

The Language We Use

BY AVRIL GLAZEBROOK

Early this year I was privileged to attend a seminar sponsored by Relationships Australia, titled Male Survivors of Sexual Assault. The speaker was Mike Lew, a quietly spoken and unassuming psychotherapist from Boston, USA. He is the author of "Victims No Longer" and "Leaping Upon The Mountains" and is an expert on leading men into recovery from sexual child abuse. It is his heart's desire that a network of small groups for men recovering from child sexual abuse, be formed and linked globally, by like-minded counsellors.

Mike's lecture was presented informally and supported by extensive amounts of literature. One aspect of this vitally important information that stood out for me, was an article by Richard Hoffman titled, "The Hatred of Innocence". In this article Hoffman considers how the everyday language we use can minimise or trivialise what happens to children.

'Our words are important. Words are how we think. We talk of them as "sick". We use names that accept their denial and distortion. We become tangled in language that does not reflect reality, but hides it until, over and over, child after child, it is too late.'

Lets begin by refusing to use the word "pedophile". The word comes from Greek and means, literally, "one who loves children". What an Orwellian inversion! To use this word to describe those who violate children, and in many instances kill to silence them, is to help the wolf into his wooly disguise.'

The term "pedophile" is more than a poor word choice, however; a pseudo-medical term, it asks us to see such evil as arising from disease or illness, evil in its effect, perhaps, but no more intentional than other natural misfortunes like diabetes, say, or muscular dystrophy. This makes the violation of children a part of the natural order and the perpetrator one who cannot help himself. In place of the term pedophile, then, let me offer an alternative: pedoscele, from Latin "scelus",

meaning "evil deed". Try it. Ped-o-skeel: one who does evil to children.'

In this article, Hoffman continues to point out the anomaly of calling a pedophile "sex offender", since their crimes rarely reflect their sexuality. Rather, the rape of a child is an act of violence in the guise of a web of seduction that has many tactical traps; healthy adults have sex with other adults. He continues to debate the inaccuracy of words we commonly use, reflecting that pedosceles talk of "love" between men and boys;

'All too often we fall for it. For example, in a news cast about the man who had devastated the childhoods of several generations in my hometown, including mine, a TV commentator said that the defendant had "admitted that he is overly fond of young boys." (The word pedophile is there, in the shadows.) At that pre trial hearing, one boy said the man had threatened to cut off his genitals if he told. Another boy testified that the man threatened to shoot his little brother. Overly fond, indeed.'

As counsellors, the accuracy of the language we use has important consequences in the counselling room for both facilitating change and in the facilitation of the process of forgiveness. Mike Lew states in an article appearing in Contemporary Sexuality (Vo.38, No.11, November 2004) titled, 'Adult Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse: Sexual Issues in Treatment and Recovery', that the key to healing consists of three basic principles. Firstly, learning that one has been lied to. Secondly, determining the nature and extent of these lies. And thirdly, discovering truths that work for the survivor to replace the lies he was taught. As counsellors, self awareness and mindfulness of globalised expressions and euphemisms is vital in the recognition of the accuracy of our own language.

As counsellors who are Christians, the bible gives us many references for searching and seeking the truth in all that we do and say. 'Then you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free'. John 8:32 NIVV

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