual behaviours, antisocial behaviour and offending; (4) Interpersonal relationship issues, such as: insecure attachment styles, reduced relationship satisfaction, interpersonal violence, sexual dysfunction, intimacy issues, and parent/child relationship problems; (5) Socio-economic issues, such as: low educational achievement, high unemployment, increased claiming of (and time on) welfare benefits, financial instability and homelessness; (6) Religious/spiritual beliefs, including issues such as: disillusionment with religion, spiritual devastation or confusion, and faith as a coping mechanism; and (7) Vulnerability to re-

victimisation, including: sexual re-victimisation and other types of re-victimisation such as physical violence.

However, although there is a significant body of academic literature documenting the impact and effects of intrafamilial CSA, much of it is based on large quantitative surveys, where all too often the "voice" of the survivor is lost. Indeed, one of the most important conclusions in a study commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner in England and Wales on intrafamilial CSA (Horvath et al., 2014) was that there is a paucity of qualitative research that looks at the experiences of victims and survivors of CSA themselves. The study further recommends that this gap be addressed through more research with victims and survivors, in order to explore their experiences, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, recovery journeys, and the effect and impact that such abuse can have across the life span.

This book aims to directly address these issues, with a particular focus on the impact and effect that intrafamilial CSA has across the life course, by presenting a series of detailed retrospective first-person accounts from ten adult victims and survivors of CSA. These six men and four women, ranging in age from their twenties to their sixties, are from England, Ireland and Scotland. Four were abused by their (step)fathers, three by siblings, one by a mother, one an uncle, and one a grandfather. The youngest age of onset of abuse was infancy, but for most victims and survivors school age was the most vulnerable time. The nature of the abuse–which ranged from a handful of incidents to that which spanned years–covered a large range of assaultive actions, from kissing, touching or fondling, masturbation, and oral, vaginal and anal sex.

The following accounts were told to the authors in conversational, semi-structured interviews, where empathetic listening was used to facilitate victims and survivors telling their stories, in their ways, and in their language. In presenting their stories, the authors draw on the phenomenological method, which privileges a person's subjective lived experience. Thus, each victim and survivor's words, use of language, and patterns of speech are captured faithfully and presented with minimal editing. In this way, their stories are more human, truthful, powerful and real, allowing the reader to engage with the experiences of the person more fully. All accounts are anonymous, with the names of victims, their abusers, family, friends, and locations changed, in order to protect their confidentiality.

Fundamentally, it is hoped that these first-person accounts will help to fill a gap in what academics, practitioners, policy makers, and the public know about the experience, impact and effects of CSA; act as a kind of validation for victims and survivors and serve to give them a voice; and

demystify the subject, debunking stereotypes, reducing stigma, and opening up a conversation about a subject considered one of the most enduring societal and cultural taboos.

CHAPTER TWO

TOM

I was sexually abused by my dad when I was nine years old. I think probably the best thing is if I tell you how that happened; that will probably take me about five to seven minutes. So, what happened is, I was brought up in the suburbs in what I would call a middle class family, in the middle of three children; I have an older sister and a younger brother. My parents married quite young–by the time she was 27 my mother had three of us children–and we lived at that time in a semi-detached house that had three bedrooms. How the abuse came about was that my dad used to go out drinking in the evenings and he snored. So when he came home at night, because he snored, my mum would come into my bedroom and ask me to go and get in bed with my dad, because it was known in the family that I could fall asleep. If we went away, or something similar, I was the boy that fell asleep in the backseat. Or if we were watching the television in the evening I was the child that fell asleep. They use to say: "Tom can fall asleep anywhere." So I think my mother thought: "Well, okay, he's a heavy sleeper so we'll put him in bed with his dad."

What happened as a result of that was that I, as a nine-year-old boy, woke up one night and was very aware that my father was next to me and he slept naked. And I'm now gay, or I was gay, or I've probably been gay all my life, so on this occasion I went down to the kitchen and got a torch and then I went back upstairs and began to look at my dad underneath the bedclothes with the torch on. He stirred, and I turned the torch off and pretended I was asleep, but it was obviously too late and he then cuddled up to me. He told me he knew about the torch, asked me if I knew about sex, and said that it was okay for me to be inquisitive and that he would tell me about sex, which I had never really fully understood.

Then he masturbated me and I masturbated him, but I was too young to ejaculate so I couldn't actually ejaculate. During that time he did actually say that masturbation was something I could try on my own, but that what we were doing we should keep between us. So that episode ended and then subsequently when my mum used to get up and come into the room to get me, that would happen on the occasions I got into bed with him. It was

always that. And I must say that it was probably true at that stage that I began to enjoy that closeness and that physicality with someone who was warm and who I felt was attractive as a person. I liked the feel of a hairy man, it was warm and comforting. So it became like–I don't want to use the word habit–but that became what happened and that was okay. It happened on three occasions, four occasions. I was always nine, as far as I remember, so I feel this happened over quite a short period of time.

Then we moved house, around the time that my dad's mother died, and on this occasion I got up–was woken up–to go and get in bed with him. And on this occasion it … it … I knew what was happening when I got in bed sort of thing, but on this occasion it was different and it changed this time. On this occasion the abuse was … I don't want to use the word violent but we'd never kissed before and suddenly he kissed me. And because he'd never kissed me before, I knew something was changing, and I could smell alcohol on his breath and that hadn't really happened before. We knew he went out every night, and we knew he would come home and snore, but I'd never smelt the alcohol on his breath. And the fact that he kissed me–and he French kissed me as well–made it all the more disgusting for me. That wasn't what we'd been doing up until that point. And we'd never had oral sex before and suddenly he performed oral sex on me, and tried to get me to perform oral sex on him. He tried to force me under the bedclothes to have oral sex with him and he'd never been forceful in the past and I distinctly remember closing my mouth and not wanting to put his penis in my mouth. Obviously I couldn't stop him doing that to me, but I didn't want to do that, so you can keep your mouth closed regardless of what situation you are in. But there was an element of force being used to get me under the bedclothes.

Then he pulled me up, and you don't really know where you're going, and you're put on your back and he gets on top of you. And although he didn't penetrate me, he did what you would now call try to, I don't know: fuck somebody? But it's not possible when a boy is nine and on their back. But you can, for want of a better expression, push your penis between their legs. And he did … um … he did then … he must have ejaculated and finished and I was in the bed. I remember distinctly being very confused and not really knowing what had happened. I know I was wet but I think, looking back, it was probably true to say that I was sweating because I was probably so scared. And the room was spinning and I felt like I was in the middle of the sea at night, in pitch black on a lilo, and I was spinning around, for want of a better expression. That's how the feeling felt. I then had to wait until all that stopped–the spinning and everything else–and I

remember I had to pull my pyjamas bottoms up, and my top down, and went to sleep and just carried on the next day as we were.

That was the first time it kind of became frightening and I kind of dissociated myself from what was happening. I think when it was happening it's like you don't feel like you're in the room. Yes, I think that's probably the best way to describe it–that your mind goes somewhere else, or perhaps it just goes blank, because you can't actually process what's happening to you. And that prevents you from calling out, or screaming or, you know, trying to stop that person as well. It's kind of like a freezing, you just freeze, so you don't speak and you don't move, because you can't really comprehend what's happening. It felt violent, and it felt different, and I didn't know what was going on, and that was probably the most horrific occasion for me as a child.

When my mother next asked me to get into bed with my dad, I refused. Because I knew if I got in the bed again, I knew I didn't want to be French kissed, I didn't want to have oral sex with him, and I didn't want him to lie on top of me like he did. So I already knew I didn't want that. It was not what I wanted. So I knew that just by saying no, that that would be alright, that that wouldn't happen. I didn't want to get into the bed anymore. So on a subsequent occasion I was on the landing of the house and I said to my mum: 'No, I don't want to get in bed with dad now.' Did I feel like telling her? No. Because on that first occasion my dad had said that it was our secret; that it was just between us. And if you imagine that comes from a place of trust, from someone you love, that's a very powerful thing and I don't think you betray that trust. Unfortunately I can see that, in hindsight, by that time I began to carry the shame and the guilt of it, so I didn't betray the person I loved. So with my mum, there was some sort of: "What's wrong?" And I just said: "No, I'll go downstairs and sleep on the sofa." And my mum said: "No, I'll sleep on the sofa." And she did. And the abuse stopped after that. So basically that's my story, really.

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Subsequent to that, when I went to senior school, I began to become more withdrawn. There were certain aspects of my life that I began to, for want of a better expression, close down and become detached from. I think emotionally I closed down–that's the main thing. I closed down on my feelings really, so I didn't really feel anything, or engage with people as much as I perhaps would have as a normal child. I became detached from my family, a bit more distant, not as close or intimate to them as I would otherwise perhaps have been. You know as a kid you go in and kiss your

parents goodnight? I began to refuse to do that and just withdrew from my dad. And because I'd just started going to senior school, they said: "Oh, it's because he's going to the big school he doesn't do that anymore." So that could be, if you like, explained away. So as a teenager I'd spend a lot of time in my bedroom; I kind of spent a lot of time alone because that was how I survived, it's true to say. I think by that stage the trust issue had already kicked in, so I didn't trust people, I didn't get close to people. That's something I've struggled with all my life because there's a trust issue, there's a closeness issue. So I would avoid intimacy is what I'm trying to say.

Everything was just kept at a distance. So I was present, but you wouldn't find me necessarily being intimate with people. I think I had already realised that if you get close to people, people will start asking you questions, and they're not questions you want to answer necessarily, and they're not subjects you want to talk about. So what friends might talk about I would avoid. When I got to 14, boys in school started to talk about masturbation and sex. I would always avoid those situations because they would say, you know: "Oh, have you masturbated?" and I always knew I already had, so I knew what that was. But I wanted to avoid it, because if I had engaged in it they might have started asking: "Well how did you know how to do that? Who told you that?" And that would have led to me having to, in some way, betray the secret I had. So I kept that hidden. And that is sad. That's probably the saddest moment for me because I think I'd already lost the innocence. I'd lost the innocence of my first kiss. What other guys did, at like 14 or 15, I'd already done. My dad had already given me oral sex and I'd been French kissed–not through choice but because that was what had happened to me. So I buried my sexuality, I buried my feelings, and I think that's the saddest thing for me.

I also think it's true to say that I was quite unhappy, and probably a bit depressed as well. Although I've never really talked to anybody about depression, I remember being really sad a lot of the time–not really knowing what was happening or why–and not really engaging in things. I think the problem is, if anything like what happened to me happens, you're distracted. So I didn't do well at school. I was quite distant from what I felt about a lot of things. And my emotions were buried. So because your feelings are closed down, you do what you think *looks* right, rather than what *feels* right, as you're not engaging in your feelings. So, like at school, I did what I sort of perceived was right for me–I did subjects that I wasn't really very good at and I didn't have much interest in, but they kind of suited the purpose, or they enhanced the persona I was building for myself.

You do build a persona. People say to me to this day: “Oh, you’re really smart looking.” And that’s because it became really important to me, out of pride, not to let anyone know the shame I held, not to let anyone know what happened. So I remember as a child being at home and if people came to the house I would have to get ready. And I think, on reflection, I can see the getting ready wasn’t just about changing your clothes and making sure you looked smart, but getting psychologically ready as well. And to this day I am quite smart and neat and tidy, and that has partly been enhanced–if you like–by the abuse as well, because it’s about giving the appearance and not letting anyone know. So, yeah: meticulous, I was meticulous, which is unusual for a teenage boy, but I was. And it is about wanting to control my environment as well–everything needed to be clean. I used to clean the house. I was mad on cleaning; I still am. Not to an obsessive compulsive degree but I am still very … everything needs to be clean. It’s funny and I’m laughing now because, you know what, it is just part of me: I’m very clean, I’m very tidy, I’m very neat.

How did I feel towards my dad then? I hated my dad at that stage. I hated him; I never liked him. I never liked him after that period. I think I must have, at some stage, loved him. I always say that because I think I must have, because something in my mind tells me that. In my story I always say I thought he loved me, that there was a moment–before I was six, or seven, or eight–where we must have had love. I was in a family and when you’re in a family you’ll have Christmas and Easter, and people tell you they love you, and you never really question that at all because it’s kind of a given. All the outward indications are that you’re loved. So there’s no reason to think that someone within that unit would do something bad to you, because they tell you they love you, and the proof is there that they love you. So you don’t necessarily question that.

But afterwards, no, he then became a different person to me. My family always used to say that I was angry. So I was okay as long as you didn’t cross my fence and my barriers, but if you crossed those barriers and that fence then you would know about it. I had a lot of anger–not in an aggressive way–but I used to fight a lot with my brother and I was verbally angry as well. So I would tell you to fuck off if you crossed my path. I don’t think I was ever violent … no, I wasn’t violent. But verbally I could be quite abusive, I suppose, maybe a bit over the top sometimes with people. When I was angry I would also just leave a lot; just walk away. I would just say in my mind to people: “Yeah, fuck off.” I used to put my hand up and walk away–I was keeping myself safe. I remember one of my classmates said: “Oh my god, I thought you were going to hit me,” and I’d

say: “No, I’m not going to hit you, just don’t do that again.” So … yeah. I needed to be in my own safe space, that’s the point. But I knew–know–that wasn’t me.

And I think the problem with carrying that anger is that you probably turn it in on yourself slightly, so you don’t necessarily like yourself. I think it was really incredibly difficult for me to like, or feel good about, myself at any stage. Or to feel I was good at anything; that never really existed. People would say: “Oh you’re good at this or you’re good at that,” but I never ever felt that in myself. And I think as an adult I’ve been fortunate enough to make some achievements and suddenly you know what it is to feel good about something. But I never really felt good about myself as a kid or a young adult in my teens and twenties; I never felt good about myself. A lot of my life I’ve always felt that–I know that this sounds strange–but that I was a bad person. Because it goes back to holding a secret, holding the guilt and the shame, and not wanting people to find out. And that makes you feel that you’re inherently bad in some way, even though of course you realise that you didn’t do anything wrong.

I didn’t tell anyone about the abuse when I was still a child. Not directly. However, on reflection, I think I did call out. At senior school we used to carry rucksacks and I distinctly remember that when I got to the new school people used to write things all over their bags. At the time it was popular to draw your favourite football team or paint something on your rucksack. And I wrote all over my rucksack: “HELP.” And somebody once said: “Why have you put that?” and I said: “Oh, I just wrote it.” I used to write “help” a lot and nobody picked it up. Or if they asked me, they didn’t pursue it, and I was still very, very loyal to my dad at that stage. Nobody’s going to break that trust or the loyalty that they’ve got and I didn’t only have a loyalty–I can say this as an adult–to my dad, but I had a loyalty to our family as well, because I think instinctively you know that the news is going to ruin everything. So I think anybody, specifically a child, is going to be reluctant to tell because of that loyalty and nobody wants to be the barer of that bad news. Nobody wants to do that. So I can say, yes, I did write “help” but nobody asked me what was wrong and that was tremendously sad. Maybe the signs weren’t there, or they *were* there but people didn’t read them or pursue it. I think on reflection now, obviously people would have noticed changes, and I think it’s very important if you notice changes in a child that you ask and you listen.

Also, at that time, there wasn’t any access for children to know what sexual abuse was. And even if there had have been, I don’t believe that I would necessarily have identified with it, or whether people would have

spoken about sex with those in your family as being wrong. The issue of child abuse as a concept wasn't in the sphere of my experience at that stage. You know, you could see the news on the television as a child but–even if sexual abuse had been out there–it would have been something strangers did to children. It wouldn't be something that would necessarily happen within your own family. So I don't think I was probably exposed to that; I don't think I would have connected the dots.

So I never really spoke about my abuse until I was 27. And the strange thing was that as soon as did tell somebody, I knew what it was: that what my dad did was wrong and it frightened me beyond anything imaginable. I don't think it was until I spoke to somebody that I knew what it was. And that's difficult for me to say. Why? Because there were so many lost years and because what you do in that time–I think it's true to say–is you bury an awful lot of yourself. You bury your feelings, you bury your pain of what's happened. You bury it deep. And also, what's sad, is that when I did speak about it when I was 27, is that you explain it away: "I always thought my dad loved me, I was only nine, it was our secret, and I buried it." I remember thinking when I first spoke about it that everything I thought was right was wrong, and everything I thought was wrong was right. It was a very frightening time.

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As I say, I'm gay, but at 27 I'd never slept with a man and so I became very unhappy and began to feel really isolated, because at that age my close friends were getting married and settling down. And I was still living at home. I knew at the back of my mind that I'd always been attracted to men so I began to explore it, really. But I've always felt that the sexuality and the abuse were a bit of a double edged sword, if you like. Although I wanted to explore it, there was probably part of me not wanting to acknowledge my sexuality, because the problem was that as soon as I said I was sexually attracted to men, the thing with my dad was *bound* to come up wasn't it? As it was sex with a man. So it was bound to come up. And I think it's probably true to say that at the back of my mind I knew the two things were connected. So to have sex with a man was like to go back and almost … not have sex with my dad, but that *would* come up. It *would* make me confront the abuse. And that's what eventually happened.

Since the age of 21 I had gotten to know a gay male couple who owned a country pub; they had become as close as I had gotten to people at that time. One day they had a big party and it was quite raucous and quite loud and, for want of a better expression, their friends were quite cosmopolitan

and someone decided it would be a good idea to go round and talk about what people were like, sexually. So this girl was like: "Oh, I can tell that he's gay, and I can tell that he's straight, and I can tell that he probably swings both ways." And then she got to me, and I wasn't supposed to hear the conversation, and she said: "And I think he's asexual." And it was a trigger, for want of a better expression, as I was already by that stage coming to the conclusion that I was probably gay. So I came out as gay. I said: "No, I'm gay." And everybody was shocked and from then it was sort of like a series of events, if you like, and I ended up sleeping with one of the couple who I had found attractive and who felt the same about me. So that's how it kind of happened; that was the trigger.

So what happened was I slept with a few guys, but I had a problem with intimacy, so that's my life long challenge if you like. So when I slept with somebody I became very attached and there was, if you like, what now seems like a delayed development there, so I felt like a teenage girl. Exactly like that. I would cry when things ended and was always fearful of abandonment, so you appear very needy and it's really tough. So when I said following an early break-up: "I don't think I can get over this," I was told: "Well, you've never slept with a guy before, that's what's happening." They were probably thinking, on reflection, that I'd fallen in love. And I said: "Well I have slept with a man before," and they said: "Well who have you slept with?" And I said: "My dad." And so it became a bit of a two edged sword, because as soon as I said it then I had to keep going with it and tell somebody the whole story, and it had a huge impact on me.

I first told one of the guys from the pub who said to me: "You slept with your dad?" And I said: "Yeah, well, I had sex with my dad," and we didn't really go into it in any other detail. And then there was a moment when he said: "Have you ever really thought about that?" and I think it was just a natural process then. It was a two-edged sword because while I began to discover myself sexually, of course it woke up the monster–for want of a better expression–that was that was abuse. And it was quite horrendous actually. I became uncontrollable. I would be walking down the street and I suddenly realised what had happened: I realised that my dad didn't love me, I realised that it was abuse, and everything that I thought was true suddenly seemed to be false. And it was enormous and overwhelming. The deception, the lies, the betrayal, my own hurt. It awoke the feelings that I actually felt around that time as well, as it's true to say that one of my other issues is that I felt abandoned as a child.

So all of those feelings, all of those emotions, came to the surface. And whilst I didn't *have* to speak about it, I felt compelled to speak about it,

and as I spoke about it the horror of what happened became a reality for me. At that stage, if I could have taken the words back out of the air and put them back in my mouth, I would have. But at that stage it was too late and so it began a cycle of realising that that's not love, realising the betrayal, starting to come to terms with my own feelings. Also starting to come to terms with the fact that I'd grieved–I'd grieved from when it happened until I was 27 really–and to begin to understand that grieving process that I then had to go through. Because I then had to start grieving for, you know, not only realising that what *he'd* done was wrong, but also understanding that other family members–like my mum–had let me down. My brother and my sister never knew but I felt–or I began to feel–isolated from them. So, yeah, that was difficult and tremendously sad as well, because then you begin to realise the loss.

So what happened is that I then reached out–I went to my family doctor when I was 27–but at that early point of disclosure I think you're still very susceptible to challenge. As I hadn't spoken about it for so long, you're still not 100 per cent sure about what exactly happened, and you're still not 100 per cent sure that it was wrong. When I was describing it and I said: "My dad pushed me under the bedclothes," you might say: "Well why didn't you struggle? Why didn't you call out? And why didn't you just make him stop?" But you don't in that situation, and that's a surprise to you, because you have to admit somewhere along the line that you didn't do anything. So I think it can be quite confusing and difficult to understand; I think that anyone in my situation initially finds it almost incomprehensible that it's actually happened. So to be challenged by it is incredibly intimidating because you're going to a place where you're frightened and you're not really sure what has happened. Even when people put words to it, it still seems incomprehensible that it's happened to you. So you're fearful. And at that stage I still had a kind of loyalty to people around me–I still didn't want to destroy everyone's life by telling them.

The challenge for me in telling the GP was I didn't want it to be a secret but I still thought: "Am I telling you? Is this crazy?" Like when I came here today, I was going to say to you during the interview: "Listen, if you think this sounds bonkers, even to me it seems incomprehensible that a nine-year-old boy would get into bed with his father and masturbate." It's unbelievable. I can't … how the hell would that happen? How can that happen? And then nobody talk about it–in a family. It's incredible. And yet that's what happened. So even today, when I tell my story, I think: "Gosh, this sounds mad but this is the story." And it's difficult for me to say, or to understand that actually. So the challenge for me, when I told

that doctor, was to wait for their reaction–for them to say: "No, I'm sorry, I don't think that happened." That's what you think's going to happen. Because *you* think it's mad, you think *other people* are going to think it's mad. So I think it becomes, for the survivor, really difficult to explain that that could happen.

I asked if I could get counselling, because I knew I wanted to speak to someone about it, and the doctor sent me to a … the best way I can describe it is a psychiatric hospital. It's quite a funny story because I went into the hospital and somebody said: "Okay, what's the problem?" And I said: "Well, you know, I've just come to talk about the fact that I had sex with my dad when I was nine." And they started to ask me questions and it was so … it frightened me *so* much, what I was saying, that I got out of the doctor's room and I ran off down the road, because it was just too much for me at that time. And I never went back. I distinctly remember that they said to me: "You can come back," but at that stage I couldn't actually tell the whole story, so I thought: "Why the hell would I ever go back there? Because I can't talk about it." Not with all the emotions going on that were attached to it. So it wasn't really possible for me to describe that; I couldn't do that. It took a long time for me to be able to tell people all the intimate details of it.

So, after the age of 27, I changed my life quite considerably. I left my job, I moved out of the family home, and I made plans to move away to London. What happened was: I'm going through this really traumatic time, I'm not even able to really talk about it, I'm not really able to verbalise and say what he actually did, and I'm leaving home to come to London. And everyone's there going: "What's going on? That's typical of him." Cos I'm the mad one–I was perceived in the family as slightly angry and difficult. And they said: "Well, are you going because you're gay?" And I said: "Well, no, that's not really my problem, maybe I should go because dad used to mess around with me." That's how I described it at that time to my family–that was the best I could do really. And so, um, my brother never really reacted to it. My sister said: "Gosh, well, good job it didn't happen to me." And my mum apparently approached my dad and then came back to me, when I was doing the dishes, and said: "Oh, he said he did it once."

So it was kind of met with a mixed bag. But by that time I was, like: "I'm out of here because this is a complete madhouse and I just need to live my life." So I just upped sticks and left really. And since that time I've not really challenged any of my family. My brother knows the most now, because over the course of my life I've become closer to him. So he knows that I deal with it and he knows that it's been a significant and

poignant part of my life. And he's seen times where the anger has exploded; he's seen that. My sister, not, and my mother, not. Because I think that it's true to say that loyalty and protection of them was just kind of carried on into my adult life. Because you realise that you have the ability to destroy their perceptions of my father as a man, and who he is. My sister had children, and my dad was introduced obviously as grandad, so if you talk about abuse, you'll ruin everybody's idea of him. So that still–to this day–is very difficult for me.

It's taken a number of years for me to be able to sit down and eloquently describe what happened without becoming emotionally upset by it. Some aspects of it still upset me but as time's gone on I can actually say: "My dad French kissed me, and he performed oral sex on me, and he tried to get me to perform oral sex on him." So as I become more confident in talking about it now, then it's possible that I could perhaps talk to my dad. But I need to be 100 per cent sure it's the right thing to do. Obviously I haven't got a good perception of my dad–he's a nasty piece of work–and I often feel that, if we spoke about it, he could go back and tell my mum. And my mum's elderly and quite frail now, so is it the sort of thing that I would like to discuss?

It's an enormous thing to talk about isn't it? At 55 I can sit here now and say: "Yeah, I was abused by my dad at the age of nine." But it's still an enormous thing because my family have buried it: my dad's buried it, my mother's shut down from it, my sister probably has as well. So it's an enormous thing to suddenly try to make people understand, or to broach, and people will only hear what they want to hear. And it might be that they would turn it on me and make me seem like, in some way, the bearer of bad news, like: "Why are you bringing that to us now, why do that now?" So it's a really difficult one and I haven't got the answer to that.

It's also true to say that actually when I speak about it–and this is maybe a strange thing to say–but I grieve for the boy who died. Because that's how I feel: I feel there was somebody in me who died. And I do feel that between the age of nine and 27 what I really did was grieve; I didn't live. It's like if you lost a child. Sometimes I find myself on the underground and you see a young boy, who you think you lost. So that's going to evoke those feelings of sorrow in you. Nothing else; just sorrow. Just for that moment, you're going to look and go: "Yeah, that's what I lost." And the difference is that some people lose an actual real child and I lost the child inside of me; not a child that I've had, as such. I lost my child who was me. So yeah, that's part of my sadness, if you like … could you just give me a moment? I'll be alright. I just need to stand outside for a second.

Yeah, I'm okay, thank you. That loss of the child inside is a huge loss for me; that's still very raw. But I'm okay to carry on. I've come here to talk, and I'm talking through choice, so that's fine. I'm fine. Talking about it is part of my healing process, but obviously it's a very emotional thing. There are things that will always be there, and that loss of childhood is really, really poignant, and very painful for me, and I think always will be so. So talking about it can obviously always bring up all those emotions really. But yeah, that's fine, I'm okay.

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After I moved to London I started to explore, and come to terms with, my sexuality more, and that was incredibly liberating. Although the abuse still bothered me, and I would sometimes reach out to helplines, I think it's true to say that after I moved away from home my main focus was on trying to live my life because I'd lost so much time. So much had been taken, and I didn't really want any of that to affect, if you like, my new life. So I brushed it aside.

However, as I mentioned before, one of the problems I have is that I always feel very protective towards people and I won't let go. And with sexual partners, it can be perceived as being very needy. But I made … well, not a vow, but I did, I suppose, tell myself that I would never hurt somebody like my dad hurt me. So my relationships have been quite intense, if you like. Obviously you meet people, and they may not be the right person, but it's very difficult for me to let go, to let guys down. Because I can't betray somebody in the way I was betrayed. Not with that level of intimacy.

I found out really early on–like at the age of 27 when I started sleeping with men–that I couldn't abandon people like I'd been abandoned. I couldn't just leave them, especially after I had gotten to know them and had any type of intimate sex with them. It used to really tear me apart. So I said: "I'll never do what my Dad did to me, to others." But, you know, you might sleep with somebody, and not get on with them, and for me that's really difficult. I mean, *really* difficult; more difficult than anyone can imagine. Because if you tap into people's vulnerabilities as well, and you see that in a person, then all of that stuff is quite difficult for me to process and to separate out.

It has also made sexual relationships very intense and difficult for *me* too–it's not only about them–*I* become more vulnerable too. And that's probably more the point: that I become vulnerable and so it brings up those memories about my dad, about him sleeping with me, and then him