I would like to thank the organizers of this symposium – Griffith University; Living Well; and the governments of Australia and Queensland – for inviting me to participate, and for making it possible for me to join you here today.

I bring you all greetings from your brothers and sisters across the Pacific, and also gratitude…for the hard work being done here to confront the sexual abuse of children.

Our focus here today is on the sexual abuse of males, and on what we can and must do to help men come forward, to unburden themselves of shame and guilt – a burden that was never there’s to carry – and to seek and get the help they need.

When it comes to our collective consciousness about male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the landscape has changed dramatically in recent years, and I want to begin with a brief reminder of some of the events that have created that change.

PLAY AUSTRALIA OPENING VIDEO
The times really have changed. And as much as things have already changed, far, far more change is on the way. In fact, it’s just over the horizon. Collective awareness of the reality of male sexual victimization has broken through an ages-long barrier. It has become a reality. A collectively perceived reality.
It’s about time. For how long did we participate – collectively – in an absurd reality?
We had stacks of research on children who had been sexually abused, and in those studies the samples were roughly 60% female children and 40% male children. And yet all during those many decades, when you then looked at the research literature on ADULTS who had been sexually abused as children, those sexually abused male children virtually disappeared. They had become invisible. There were almost no studies of male survivors.
No more.
Today, there is a still small but a growing research literature on male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. We have documented many of the long term effects, and we have helped to clarify the unique issues that so many male survivors must grapple with in healing their wounds.
And this change is – and will have – effects that go far beyond creating awareness of the FACT of male sexual victimization. This change will transform our collective definition of masculinity. For as we collectively merge the reality of a male child's suffering -- of his helplessness and fear and vulnerability -- with our image of the man that child has become, we will have fundamentally altered – we will have expanded – the narrow, constricted boundaries of traditional masculinity.

We will have collectively expanded masculinity to include not only power and strength, but also vulnerability and helplessness, and the grief and sorrow that all humans must contend with in the wake of such experiences.
We will understand that a man can cower in fear when a flashback sends him reeling into a terrifying past that can still pierce the present, but understand as clearly that this same man can moments later gather himself, wipe away his tears, re-connect with the present, and stand up, an act of formidable strength, and courage and yes, power.
So what has been driving the increasing awareness of the reality of male sexual victimization?

Is it the media?

Is it government investigations?

Is it the criminal justice system?

Is it some ineffable evolution in our collective consciousness?

I would argue that all of these are secondary forces. That these are forces that all respond to one, primary force that has been driving the increasing awareness of the sexual victimization of boys and men:
Men. Men themselves.

Men who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse, who have lifted off of themselves the burden of shame, the shackles of secrecy, and have broken centuries of silence.

I would argue that this breaking through the wall of silence is the only way that this cultural transformation is possible, and it is the only way forward.

Men coming forward publicly have blown open the doors of archdiocese around the world. Men coming forward publicly have blown open the doors of such bastions of secrecy as the Citadel, Penn State university, and countless other institutions, including Boystown.

Men coming forward publicly have exposed individual sexual predators all over the world who hid for decades behind walls of secrecy and collusion. Individual men, one by one, taking strength from each other.
Now I need to take a brief diversion into something personal.

I was sexually abused when I was five years old.

And ironically, the abuse that altered my life actually began, relatively speaking, not far from here. [CLICK IN REST OF SLIDE]

In Indonesia. When the Japanese invaded the Dutch East Indies in 1942, they rounded up the Dutch residents, separated the men from the women children and put them in concentration camps.

In those camps, many of the children were brutalized, sexually and physically.

One of those brutalized children who survived emigrated to Canada after the war, became my live-in baby-sitter, and sexually brutalized me for three months.
Just like so many sexually abused men, I was shamed and terrified into silence for decades. Silenced or not, the abuse shaped my life.
I became a clinical psychologist, and wouldn’t you know it, I specialized in the study of trauma, and violence.
And then I further specialized in what was then a research void: the impact of sexual abuse on the lives of men.
And then, fate caught up with me. About six years ago, a filmmaker named Kathy Barbini asked me to serve as a consultant on a documentary that she was planning to make about men who had been sexually abused as children.

I quickly agreed. About a year later, a man whom I had evaluated as part of my death penalty forensic work – James Thomas – was scheduled for execution in the state of North Carolina. James is a remarkable man – he is, miraculously, still alive – and I asked Kathy if she would like to interview him about his sexual abuse history before he was executed. She said yes, and then asked me to do the interview.

I did. And in the course of saying what I thought was a final goodbye to James, I told him that I too had been sexually abused as a child. And of course, the cameras were rolling.

Kathy saw the footage, and immediately asked me if I would be one of the men profiled in her film.
For the vast majority of male survivors, this is not an easy decision to make. And it wasn’t for me. Kathy did not pressure me in any way. The pressure came from within.
I LOATHED the idea of going public. It made me feel exposed, and intensely vulnerable. It triggered me. It spawned nightmares.
But in the end, I felt I had no choice.
I believed then, as I believe even more strongly now, that the only way that we will break the back of the stigma, of the burden of shame that still throttles so many men, is by men who were abused coming forward to tell their stories.
If I am to ask other men to do so, how could I not do so myself?
Well, I survived the exposure. And learned that I am not diminished by my public disclosure, but rather empowered.
A telling moment occurred a few years ago. I was standing in a hallway in the Pentagon, having a private conversation with a 4-star general. There was a pause, and he said: “You were sexually abused yourself.” I looked him in the eye, and I said, “Yes,” and felt an almost physical lifting of the weight of unwarranted shame.
And so, two and a half years ago, I thought: Wouldn’t it be great if ordinary men, survivors of childhood sexual abuse who were ready to publicly tell their stories, if they had a way, a dignified way, of doing just that?

And so began the Bristlecone Project. Portraits and stories of men who were sexually abused as children.
It is a labor-intensive project. I travel all over North America, and eventually I will travel all over the world, to meet with each man, individually.
The portraits and very-condensed life stories are displayed on the Bristlecone web site, and we have put up physical exhibitions in Los Angeles and in New Mexico and many more will be scheduled.

Eventually, we will have local exhibitions in many communities, focusing on survivors from those communities.

These men are not only breaking down the stigma, and shedding themselves of the shame that was never theirs to carry.
In telling their stories – which I am now videotaping – they are also giving all of us a window into what it means to endure, to cope with, and to survive childhood sexual abuse as a man.

And so I want to share, via the men’s own voices, one of the surprising – at least to me – things that has been revealed through these interviews.
And now I need to add another layer to this story. Tim Hetherington was a photo-journalist and filmmaker who was killed in Libya in April, 2011 while documenting the uprising against Khadafy.

I knew Tim, briefly, before his death. We had several very intense conversations about trauma, and about photography. I told him about my plans for Bristlecone, and he adamantly told me that I MUST videotape the interviews. I told him he was probably right, but that I simply could not manage everything all at once. So I proceeded with Bristlecone, doing the interviews and taking the still portraits.

Then, about four months ago now, I was walking through an airport and there was Tim staring at me – accusingly – from the cover of a recently published biography. I bought and read the book, and then for weeks Tim visited me in my dreams, berating me about not shooting video of the Bristlecone interviews.

Well, he won. As of a month ago, I am videotaping each interview.
Of the 29 interviews and photo sessions that I have now completed, a substantial minority of the men have spontaneously described extremely intense spiritual experiences, associated either directly with the sexual trauma, or with the aftermath, and they have described these spiritual experiences as transformative and absolutely central to their survival and their ultimate healing from their traumas.

They tend to describe their experiences within the context of their own religious or spiritual backgrounds. But there is a common denominator. They describe experiences that connect them in moments of desperation to something that is greater than themselves, and that connection is the difference between life and death. Sometimes physical death. Sometimes the death of their spirit.
Manassah was visibly shaken when he described what was an utterly overwhelming spiritual experience. And it is an experience that remains tangibly a part of him. During the interview he leaned forward and exclaimed to me that he could feel that love, that whatever it is, right now, in the present. It had never left him.

And he is a completely non-religious man. He does not go to any church or affiliate with any religion. At one point he reflected on what he had heard from priests over the years and said: “They just don’t get it.”
Next up: Bo Budinsky. He describes a transformative experience that involved no words.
What seems salient, and common between Manassah’s and Bo’s accounts, is a profoundly emotional connection to some thing, some entity, that is beyond them. That in their moments of despair, when they have been abandoned to the brutalization of a sexual predator, they encounter what to them is indelible proof that they are not alone.
So, thanks to Tim Hetherington, I present to you, Tedd Cadd, the first Bristlecone man to be videotaped. You will have to pardon the video’s shortcomings. I am climbing yet another, steep learning curve. I promise you, the quality will improve.
Tedd is much more formally religious than either Manassah or Bo, and his experience of spirituality is expressed clearly within the parameters of his Christian beliefs and support structure. That said, there is still a discernible commonality, which I find easiest to describe as connection. Tedd found connection with other people, and with other survivors, through his connection to a God that is as palpable to him as my beloved wife is to me. And that connection has clearly been absolutely key to Tedd’s not just survival, but the fact that he has lived a healthy life. How could someone who was savagely and brutally sexually abused by his own father, and utterly rejected and abandoned by his own mother, how could someone who endures that still have the capacity to feel love, and to give love? The love that is depicted in that image of Jesus holding the grieving child is not a word, or a concept to Tedd. It is real, and it has always lived within him.
Sometimes, there is simply mystery to how an individual endures unimaginable brutality as a child and yet somehow retains a connection to some core within himself.

Here is Mike Skinner…
How did Mike know to flee to the woods? What instinct led him to build a fortress there, where he could protect himself not just physically, but spiritually?

How did he know that his own parents were like the Nazis? A knowledge that allowed him to take a different path from them rather than to internalize their ugliness.

How did he know to seek out survivors in books who could show him the path to his own survival?

Mike and Tedd experienced childhood traumas that I encounter among the men I evaluate on death rows across the United States. And yet, their wounds have healed. They bear many scars, but in their core, there is health. How is that possible?
The last survivor I am going to introduce you to this morning is not a Bristlecone volunteer. James Thomas, as I mentioned earlier, lives on death row in the state of North Carolina. He is sentenced to death and likely will be executed within the next two or three years. James, or JT as he is known, is a prime example of a phenomenon I have encountered often enough or the past 25 years that, once again, I have to ask, how is this possible?

The phenomenon is this: I periodically encounter men on death row who were brutalized and utterly neglected as children, who lived lives of brutality and addiction, who committed awful crimes, who then adapted to the brutality of maximum security prisons where, for 10, 15, 20 years they live in all-but solitary confinement, and somehow, despite all this, they are transformed.

They find quiet, they find meditation, they discover insight and self-reflection. They somehow become fully human beings, as though humanity were a seed in each of us only waiting for the drops of water needed to take root.
I’m going to end my talk in the only way that seems right to me, with a salute to the men who have volunteered for the Bristlecone Project.

Men who represent all of the men who have courageously stepped forward to create a space, to open a door for their fellow survivors.