

Episode 4, samsn's STRONGER: Real Men / Masculinity

© Survivors and Mates Support Network 2021 | support@samsn.org.au | 1800 472 676

The gender myths surrounding masculinity are often an obstacle to recovery for male survivors of child sexual abuse. Our society presents us with repetitive reinforcements of how men are supposed to look and act, especially with regard to emotional range and sexual intimacy. Those who don't fit the prevailing stereotypes for 'white male privilege' often face additional challenges. Men from First Nations, culturally diverse, or LGBTQI communities, men with disabilities and older men report that they often face additional discrimination and prejudice on top of the burdens of not conforming to dominant expectations about masculinity.

Strong messages like 'don't be a victim, be strong, don't show emotion, harden up, you should have been able to fight it off, boys don't cry...' are still alive and well. What did survivors of child sexual abuse learn about masculinity myths that enabled them to unlock a new way of looking at life, manhood and themselves?

Featuring (in order of appearance): Mark W, Shane Greentree (SAMSN, Clinical Services Manager), Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald AM, Pete R, Phillip S, Luke S, Professor Patrick O'Leary, Dr Judy Cashmore, Les S, Matthew O, Jarad G, Lindsay G.

Resources for survivors:

<https://www.samsn.org.au/recovery-and-healing/resources-for-survivors/>

Thanks to: Joe Jackson and Maine Road Management for permission to quote the lyrics from Joe's song 'Real Men'.

Music: Licensed via Audiio.com

OPENING / MARK W - Julep House: Mentoring

LES - Ardie Son: Folklore

LINDSAY - Seth Öphengon: Waking Life

CLOSING CREDITS - Seth Öphengon: A Safe Place (Instrumental)

SPEAKER	CONTENT
Rob Carlton	Welcome to SAMSN's 'Stronger', a podcast series featuring stories of resilience from male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and their allies. In some parts it <i>is</i> heavy going, so if you're not in the space to listen right now, switch to something lighter. But do come back. We learn a great deal about surviving and growing stronger than your past from survivors.
	If what you hear stirs up strong feelings, know that you can find us at samsn.org.au , call us on 1800 472 676 or give Lifeline a call on 13 11 14.
Mark W	After my abuse ended, there was this sense of should I should I be behaving like this? You know, am I actually gay? I guess it's because of the grooming that occurred. There was the thought, thought process in my head that, yes, this is how I'm spending my life. And it's, I guess, I put it down to what I'd call a crisis of identity: not knowing, you know, with what you're feeling, you know, resonates with, you know, what, what you feel you should be doing. And it's

	<p>this, this crisis of identity that I've, you know, come to have a look at in the years since it happened.</p> <p>And I, I felt like I needed to prove myself, that I wasn't actually gay. And that's led to other risky behaviors that I've been that I've done. And it's it's a whole thing about, you know, being, being a male, being masculine, all that sort of stuff. And, you know, my abuser told me that I was too pretty to be a male. And I guess that's one of the main comments that was ever made to me that made me wonder but I haven't, I've never identified as being gay or being bisexual. I've always felt that I'm heterosexual. It's really only been probably in the last 10 years, that I've actually felt comfortable within myself to say, you know, I'm heterosexual, and, and that's, that's how I identify myself.</p>
Felicity Blake	You're listening to STRONGER, a podcast from SAMSN (the Survivors and Mates Support Network). We're your hosts; I'm Felicity Blake...
Rob Carlton	<p>...and I'm Rob Carlton. This is episode four: 'Real Men', about the unique effects of child sexual abuse on males and our sense of masculinity.</p> <p>As far as we know, the majority of perpetrators who sexually abuse boys are male. In about 90% of reported cases, the abuser is a man. But we can't be totally sure about that percentage, because so many cases go unreported, particularly when the abuser is a woman. In the context of child sex abuse, social expectations about gender and masculinity can have different impacts on the way that boys respond to the abuse and its aftermath.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>This time, we're going to hear from male survivors of abuse - and some expert allies - to unpack some 'masculinity myths and misperceptions'. Society presents us with repetitive reinforcements of how men and women are supposed to look and act, especially with regard to emotional range and sexual intimacy. Australian men, in particular, are encouraged to act tough, not show any emotional vulnerability, always be confident, don't be a victim, be good at sport, and be a total chick magnet.</p> <p>Here's Shane Greentree, SAMSN's clinical manager...</p>
Shane G	<p>One of the common themes that we hear from men that access services at SAMSN is really around their sense of being a man and their ideas of masculinity, and how the their abuse had impacted that and often made them question what it is that it means to be a man, but also, often, it comes up against some of those, I guess, societal ideas, particularly in an Australian context about exactly people's understanding of being a man and what it means to be masculine. And that I think plays into some of the delays in men coming forward to disclose because it can be seen in conflict that (A) you know, how could this happen to, to a man, but really, you know, we must remember that these were boys at the time. But also that this idea that men just suck it up and get on with it, and that that stoic idea of of just dealing with it can really make it difficult for men to come forward and ask for help.</p>

	<p>I think it is part of the, I guess the narrative in the community about who is sexually abused and who the perpetrators and who the victims are. And certainly, we do know, the majority of perpetrators are men and the majority of victims are women. However, it's important to recognize that, that men and, well, <i>boys</i> are abused and those boys grow up to be men.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>This is Robert Fitzgerald, former Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse:</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>In the general society in relation to child sexual abuse, the majority of victims are, in fact, female.</p> <p>I think the focus has largely been on the sexual abuse of girls and women, quite rightfully so because they are the majority generally. I think this Royal Commission is the first time we've got a real insight into abuse of young boys, young men, and then how that impacted on their lives much later.</p> <p>So this is quite unique within the institutions. In part, it's the nature of the institutions, boys homes, boarding schools, you know, army corps, those sorts of things. But there is something unique in relation to the way in which institutions dealt with boys, young boys, and young men.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>Despite what Hollywood suggests, abuse by random strangers is pretty rare. Children are most frequently abused by someone known but not necessarily <i>related</i> to them. Girls are more likely to experience abuse in their own family home: <i>their</i> perpetrators are mostly biological fathers, stepfathers and other male relatives. Boys, on the other hand, are more often abused by someone from <i>outside</i> the family: a neighbour, family friend, other boys, or a trusted adult (like a teacher, a priest or a coach). Boys' abuse generally happens in the offender's home, a public place, or in institutions - schools, churches, sports clubs. That's why a lot of men came forward to speak to the Royal Commission: their childhood abuse happened in an institutional setting.</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>Changing the way in which men relate to these sorts of issues, the way in which institutions encourage men to relate to these issues is going to be a long term objective. And the other part about getting all of the society to be responsive when they see things that aren't quite right, is going to also be a long term endeavor. So those two things are going to take time.</p> <p>In relation to men's conduct, I think we can make one assumption, and that is that men fundamentally haven't changed over the last few decades.</p> <p>And so the great challenge for Australia is going to be to say, how do we gradually start to change the way in which men think and perceive these sorts of issues as well as changing their behaviors?</p>
Pete R	<p>Hi, my name is Pete, and I'm 61 years old. I'd like to give you my thoughts on the concept of masculinity. And the first thing that comes to mind for me is an old song from 1982 - I don't know how old you are - by the English singer Joe Jackson, called Real Men. And a couple of the lines in particular stand out to me.</p>

	<p>"What's a man now? What's a man mean? Is he rough or is he rugged? Is he cultural and clean?"</p> <p>To me, the concept of masculinity is tied up with strength and mateship. And to me, I can link them all together by thinking about a historical overview of war. World War One and World War Two. However, there is a dark side to all of this that wasn't being mentioned at the time. I can for example, remember my mum saying that her father was gassed but he never spoke about what it was like at the Battle of Passchendaele. The man just had to ignore the shell shock and get on with his life.</p> <p>If I can look at some of the changes that I've seen in my life, and the concept of masculinity or manhood. Firstly, I make reference to the fact that we now - thank goodness - accept the impact of trauma on both the physical and mental wellbeing. And we now acknowledge the impact of PTSD on the Vietnam vets, and that they may need ongoing help the rest of their lives. Where is being a man and mateship tied up in these statistics? Well, a change has, and still is, occurring. Men can be real, and men can be vulnerable. A man can ask for help. I did so myself and I'm glad I did and wouldn't be here if I hadn't.</p>
Phillip S	<p>Hi, my name is Phillip Saunders. I live in Adelaide. I was born in Mount Gambier, South Australia. My background, I was a lawyer for a number of years, I no longer work as a lawyer.</p> <p>You know, I've been sober 14 years, and I've got depression, I deal with my mental health and, and things like that. And I've been suicidal in sobriety. I know I don't have to go and drink for... to want to go and do myself in. I know, it's a matter, it's issues around mental health and just the combination of a lot of different things. But we just got to talk about it and get it out there. And I always say, for me, my story is a happy one. If we do not talk about it, it will still... the secrets will have their power over you. That's why the suicide rates for men are so high, in part, because all these topics. Yeah, that's it, like having a safe space to talk about your, your feelings and your emotions. And, you know, I'm grateful for SAMSN, I'm grateful for sobriety. I'm grateful that you know, I take medication for my depression. I'm grateful that I, you know, have got a network of people around me that I can bounce ideas off.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>This is Luke. He was able to disclose his childhood abuse earlier in life than most men, but it's still had similar effects on his perceptions of masculinity.</p>
Luke	<p>I'm still working it out, like I'm 27 now. But I think masculinity is still... it's just such a broad topic, it's massive to sort of think about and how you know, how you fit, how you fit into the world.</p>

	<p>So in terms of masculinity, it's sort of, I really struggled in terms of expressing emotion, or, you know, being validated through expressing more difficult emotions like anger or, you know, really going there for what necessarily might not be society's, when society's view is sort of negative towards those kind of emotions.</p> <p>I laboured a lot to look at the sort of impact that it's had on my, I guess I'm, I'm still young, like I'm still coming to terms with what it all means, but I think it's been a really formative experience in the sense that I've sort of questioned things around masculinity, I've questioned things around who I am as a person, who I am as a man. But I, I guess at the heart of it, I've really realized that it's a very slow process.</p> <p>The hardest, biggest struggle was to try and get perspective on the whole situation. Obviously, growing up as a young man, I sort of, I wasn't as close to my father as I would like to be. And, you know, all these things sort of came into question, and I was sort of questioning, you know, what does this experience mean? How does it sort of influence my relationships with my family, and with the wider community. And I think, in terms of masculinity, it's not talked about, none of this stuff is sort of, you know, it's so taboo, it's so scary to even, you know, mention the word abuse.</p> <p>I think what it really comes down to for me is just being able to express yourself authentically and honestly with the people that you're with. And I found that, you know, this experience has sort of gotten in the way of that.</p>
Patrick O'L	Hi, I'm Patrick O'Leary. I'm a professor and director of violence research and prevention program at Griffith University.
Rob Carlton	Patrick's area of expertise is with male survivors of sexual violence, particularly child sexual assault. We asked Patrick about masculinity, emotional vulnerability, and the effects of abuse on males.
Patrick O'L	<p>But I think one of the differences is that the judgment about male identity probably comes into play in a more intense way for men and boys. And I think that's a very complex thing, because it's very much about how people will receive a disclosure, you know, how safe you will feel. And, you know, I don't think in our society, particularly Australian society, we're particularly good at acknowledging that men can feel unsafe. But we have a lot of coverage about how women feel unsafe. And quite legitimately, a lot of men don't have to think in the same way women do in terms of personal safety. And I think that obscures a fact about your emotional safety and your wellbeing safety in talking about abuse.</p> <p>I think one aspect of masculinity that is really interesting in that area is the sexualized nature of masculinity that, which has a power about it. And I think that can influence that sort of side of toxic masculinity.</p>

<p>Rob Carlton</p>	<p>'Toxic masculinity' is a useful expression because it distinguishes between just being male - nothing wrong with that! - and a certain <i>type</i> of masculinity that brings harmful stereotypes with it. Toxic masculinity enables 'controlling behaviours': misogyny, homophobia, violence, and sexual violence. Toxic masculinity is what makes it hard for men to show any feelings (apart from anger). It can lead to fights for dominance and bullying, and the devaluing of women's humanity or anything perceived as feminine or effeminate. Toxic masculinity harms men because it can limit our life experiences and contribute to the myth that we are invulnerable and don't need help, when in reality <i>everyone</i> needs help at some point.</p>
<p>Patrick O'L</p>	<p>One really interesting thing is that, where men felt more compelled to live up to, I guess what we might term broadly the alpha male sort of idea of being a man, of being tough. Being one of the boys. And when I say one of the boys being a member of males. So I think there's lots of positives to masculinity. There's also the toxic side of masculinity where, where it's constantly about measuring up about toughness about who's in charge, about not being vulnerable, about heterosexual sort of exploits, about being in charge. What, what we did find is those men were more vulnerable to suicidal ideation. And I think that had a corresponding nature to our discussion on disclosure, which is about the silencing. So the more the more locked into the sort of restrictive role of masculinity and some of the more toxic outcomes of that, the more internalized the silence became for those, those guys. The less opportunity to say this happened to me, and this is the impact on me. It becomes more restrictive, and I think that is a really core bid that masculinity is locking that masculinity in.</p> <p>And the fact is that trauma impacts on how you perform. It really does. We're not talking about something, you can just move on and just say, right, I'm gonna dust myself off, it's a bit like a tackle and a game of footy. You can, it hurts for a moment, but you can sort of dust yourself off and go on. Sexual abuse, you can't do that. It's, there is trauma and impact. And when we combine that with a really restrictive idea of masculinity that gives no room for that. I think we have that really damaging aspect of masculinity, that really damaging aspect, angry aspect of masculinity. Somwthing I've noted too in some of that work around suicide and masculinity is, is the way that men are angry about what happened to them. As one bloke I remember interviewing said, Yeah, I'm bloody angry for a bloody good reason. And that's exactly right. But what do you do with that anger? And where does that take you when you've got a very restrictive idea about masculinity?</p>
<p>Pete R</p>	<p>If we look at another song, 'It's a man's world', James Brown 1966. If I could counter that heading, with some statistics from Beyond Blue. The quote: "On average, one in eight men will experience depression, and one in five men will experience anxiety at some stage of their lives. Blokes make up an average of six out of every eight suicides every single day in Australia. The number of men who die by suicide in Australia every year is nearly double the national road toll."</p>

	<p>The other thing too, that I think is relevant is often it's really, really (I'll add a third really) <i>difficult</i> to speak out. For example, you can look back and say, regarding a particular event, why didn't I stop it? Why didn't I speak out? But maybe the reality is that the situation you were placed in was just so difficult, you couldn't do it. Maybe you were a child at the time. In that situation, you're not really responsible. Someone else should be responsible, an older person, and they should be responsible for your actions. But yet, you didn't speak out because of your age. And the situation was so overwhelming.</p>
Felicity Blake	Shane Greentree, SAMSN's clinical services manager:
Shane G	<p>One of the conversations at the moment really is around this idea of consent. And it's something that, particularly maybe adolescent boys have had to deal with is that, you know, you wanted it, or your body responded, and that that somehow means that they consented or are wanting it. But I guess it's really important to not blur the the discussion around consent between adults versus what's what's abuse, and not only abuse, but a crime. And so it's important to remember that children can't consent. And that the age of consent exists for a reason. And it's, you know, relates to the vulnerability, and that childhood, and that, that that vulnerability is being exploited by an adult when they're abusing a child. And so it's not something that a child can consent to at all. And so it's really important to remember that when we're having these discussions, that you might be talking to an adult, but just always keeping in mind that, you know, when we're talking about child sexual abuse, that was a child at the time.</p>
Rob Carlton	Developmental psychologist, Dr Judy Cashmore:
Judy Cashmore	<p>We know that men are most likely to be the abusers, or they are in the majority of cases.</p> <p>What we know very little about is women as abusers. And that particularly is the case where it's boys as the victims, because that's often seen as a rite of passage, it's not seen as something that is abusive, and it may not be until later, that it is seen as abusive, it's treated very differently now than it used to be.</p> <p>And because of the sexual identity of boys that becomes really forefront in their minds in their mid teens, it's often seen as a rite of passage, and in fact, some of our films have portrayed it that way, that this relationship between a young boy or an adolescent boy and a teacher, or someone else is not portrayed as abuse, in many of those films. I'm not sure that that would be the way it would be portrayed now. But certainly, it has been the case in the past.</p>

	<p>So that makes it really confusing for guys as to - was this abuse, and sometimes it's not until much later and they realize their distress, or they might go for support around mental health problems.</p>
Felicity	<p>Here's Les:</p>
Les S	<p>My perpetrator was a female, and she was a friend of my mother's. And she groomed me from the age of 10.</p> <p>Considering that I was actively sexual from from the age of 11 it's quite surreal. And you just don't know who to tell, because I didn't think anybody would believe me.</p> <p>The sexual abuse went on, it was almost on a daily, daily basis. Every school afternoon she would either pick me up or we would rendezvous at the river bank, because I lived close on the river. And so yeah, it was just ongoing.</p> <p>It was not only was it sexual abuse, it was psychological abuse. She actually told me that I gave her a sexual infection. And I felt obliged to sexually insert ointment. So I felt as though, that I was responsible, and I didn't know who to tell.</p> <p>So my perpetrator controlled me, she controlled every aspect of my life, what I do, my friends, who I could see. She wanted me to be with her so often that it actually limited who I could see outside of her circle.</p> <p>It got to the stage when, when I was 16 I it was just encroaching into my, my social life because I enjoyed being with my friends. But my perpetrator didn't like that because she was losing control over me. I feel that she was worried that I would actually find someone o,f someone my own age that I would be sexually attracted to. So that's why she encouraged me to be sexually active with her almost daily. It was just it was just so much control. And I was totally trapped in her web.</p> <p>And when I was 16 it just got to the stage where I was telling her I didn't want to do this anymore, but this woman had serious mental health issues and she would not let go of me.</p> <p>However, I went to that doctor, and I think the main goal for for me was to prove that I didn't have a sexual disease, because logically, I'm thinking, well, how can this happen? It can't be... I could not have given her this disease. However, it was etched in my mind, because she used to tell me all the time. So once I received confirmation from the doctor, it was a sense of relief, because my logical thinking I knew was intact.</p>

	<p>And being abused by a female perpetrator is... it is just emasculating. It just takes away all your power. It just... I didn't feel like a man or a boy. I didn't... I was almost like I was an empty shell. It was almost... It was almost like she had sucked out my, my masculinity. And I just had no power. I had no voice. I just felt I had no confidence. Because no matter who the perpetrator is, they take your power away from you, and they take your manhood with them. But, and at the moment, at my point, point in life, I have my power back.</p>
Shane G	<p>For men that have experienced abuse with a, had a female perpetrator, that again can be really confusing. And come, they come up against ideas that are in society, (A) about particularly for adolescent boys or young adolescent boys, there can be a community belief that, oh, you know, the particularly in a school setting or something, that they're so lucky and that, you know, boys are into sex and this is this is should, should be something that they're almost grateful for, particularly if it's a it's a female perpetrator, but it's, the reality is it is still abuse in the dynamics of power and control that are used by perpetrators can have the same impact. And further to that, guys talk about not feeling like it's valid in some way, if their perpetrator was a woman. And the question whether they will be believed, yeah, in the responses that they get may not be helpful, because of that dynamic in those community beliefs.</p>
Felicity	<p>Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald:</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>In relation to the abuse of young boys by women, about 10% of matters that we heard were in fact of that nature. And it's often an overlooked area of abuse. What we discovered there was that there was an even greater resistance to disclosing where the perpetration was by a woman. And partly that was in relation to two or three things. The first is, I can't be a real man, I can't be a real boy, if I've let a woman actually abuse me. The second thing is when they disclose, and this was particularly true in orphanages and, and mixed boys' and girls' homes, many of the boys would say, uh, you know, you should feel lucky, you should feel, you know, like you were lucky to be able to have this happen to you. And so there was sort of a degradation that took place if you actually disclose even to your peers.</p> <p>The third thing is because it's never talked about, I think boys had no understanding of how they should feel about this sort of abuse, all the abuses that people have ever heard about generally, at that stage, were by men. And so they often thought that this was weird and the weakness was actually about them. Not about the perpetrator. But what we heard of in particularly boys' homes in juvenile justice settings, was it was the cook, it was the cleaner, it was the, you know, the female guard, and these were genuine cases of real abuse, there was no question about it. But the female lived in the belief that it would never be disclosed for the reasons that I've indicated. So we found that with boys that had been abused by women, there was a very deep mixed sense of whether or not they could or should disclose this sort of abuse ever. And it was very unclear as to sort of the response people would have.</p>

	<p>Now, the tragedy we've seen in Australia is that we've seen an increasing number of female school teachers that have sexually abused teenage boys. And that's starting to be publicized. Now, there's no doubt that that's increased. I'm not sure whether it's simply the reporting is increased both publicly but also just disclosure. So we are starting to see more and more of those cases. Now, it is always likely that that had happened previously. It's not a new phenomenon. What I suspect has happened, the new phenomenon is the boys are coming forward, reporting the matters. And institutions are taking it seriously. And in many of those cases, criminal action is occurring, and convictions are being recorded.</p>
Felicity	Professor Patrick O'Leary:
Patrick O'L	<p>I also think, I think we have changed a lot. And I think that things have improved in terms of other ideas of masculinity, around homophobia, but it's still present. And because most, most survivors (not all, and it's important to note not all) have been abused by another male, and that sometimes is called into a self questioning of their identity, or sexuality or the idea of what we see in trauma responses.</p>
Felicity	This is Mark, who we heard from at the beginning of this episode:
Mark W	<p>So during during the time that my abuse, my abuser kept telling me that, you know, he said that I wasn't, I wasn't straight, I was actually gay, that's why it was happening to me. And it's that sense of, you know, is that correct? Is it? Is this what I want to be doing? Is this how I'm supposed to live? And the fact that he took advantage of that and pushed that.</p> <p>At times, I felt like, yes, it's happened, but did it happen because I am gay, or did it happen because I'm expected to be like this? And I guess that's where your sense of identity gets, gets lost.</p>
Felicity	Here's Phillip Saunders:
Phillip S	<p>That's the thing about shame, you know. Shame about your own identity, shame about your masculinity. You wanna talk about toxic masculinity... Are you gay or are you straight? Because of this, you know, what does it all mean? We don't have we don't have people around us, you know, I didn't have people around me to have these conversations in an intelligent way, you know, in an emotionally safe and secure way.</p> <p>The issue around disclosing is a big issue because of the shame stuff that I've talked about, but also in turn then, there's issues around masculinity and sexual orientation, all that sort of stuff, which are more compounding issues for men, and particularly for Aboriginal men.</p>

	<p>I thought I was gay at different times. I didn't know, you know what I mean? Because I was so confused, and so messed up. And who gives a rat's ass if you're gay or not? Does it matter?</p> <p>And so for me, it's about addressing those issues. We need to have those conversations. It doesn't mean I'm gay because I was sexually abused as a kid, or because I was raped as a kid.</p> <p>As males, we need to open our heart up. And our soul. We need to have these conversations around these taboo topics.</p>
Felicity	SAMSN's Shane Greentree:
Shane G	<p>A lot of men will talk about their experiences, particularly going through adolescence and young adulthood, because of the abuse, and the impact it has on shaping their identity and and their understanding of what it means to be a man, and what it means to be, you know, relate how that relates to their sexuality, particularly if it was a male perpetrator.</p> <p>A lot of men may question whether it's because they were gay, or does that mean that they were gay, or were they targeted for a particular reason to do with their sexuality and, and that can be really confusing for a lot of guys. Even when they, you know, find themselves in, in a relationship, in a heterosexual relationship, they can still have those queries or doubts, and they're really difficult conversations to have, and can be really confusing.</p> <p>And similar, but different for, for men that identify as gay: it can also have an impact on their understanding of sexuality, and particularly, I guess, relationships and relationship dynamics. If they've been, part of the abuse is really the grooming and the dynamics that have helped facilitate that abuse can really get blurry, can become blurred in people's understandings of what a healthy respectful relationship is. And so that can be a real challenge for people as well.</p> <p>One of the things that can be really confronting for the guys and can kind of play into their idea of feeling shame is that during the abuse, and this for boys is, it can be an obvious thing, but their body can respond with physical arousal, which can be really confusing, because the body is just reacting to things that's happening to it, but that doesn't mean that they wanted it or enjoyed it. And so that can be a real challenge for guys. And it can be very confronting and confusing, because their body is responding to something that they, you know, didn't want, didn't ask for, shouldn't be happening. So when they're thinking about that, the their body responding during the abuse and with physical arousal in particularly, guys have talked about, almost their body betraying them, because, again, it wasn't something that they wanted or invited in any way. And so that can make, you know, I guess, at times, sex and sexual relationships difficult because, you know, for some guys, having having sex with a consenting partner can can be at times</p>

	<p>triggering, and they can experience flashbacks, or they may have difficulty with feeling safe being aroused in a sexual relationship now in adulthood, because it, you know, the body remembers, and that relates to something where they felt unsafe. So, some guys do talk about erectile dysfunction, or, you know, really struggling to, to have a satisfying sexual relationship.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>Some survivors who had male perpetrators, but are heterosexual, found that they later did things to reinforce their heterosexual identity. Here's Mark again:</p>
Mark W	<p>So for me, trying to prove my identity to myself, involved a lot, a lot of sexual activity with girls in situations that when I look back at it, it's like, you know, that that was an extremely risky behavior, something I probably shouldn't have done. I spent a lot of time, you know, trying to identify with the opposite sex. And trying to prove that, you know, I am a male, I'm heterosexual, you know. And going through school after my abuse, most of the people that were in my group of friends, it was primarily girls, there was only a couple of guys that I'd been with, that I'd been as friends with, before the abuse, and we continued through school together. I guess I guess it was, I need to go down the lines of having a sexual relationship to me that yes, I am heterosexual. But there were quite a few girls that I'd only known for a few hours and most of them I never saw again, there was only a couple that I would say that I saw more than once. But there was also that risky behavior of having multiple partners at any time. When I look back at it. It's something I'm not even proud of, so.</p> <p>I know, a lot of the guys have addictions to alcohol, to drugs. Mine was more an addiction to online chat rooms. I guess, that was a part of me trying to prove myself, you know, show that I'm still heterosexual. And that had happened before I got married, it continued on, after we got married. My wife had found out about it, we'd had many discussions about it, I promised that it wouldn't happen again. And it did. It also happened a couple of additional times where our marriage was pretty much ready to break up. And I felt that I had to do something about it.</p>
Felicity	<p>Developmental Psychologist, Dr Judy Cashmore:</p>
Judy Cashmore	<p>And we're very fortunate that the stigma and the concerns around homosexuality now have been so much reduced, it's no longer, hasn't been a criminal offense for some time. But that was a big issue for a lot of boys. And it goes against their view that they could be victims. The notion of masculinity, and particularly Australian masculinity, I think, is that you can't be a victim. And that might also be one of the reasons that boys compartmentalize, that they put it in another category, they put it, bury it deep, that it didn't happen. It wasn't abuse, I'm not a victim, I'm not homosexual. And then they try to get on with life.</p>

	<p>But some of those, the consequences, the longer term effects can come back and come to the surface. And sometimes at times where they had, they really take them by surprise.</p>
Rob	<p>Here's Matthew:</p>
Matthew O	<p>This is kind of hard, hard to admit, but one of the coping mechanisms was, I, from a very young age, I discovered pornography and as a... and this was in the 1970s and 80s, I suppose. So everything was in magazine sort of format and found a number of pornographic magazines in the neighbor's, you know, in the neighbor's back shed where he would, he'd probably stash those so his family couldn't see them and spent quite a bit of time pilfering those from from said back shed, and what I was what I was doing with that I think was the, in the 1970s and 80s the homosexuality was was really frowned upon and what was going on with me was what, as a child and being abused in a sexual sort of nature by a trusted other adult was was all that we were, we were kind of... we were absorbing or I was absorbing at the time as, as this "Homosexuality, it's a very bad thing". And so I was I was justifying that, that it was okay to steal pornographic magazines and and spend hours looking through that sort of material justifying that. What I was doing was actually making sure that I was protected from what was going on.</p> <p>So when I was looking at those sorts of things, I was justifying to myself that this was all okay, what the abuse that was going on, was okay, because I wasn't actually... I'm more interested in, in in, in females rather than rather than potentially this homosexual sort of lifestyle. And it took a very long time throughout my, throughout my youth really unpackaging that sort of information as well, it took a very long time to realize that there's really, there's absolutely nothing wrong with with homosexuality, and it's not something that sort of automatically comes out of being abused. It's not something that, you know, had had it been picked up earlier, had the abuse been picked up earlier, it would probably would have been something that saved quite a lot of energy that the that I put into trying to protect myself, or trying to protect myself from the teachings of the church that says that this is, you know, this is such a... not a good thing. And I think that's been proven, you know, right through society, that, that the teachings of the church, probably still I don't know, but you know, right through the 70s and 80s that that had some quite detrimental effects to a lot of people.</p>
Pete R	<p>When I thought about doing this podcast, a couple of songs came to mind. They're actually songs that I like playing when I'm in a certain mood and they generally get played at full volume. It's called "It's a Sin". And this I feel, would resonate with a lot of people who went through through religious schools. And just to quote a couple of lines there before I sort of elaborate on them.</p> <p>"When I look back upon my time, it's always with a sense of shame. I've always been the one to blame for everything I longed to do, no matter when, or where, or who... There's one thing in common, too: it's a sin". And that's the</p>

	<p>story through the whole song. You know, being told that whatever you do, whatever natural feelings you feel, it's a sin. You know? And, and I think people who went through Catholic schools will realize it was all negative, there was nothing positive; that of course, you're going to end up in hell, just for natural feelings. And particularly for the guys who are teenagers in Catholic schools. For anyone, teenage years are pretty horrific, as we all know. But to be told these natural things that you're experiencing, are a sin is pretty, pretty fought, fraught with danger. Particularly when of course, we hear the things that a lot of these members of religious orders were doing to these young boys. So the hypocrisy there is as blatant as anything.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>There's one especially powerful and complicated myth that prevents male survivors from coming forward about their abuse. It's a rumour many of us have heard, that's been reinforced by countless TV thrillers and lurid news stories. It's called the "victim to perpetrator myth".</p>
Shane G	<p>So one of the big factors that men talk about at SAMSUN is the fear that they will be labeled a perpetrator themselves if they identify as a victim or survivor of child sexual abuse. And that seems to be, I guess, a really specific belief that relates to men that if they're abused as children, they will go on to become perpetrators. So that is, you know, a big fear that men worry about.</p>
Mark W	<p>I was always very worried about how they would see me, because there was always that sense of if, I guess it was something that was portrayed in the media, a lot of people their first line of defense was, well, I was abused, I'm allowed to do it. And I guess, there was always that thought of, if I let people know that I'd been abused, would they not want me to, you know, be a part of their lives? And it's that sense of having your identity stripped away from you, actually, who you can trust to be your friends, or who you feel will trust you to be around them that you need to try and get back. And it's, you know, the fact that if people found out that they would look at me differently. I'd be treated differently.</p>
Felicity	<p>Professor Patrick O'Leary:</p>
Patrick O'L	<p>I particularly think that we have this perception that if a man discloses, it does pull into question the legitimacy of them also as a safe person, because we've had a strong mythology around, you know, from victim to perpetrator. I think we can ever quite underestimate how, how that can be a constraint on men's disclosure, because the last thing you want to feel if you're a survivor, that you'd be putting alongside perpetrators in any way. And even that to be called into account, even having to answer that question, you know, poses some real threats to identity and safety.</p>
Felicity	<p>Robert Fitzgerald:</p>
Robert Fitzgerald	<p>One of the great challenges for young people, particularly teenagers, to disclose any form of abuse, is this false notion that if I've been abused, that I may well become a perpetrator later in life. It is true that that is very unlikely to</p>

	<p>be the case for women. Women that have been sexually abused by other women or by men tend not to have that view. But boys, it's quite an overwhelming comment that we heard that there was a real fear that if anybody knew that I was abused, one is that they may say I'm homosexual, particularly if the abuse was by a male. But the second one was that I would be regarded myself as a potential abuser. And we now know absolutely and overwhelmingly, that the vast majority of boys that are abused do not go on to abuse, in fact, a very, very, very small percentage. And so it's very important to continuously be saying to people, you know, that this is, is this is not true. It's a myth, that if you've been sexually abused as a child, there is very little likelihood that that will lead to you perpetrating later on in life.</p>
<p>Les S</p>	<p>There is a myth that a victim of child sexual abuse will become a perpetrator. I know that, that is so far from the truth. And it never even entered my mind. Because I wanted a family and I was, you know, being a father was probably... it would have to be one of the proudest moments of my life, and and how could I inflict the pain that I endured onto the very people that I love?</p> <p>So that myth is just total rubbish. It just, it is so far from the truth, it's just, it should... no-one should even think it.</p>
<p>Jarad G</p>	<p>So I, you know, I carried this guilt that, that I found it awkward to be around children. And thankfully, I'd had a lot of friends, you know, who'd had kids and who, who'd worked hard to make me aware that it was alright to be around with kids. And I was quite comfortable around children. But, you know, by the time I went to SAMSN, at least.</p> <p>But when I sat in that group, every other guy there had been through that same thing, or still had a real awkwardness about being around children. And the assumption that I still even at times - though, I'm quite public about my abuse no, so it kind of hasn't, it doesn't really come up so much anymore - but when I was first telling people, the assumption that they would think that I was automatically an abuser, or was at risk of being an abuser.</p> <p>Yeah, just, you know, and it was just nice to sit in a group of guys and hear that all of them had that same fear, and that same worry.</p>
<p>Robert Fitzgerald</p>	<p>That's not all perpetrators, some perpetrators, the road is very much, you know, a part that is almost unable to be changed until much later. The myth that if you're abused as a child or a young person, you'll go on to be a perpetrator is very much entrenched in the psyche, of, of, of young people in society generally. I don't know the origins of that. But what I do know is it's very hard to, to to dismiss, particularly for a young person that is concerned about disclosure concerned about telling somebody, if this is part of their thinking. What we just have to continuously say over and over again, is that it isn't the case. It isn't true. We now have the evidence. It's overwhelmingly the evidence that people don't go on to perpetrate.</p>

<p>Shane G</p>	<p>Being in a group with survivors or talking to another survivor, it seems to just get there for the guys more quickly. So they just tend to find that trust in each other to be open and vulnerable. And connect. That really important. And so we know, for lots of trauma, one of the responses can be kind of detachment and disconnecting. But this really is about finding ways to reconnect and, you know, be with others and have that shared sense of you know, understanding and experience but also that hope for moving forward because so many times guys will say, "Oh, it's like a weight has been lifted after after meeting meeting other guys and talking through some of this".</p> <p>So it's like they're, you know, starting to share, or break the silence of the secret that they've carried for so long and shouldered that burden, usually often in isolation. So it's about being able to, yeah, come come together with others and, and share that burden, but break that silence. Because it's not their, it's not their burden to share alone. And it's not their responsibility, what happened to them.</p>
<p>Judy C</p>	<p>Now, that's why it's also important for those who've been sexually abused, to be able to talk and to be honest with their partners, their intimate partners, their sexual partners, and so on, in adult life. And if they're burying something, and their behavior, if they have outbreaks of anger, or depression, frustration, drinking, all sorts of things that can come to the fore when they're stressed in other ways. If they're also hiding a secret, and they don't feel that they can share it with the people who are closest to them. That's an additional burden. And that's why SAMSNN and the support that they give to everyone around, the person who has been sexually abused, men who've been sexually abused, is so important, because it allows them to be able to be honest in their relationships, and allows those who are their family members to understand their behaviors, and how to respond.</p> <p>The other long term consequence, and this is really troubling, is the one about interpersonal relationships. And the difficulty that people who've been sexually abused, have in trusting other people. And particularly in intimate relationships and sexual relationships. That's hardly surprising, because what sexual abuse is, is the betrayal of their trust, the deliberate grooming, and manipulation for someone else's sexual gratification. And that means that people who've been sexually abused may well have difficulty in trusting others. And it can be difficult when they come to have children. And when they have a breakup of a relationship. So those trust and relationships, that's why what's important in terms of overcoming the long term effects of sexual abuse, and that is possible, is getting support and being able to talk about it in a non judgmental environment.</p>
<p>Shane G</p>	<p>Partly for that, with men, as well as that they're taught to, I guess, compartmentalize some of the, the experiences, their feelings, and, and, and it can, you know, extend to a fear or discomfort with intimacy. So if you're thinking about a long term relationship, getting close to people, is about being intimate. Intimacy can be really confronting for people that were, you know, that can feel like you're exposing yourself to vulnerability. And, for a lot of</p>

	<p>survivors, being vulnerable meant being unsafe, and so that, that, that can in a way be closeness can be, act as a trigger, or reminder to a time when they were unsafe in their childhood.</p> <p>So we find within the, in the talking to other survivors, and that can be individually or within the group, the primary focus is always around safety. And so trying to create an environment where men feel safe to test the waters and, and start to open up and share and become vulnerable.</p> <p>"They just get it" is one of the phrases that, that people often talk about, from that, from the group just being around men that, you know, they get it, I don't have to explain myself.</p>
<p>Pete R</p>	<p>One of the things that I find interesting is mottos and how they're often used. So there's a particular private school, I believe, that has the motto "Act like a man." I've been talking about some of my ideas about what is a man anyway? So that's, the thing is, it's an idea, is well, what does a man act like? That's the first question. But also, these are kids, these are teenagers. When you're old as me, you go, youth is wasted on the young. But these are basically kids who haven't experienced life, and yet they're being told to act like a man, whatever a man is, and how he acts.</p>
<p>Patrick O'Leary</p>	<p>Yep, sure. Let's talk about young men.</p> <p>And around masculinity, I think we're the there's a confusing message for young men today and a confusing message for us. What do we tell boys? Today? I think, and thank God, that is the case, we've got some clear messages to tell young women today. Be strong, be bold, state your case, be ambitious, be aspiring. You've got some fantastic messages for young women and that they were well overdue. And they're still lots of work happened there, I don't want to discount that at all.</p> <p>But I think we're in a dilemma of what we tell boys. Because when we tell boys to be strong, are we just repeating some of the things we don't want? But we want for girls? What do we tell boys today that's going to be helpful in terms of where they sit in the world of who we want them to be? Do we tell them to be more sensitive? Do we tell them to be aspiring? Do we tell them to exercise their rights in the same way that we want this balance?</p> <p>So I think sometimes the end response is boys aren't getting a clear message about how to be in the world. It's kind of a bit silent. We're quite loud on how to be a girl in the world now. But we're a bit silent on how to be a boy in the world. And what that gives power to is some of the more dominant ideas of masculinity still pervading around, because they come through the movie and social media and news and this. So we're letting the message from boys be determined by things that we're not actually actively engaged in, in providing a message.</p>

	<p>I think that really does impact on how boys can talk about abuse and violence, I think it really has a massive impact that we are going to really need to be accountable for in time with our young men of today. And I have some real concerns about that. Because the the rates of disclosure and help seeking don't match the rate of abuse that's being reported in the system. And I think that's a real social justice and human rights issue.</p> <p>And so masculinity, we need to celebrate boys' masculinity in a way that they can feel comfortable in their skin. I think one of the, you know, unintended consequences of some of the the way we've profiled male violence against women, sexual violence, is that it paints men as bad. It paints men all in one picture. And I think that's a very simplistic idea of men. Because there's great differences of power and identity amongst men. And when we talk about men's power, and patriarchy and all that, we often are lumping all men together, like all men are powerful. All men have access to money and resources, all men are kind of that white, middle aged guy who has power and prestige. Yet, we don't have to look far to know that our homeless populations of men, mental health populations of men don't have a lot of power or say. They may will act in some male dominant posturing, but their structural power is very limited. And I have a real concern that we're in this area. We're not nuanced enough about where does power really lie. And who's powerful, and I think that is particularly impacting on young men, on Aboriginal men, on men with men of diverse identity and sexuality. Men who, who are defined by ability, disability or other capacities. And I think it's just such a simplistic argument that that we have around, you know, it's almost the devils and angels type thing, which we know is not helpful.</p> <p>I think it's about men's connections. And, and within those connections, having the diversity within those connections, having the ideas that there's capacity for men or of all diversity to celebrate some of the active roles of males, you know, the connections that men share. The courage of men in coping with change. The courage and the partnerships with women, I think sometimes when we think about masculinity, we think about the men's culture, but actually, it's really men and women's culture, too. And how do we actually, you know, masculinity doesn't exist without femininity, and ideas of being a woman. So, that blending of things is incredibly important, you know? We're all human and live together. And we're human first and gender is kind of a secondary thing.</p>
Lindsay G	<p>My name is Lindsay. I'm an older Australian. I'm a grandfather.</p> <p>My interest in social justice... I'm unsure where it has evolved from. I think it's evolved from a collective sense of that we can do better. The men SAMSN turns out, or that the graduates of SAMSN's eight week groups are better men. They're men who have better relationships, they're men who respond better to the needs in the community. They're men who respond better to their immediate environment, if you like. They're men who are prepared to go out</p>

	<p>and make some change. I see it all the time when they come to the monthly meetings, and I hear their stories, and I think, wow, this is just fantastic stuff. And they're succeeding and doing well.</p> <p>It was just such a powerful thing to see men who had significant traumatic events in their lives, become people who succeed and contribute to their communities. And I think being a calm, peaceful, nurturing male is contributing to our communities. And I wish I had learned the message earlier in my life, because I would have affected my communities in a much... in a more beneficial way. I would have been more compassionate, I would have been more considering, I would have been a person who listened. And I would have been a person who wouldn't adopt a bizarre perspective. I would have been prepared to accept that there are many shades of masculinity in our communities. And I would have accepted that the rights of individuals are very, very important.</p> <p>And that's probably why I would like to see in terms of social justice, that we become calm, nurturing people; prepared to listen, to hear, and to make change where it's needed. But I believe we can recover and we can be better people.</p>
Closing Credits	
<p>Rob Carlton</p>	<p>SAMSN is the only specialist charity in Australia dedicated to helping all male survivors of child sexual abuse and their families. Each year, SAMSN provides free services to hundreds of male survivors and their supporters.</p> <p>SAMSN believes that male survivors of child sexual abuse can recover and thrive. Help him believe. Donate today. Visit: samsn.org.au (that's s-a-m-s-n).org.au</p> <p>Remember to rate and share this online, because it helps others - especially survivors - to find it.</p>
<p>Felicity Blake</p>	<p>STRONGER was created for Survivors and Mates Support Network entirely remotely during the pandemic of 2020 and 21. It was produced and directed by me, Felicity Blake of The Dove Media, with Julie Blyth of SAMSN. Our Executive Producer is Craig Hughes-Cashmore. Interview help from Les Spencer and Shane Greentree. Audio editing by Dion Brooks. Transcript assistance from Dr Anna Kamaralli and Melanie Teychenne-King. A big "thank you" to our co-host and SAMSN Ambassador, Rob Carlton.</p> <p>Very special thanks to all 32 of our participants; your insights make others STRONGER.</p>
ENDS	