

# HEARING THE SURVIVOR'S VOICE: *SUNDERING THE WALL OF DENIAL*

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SANDRA L. BLOOM, M.D.

JOURNAL OF PSYCHOHISTORY, 21(4): 461-477, 1994.

**“The need to deny death, or at least to blunt consciousness of it is shared by everyone. We could not live with a persistent awareness of death ... Denial of death may be a stabilizer of action for life’s sake, but seduced by it, we may also be brought closer to the death we wish to evade.”**

Martin Wangh

In “Schindler’s List”, Spielberg’s monumental film about the Holocaust, a remarkable scene takes place in the female prisoners’ barracks of a forced labor camp. The characters who are speaking are all Jewish women. They have just experienced being forced into leaving their homes and moving into the Krakow ghetto and have then survived the liquidation of that ghetto, only to be imprisoned in the unspeakable conditions of the camp, a place in which random murders, arbitrary torture, and routine humiliation are part of daily life. As observers, we know what has happened to them, and we know what their future is to be. But they represent the voice of the unknowing present. Crowded together, three and four to a narrow bunk, the women are deep in conversation. One of the women is telling a story she has heard about what is happening to other Jews in places like Auschwitz. She gives what we now know to be an accurate account of the gassings and the crematoria. But her listeners actively deny that her story could be true, arguing how illogical, how incomprehensible, it would be to do such things, finally telling her to keep quiet and stop trying to scare them.

The horrors of the present are only truly known to the victims and to those who perpetrate the horror. The rest of us, the bystanders, spend most of our lives denying the reality of the irrational all around us, despite the many lessons history has to teach us. Only when confronted with massive evidence and/or personal experience do we lower our protective shield of belief in the fundamental and controlling rationality of human existence and even then, often the shattering of our comfortable belief systems are only temporary. Denial is a potent and universal defense, protecting us from being overwhelmed by an unacceptable internal or external reality. Rafael Moses has described the functioning of denial in the political process, using examples taken not from satanic cult experiences but from the Holocaust and modern Israel. He describes an adult form of denial different from the more primitive forms of denial seen in childhood or in psychotic patients, a denial that is set in motion by relatively healthy persons, is unconscious, and is directed mainly at an external reality that represents a threat to physical or psychological existence. This form of denial can be used by the individual, by a group, by a

community, or by a nation and becomes visible in the political process and is, he believes, ubiquitous. Like any defense, denial can be life-saving in the presence of acute threat, but Moses raises the question of what price we pay for this type of denial and asserts, "Bluntly stated, I believe that such denial brings about an impediment in the ability to face and therefore deal with the danger that is being partially denied. By not facing danger, the society, just as the person, is able to deal less efficiently than possible with the approaching threat." (Moses, 1989).

## THE RITUAL ABUSE CONTROVERSY

In the last ten years there have been increasing numbers of reports of ritual cult abuse in children and in adults, remarkably similar in detail, from all over the United States and in other parts of the world (Cozolino, 1989; Jonker & Jonker-Bakker, 1991; Nurcombe & Unutzer, 1991; Sackheim & Devine, 1992; Sinason, in press; Young et al, 1991). Because of the sensational nature of the material and its pornographic content, it has aroused great interest and great controversy. Theories abound ranging from attention-seeking on the part of hysterical patients to theories that involve ex-Nazis and CIA-directed mind-control experiments. Unfortunately there is still a dearth of both scientifically controlled studies or good investigative journalism (Jones, 1991; Kluft, 1989; Putnam, 1991; Van Berschoten, 1990).

The entire subject of ritual abuse is so inflammatory and controversial that most discussions about the subject flare up into bitter and divisive arguments between different camps of believers. These groups generally constellate into those who believe that there is no such thing as cult abuse, alleging that the present phenomenon is the twentieth century version of the medieval witch hysteria (Lotto, 1994) and those who believe that there is a widespread network of sadistic abusers who have been and are still in the business of abusing children for a number of scurrilous motives, not the least of which is financial gain. There are also those religious fundamentalists who believe in the literal existence of Satan as an active oppositional force to God (Richardson et al, 1991; Sackheim & Devine, 1992; Victor, 1993).

In the process of focusing on the issue of "belief" what is frequently overlooked is the very real, devastatingly destructive, and prolonged suffering of the patient. Certainly, questions can and should be raised about the nature of widespread and organized abuse. There can be no question, however, that a significant proportion of the psychiatric population suffers from syndromes that are trauma-related. Initially recognized through work with Vietnam veterans, it is now generally accepted that there is a universal reaction to overwhelming stress that has come to be called posttraumatic stress disorder. Stress that overwhelms our capacity to cope consistently produces serious biological, psychological, social and moral consequences. Many survivor groups have now been studied including disaster victims, Holocaust survivors and their children, victims of torture, prisoners of war, refugees, burn victims, and others (Wilson & Raphael, 1993). Although there are some distinguishing features about patients who report ritual abuse, in the main their symptoms differ little in nature or severity from patients with similar long-term and devastating psychological damage like concentration camp survivors, prisoners of war, and torture victims - all of whom have experienced prolonged periods of coercive control (Herman, 1992) and numerous encounters with the threat or reality of

death - the death imprint (Lifton, 1993). We cannot claim direct knowledge about the exact details of the traumatic childhood experiences of our patients who report ritual abuse, many of whom suffer from multiple personality disorder, but we can say with a high degree of certainty that their symptom picture is consistent only with trauma of monumental proportions.

By now there are many accounts of the experiences that patients report, some examples of which can be found within other articles in this issue. The experienced clinician becomes readily caught on the horns of a dilemma when listening to these stories. On the one hand, the cult survivor's account is often difficult to credit due to the frequent flamboyant nature of the story, the extremes of recounted behavior, and the ongoing elaboration of more and more detail. For any reasonable person, the inevitable questions present themselves: Where are all the dead bodies? How could this many children have been kidnapped, abused, and murdered? Could there actually exist a large group of modern men and women sane enough to pursue normal lives by day and insane enough to engage in satanic rituals by night? Why would groups of people revel in death, blood, eating excrement, fornicating with dead bodies? Is it possible for any group of humans to keep this big a secret for this long? Where is the evidence? And what could it mean to our vision of the world if, in fact, these activities are going on in a relatively widespread fashion? Who could blame any rational person for preferring an explanation that focuses on the somewhat mystical concept of hysteria that firmly bases the explanation within the imaginative pathology of the patient - usually the female patient.

A psychohistorical perspective implicitly demands a willingness to look at the other half of reality, the part we would just as soon not see, the threatening but obvious irrationality of historical and political events, of individuals and groups. Nothing illustrates the irrational as much as the alleged beliefs and practices of satanist cults. For many therapists and laypeople, the willingness to believe in the real existence of such people and practices comes gradually, a process of incremental acceptance of human cruelty and sadism, more than the sudden conversion to a belief in the unbelievable. This gradual process of exposure makes the unbelievable more believable because the shield of denial that surrounds us in our daily life is gradually reduced rather than being suddenly shattered or threatened. Much of the entire difficulty in making any sense of the present "dialogue" between those who advocate that patients' memories of abuse are false and those who assert that they are all or partially true hinges on the issues of credibility and experience.

As I have stated in another work, "Ten years ago, had a patient come to me and told me that they had been sexually and physically abused in a satanic cult, that they had been forced to engage in the most degrading of acts, that they had participated in the sacrifice and cannibalism of infants and adults, I would have diagnosed them as suffering from some form of paranoid disorder and I would have tried antipsychotic medications to treat their delusions. I would have labeled their dissociative experiences psychotic. I would have found any excuse to get them out of my practice and out of my life. I could not bear to believe that such things are possible. Now I recognize that there is a very long continuum of human pain and human possibility" (Bloom, 1994).

## SPEAKING FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

My comments must be understood within the context of my own experience. I have been running an inpatient psychiatric unit since 1980. Around 1986, we began recognizing that we had been denying the impact of childhood abuse on many of our patients, even though, in many cases, we had that information available to us. Our patients did not suddenly begin telling us about their abuse as a result of influence from us, the media, or anyone else. They had been telling us all along, we had just been refusing to listen (Jacobson & Richardson, 1987). When we reviewed old charts of patients who had been readmitted to our unit we discovered that they often had told us about information that only now began to make sense. We had a particularly interesting situation since, being in a relatively stable community with a stable practice, many of our patients were people we treated before and after we had begun to recognize abuse as a major treatment issue and we were therefore able to see our own “before and after” results. As we expressed a willingness to take this information more seriously and include it in our treatment recommendations, our patients began to respond rather dramatically to the change in us, in our willingness to see them as credible informants about their own histories, as suffering human beings who deserved our respect rather than our disdain. When we began validating the horror and injustice of their experiences and in return offered a comprehensive cognitive framework within which they could understand and begin to restructure their symptoms, treatment became much more effective and patients previously considered virtually hopeless began to show improvement which has been sustained. Many of these patients entered treatment with clear memories of their childhood physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Others had fragments of memories but had begun having flashback experiences that were vivid and terrifying. Still others, with symptoms similar to the first two groups, remembered little until after they had entered treatment. For the first several years, we had few preconceptions about the nature of the entire recovery process. This was all new material to us. Little that we had been taught in our various training programs prepared us for what we were inadvertently uncovering. I can say quite unequivocally that we had no previous agenda, no ax to grind, no crusade to launch. We simply were willing to admit that up until that point our methods of treatment and the extent of our understanding of psychiatric disorder was quite limited and we were, therefore, still open to new learning. What we learned was not from textbooks, was not anything we wanted to know about, was not conveyed easily or comfortably to us by our patients. The reality of child abuse was hard to digest, internally conflictual for us all, made us feel contaminated, deskilled, angry, resentful, disgusted, frightened, and sad. Only our respect for these survivors of traumatic experience kept us able and willing to listen. As we began to recognize their courage instead of seeing only their failures, they inadvertently rewarded our “efforts” by improving, and like any other scientific discovery, we suspected that we were on to something quite important, something with major implications for the culture.

But not everyone improved. Gradually we began to notice a subgroup of patients whose symptoms were similar to those of our most traumatized survivors, symptoms also consistent with those of other survivor groups who had suffered severe, prolonged, dehumanizing experiences - Holocaust survivors, victims of torture, prisoners of war. Many of them also were diagnosed as suffering from multiple personality disorder known to be

etiologically linked to severe, repetitive, and inescapable trauma in childhood. But there were also differences in their clinical presentation, differences that though hard to quantify were easily identifiable by the entire clinical team. Their symptoms were somehow, worse, more severe, more disabling, more encompassing. Their general level of terror was higher, more paralyzing, more persistent. They would be “triggered” by an unusual number of everyday articles like knives, articles of clothing, jewelry, by specific dates, by symbols, particularly religious symbols although they were not necessarily religious. And when any of these objects or events triggered a flashback experience similar to many other trauma survivors, their fear and symptoms of physiological hyperarousal were markedly greater and far more difficult to soothe. Their ability to connect with other human beings was significantly more impaired than others and they had a clearer tendency to test the boundaries and reliability of relationships than other patients with the more typical intrafamilial abuse. They showed more difficulty tolerating group therapy and appeared to be particularly disturbed by the physical layout of the group in a circle, especially if music was in any way involved in the group setting. They had a pronounced heightened tendency to dissociate in the group setting as well, and tended to be more dissociative than even other multiple personality patients. In their art work, they consistently limited themselves to using only reds, blacks, and grays and the same representations would appear over and over among people who had no contact with each other and had not even begun to talk about ritual abuse - bloody bodies on altars, tombstones, upside-down crosses, hooded and robed figures, crowds of watching figures, pentacles, blood, excrement, dismemberment, aborted fetuses, animals being killed. When asked about these drawings, the patient would often deny that they had any meaning, apparently oblivious of the actual content.

These patients had other characteristics that began to differentiate them from others on the unit once we became clinically sophisticated enough to notice. Victims of early childhood trauma often are quite self-destructive and victims of sexual abuse, particularly, commonly self-mutilate, often repeatedly inflicting cuts to their arms and legs. But these patients cut more and cut more bizarrely. Not infrequently they made wounds not just to their arms and legs but to their abdomens, their faces, their genitals. And we noticed that this behavior seemed to be provoked by much lower levels of distress than other patients. Additionally, their general level of rage, hostility, aggression, detachment from others, lack of trust, and impairment in the capacity to attach to others seemed much greater than patients, who for instance, were incest victims or victims of other kinds of sexual assault and more similar to reports of concentration camp survivors and other victims of prolonged imprisonment and torture (Lifton, 1993). When they did spontaneously form tight interpersonal bonds it was usually to patients with a similar constellation of symptoms and the two or three of them would quite rapidly form a “minicult” that became quite exclusive of other members of the community and an air of secrecy permeated these bonds, an attitude that only the other could truly understand their experience.

Despite the clinical evidence that these patients had been severely traumatized in unusual ways that were somehow quite different from the abuse suffered by other patients we were treating, we resisted the information that started to appear in the literature and conferences that pointed to the possibility of organized ritual abuse. It was too bizarre to contemplate, too irrational, too

horrible, too frightening. And this comes from clinicians who had been hearing bizarre tales of cruel and irrational behavior for years - children savagely beaten, deliberately burnt, tied to doghouses and starved, passed from family member to family member for sexual pleasure, and many of these accounts had corroborating evidence. We had spent years, by this time, bearing witness to human cruelty to children and yet we still resisted the possibility that such cruelty could spring from organized groups of family members and other adults who were presumably motivated by power, money, sadistic pleasure, and bizarre "religious" beliefs, despite the obvious existence of child pornography - which somebody must be filming - and the well-established practice of child prostitution documented in many areas of the world (Simons, 1993; Nash, 1993). To be perfectly frank, many of us still have a great deal of difficulty accepting the reality of satanic cults, and yet when faced with the clinical material, the actual presence and witness of the suffering patient, one cannot help but become convinced that the greatest danger is not that well-meaning clinicians will be found gullible in the face of histrionic patients. The greater danger is that as we colluded for the last century in denying the reality of child abuse, so too will we deny the more flagrant examples of human evil, despite the manifest twentieth century examples of the Nazis, the Cosa Nostra, the torturers in South America and Southeast Asia, or closer to home, Dresden, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Iraq.

Many of the questions raised by skeptics are valid and need to be answered, but answers need to be sought from a perspective of open-minded investigation, not from the point of view of absolute belief or non-belief, and too frequently the critics are as strident, sarcastic, self-assured, and condescending about their criticism as the true believers are in their certainty. As the matter stands now, we cannot be sure about the extent of ritual abuse. Although there have not been many convictions there have been some and even in the most widely known cases there has been a great deal of information that leads one to question not so much the innocence of the alleged perpetrators as the faulty investigative procedures or legal procedures of the criminal investigative and judicial branches of various levels of government (Kahaner, 1988; Sinason, 1994; Summit, 1987; Tate, 1991; Timarkin, 1993). It certainly is possible that there are other explanations that could explain the similarities between the symptoms of these patients and those of other victims of prolonged coercive control, including explanations that focus on fantasized elaborations of actual family pathology (Lotto, 1994), but such explanations do not apply consistently to all the cases. No one has investigated the possibility that some of these patients may have experienced very early infant or childhood traumatic experiences like premature birth and the use of incubators, surgical experiences, accidents, prolonged illnesses to see if there may be a correlation, experiences that to a young, nonverbal child could feel persecutory, life-threatening, and tortuous.

But for us to believe that satanic, organized, ritual abuse does not occur, someone is going to have to offer us an explanation that is at least as credible as the eye witness accounts of our adult patients and the child patients of our colleagues. This is not to say that every person who says that they were ritually abused was, or that the country is actually being run by a bunch of satanists. Incompetent therapists do exist, memory is at times fallible, people are at times open to the influence of others, and there are cases in which people would presumably rather believe they were victimized by an anonymous cult

rather than by their beloved father, but nonetheless it is impossible to rule out the existence of organized, motivated criminal behavior by a group of adult sadists who require an ever increasing level of sadistic behaviors in order to have their perverted urges sated. We would much prefer to believe that Jeffrey Dahmer is the only human being sitting around enjoying eating people, but after our exposure of the last several years, we are fully aware that human aberration is more common than any of us would like to admit. We would like to forget that the roots of human social experience go back to human sacrifice in virtually all parts of the globe and power has always been gained by killing others (Tierney,1989). Although we do not want to believe in the existence of satanist cults, and despite the fact that we have no evidence other than the walking evidence of our damaged patients, we do find it possible now to believe that they COULD exist. And to properly investigate this phenomenon we have to get it out of the realm of belief and into the realm of possibility while looking for proof.

## THE "FALSE MEMORY SYNDROME" CONTROVERSY

Given the inflammatory nature of the abuse material in general, and the cult material specifically, and given the enormous social implications of any meaningful attempt to correct the situations in which abuse flourishes, it should come as no surprise that a backlash phenomenon would occur, not entirely unlike the "denial of the Holocaust" movement (Lipstadt, 1993).

The False Memory Syndrome Foundation originated in Philadelphia in 1992. It was founded by Dr. Pamela Freyd, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, who is not clinically trained. Dr.Freyd serves as the executive director of the Foundation. The Foundation was formed to "aid the victims of what is being called false memory syndrome." The FMSF quickly founded a board of directors upon which sat some prominent clinicians including Dr. Harold Lief, a psychiatrist who had treated Dr. Freyd and her husband in the early '80's. Ralph Underwager, another prominent board member of the FMSF resigned last year after giving an interview to a Dutch journal of pedophilia in which he described sex with children as a "responsible choice for the individual" (Fried, 1994). According to a newspaper article, Dr. Freyd "started the foundation because she has had 'personal experience' with a child conjuring up false memories" (Every, 1992). Recently it has been made public that the personal experience referred to by Dr. Freyd is quite personal, since her daughter, a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon accused her father of having molested her as a child (Freyd, 1993).

The members of this group are predominantly parents and family members who have been accused of abusing - usually sexually abusing - their children. It is of note that the need for such an organization is at least temporally related to lawsuits filed against parents as a result of changes in the statutes of limitation for many states. The annual budget of the foundation now is over \$600,000 (Fried, 1994).

The Problem, as stated in the False Memory Syndrome Foundation statement of mission and purpose is this:

*Increasingly throughout the country, grown children while undergoing "therapeutic" programs have come to believe that they suffer from "repressed memories" of incest and sexual abuse. While some reports of incest and sexual abuse are surely true, these "decade-delayed memories" are too often the result of False Memory Syndrome caused by a disastrous "therapeutic" program. False Memory Syndrome has a devastating effect on the victim and typically produces a continuing dependency on the very program that creates the syndrome. False Memory Syndrome proceeds to destroy the psychological well-being of not only the primary victim but - through false accusations of incest and sexual abuse - of other members of the primary victim's family. (FMS Foundation)*

The use of the medical term "syndrome" is interesting since it lends credibility to something that has not yet been shown to exist, for which there have been no clinical trials, no scientifically controlled comparison groups, no research to document or quantify the alleged phenomenon. It is also of interest that the word "false" suggesting an element of lying and deception, was chosen instead of possibly more accurate words like distorted, layered, complex, confused, or altered (Olio, 1993).

The Foundation appears to be composed of a variety of people with different issues as complaints. Some appear to dislike survivor groups and the self-help movement, leveling rather vicious attacks at books like "The Courage To Heal", a self-help book for incest survivors. Others report on the unreliability of hypnotic or drug-induced recovery of memory, others deny the reality of the possibility of repressed memory claiming there is no such thing, others base their incredulity on the reports of ritual abuse, still others question the epidemiological findings (Loftus, 1992, 1993; Ofshe & Watters, 1993; Olio, 1993). Some of the criticism that is lodged against the field is correct and warranted. But there is a notable lack of substantiation for their claims and a degree of overgeneralization that is definitely "unscientific". Yet they have received a great deal of publicity nationally and internationally for their claims. The Freyd family has been called "the most influentially dysfunctional family in America" (Fried, 1994). Little attention has been paid to the notable fact that there has been an identifiable "false memory syndrome" known for centuries - perpetrators of many crimes are well known to deny charges brought against them. As David Calof has pointed out, "Advocates of false memory often paint a picture of an idyllic family victimized by overzealous or unethical therapists and lying clients. They avoid discussing the possibility of lying, sociopathy, amnesia, dissociation, alcohol blackout, and other "false memories" of the families themselves" (Calof, 1993). Even FMSF board members have admitted privately that they assume that at least some of the members of their organization are guilty as accused (Fried, 1994).

The premise is basically that through a variety of methods - suggestion, hypnosis, drugs - therapists are implanting pseudomemories of abuse into thousands of unwitting patients' heads. Memory is fallible and certain memory research studies are used as support for this claim. The implication is that a great deal of the motivation for all this is greed on the part of therapists and lawsuits against therapists are encouraged. This "flood" of cases is being created by therapists because it makes them money, not because there are so

many people who have been abused. Patients are just trying to blame someone else for their problems that can be explained in other ways. Interestingly, it is never stated what all those other explanations actually are. There is a presumption that somehow, accusing your closest relatives of the highest act of betrayal creates a simple solution to one's problems, presumably only for women. Naive and suggestible, hysterical women - there are few complaints related to male victims - are being led falsely astray by greedy or ignorant therapists who use Svengalian methods to dredge up false memories and then direct the patients to terminate all ties with their innocent, but beleaguered parents. Interestingly also is that the focus of attention is on sexual abuse, not physical abuse, neglect, or emotional abuse, despite the fact that many of the presenting symptoms are similar..

It must be kept in mind that there have not yet been any documented, controlled studies that support any of these claims. Scientific terminology is used to describe anecdotal events, studies done on normal people are applied to traumatic situations, most members of the professional board have relatively little clinical experience in dealing with many of the abuse-related syndromes, no other substantial explanation for these syndromes has been offered that positively influences the course of treatment. Nor is there any explanation for how perfectly normal, supposedly healthy human beings could be influenced, sometimes within a session or two, by a perfect stranger, to suddenly and spuriously believe that someone in their family had molested them as a child. This goes against everything we know about attachment behavior. If people are so astonishingly susceptible to suggestion then we would like to know why patients have been so reluctant to respond to our oft-repeated suggestions that they trade in their symptomatic behavior for healthier actions. This simply defies, not just clinical experience, but common sense. Go up to a friend, relative, or stranger on the street and say something insulting about a member of their family and they are much more likely to react violently against you than they are to agree with your negative judgment. Children tend to be extremely protective of family members even as adults and although they may say negative things about their parents, they are likely to defend those same parents against the criticism of others.

Let us focus for a minute on the epidemiologic argument that basically alleges that the rates of sexual abuse are grossly overestimated. By now, there have been many studies that support the incidence of child abuse in this country and throughout the world, the best being a study done by sociologist Diana Russell, indicating that one girl in three is sexually abused by age 18 (Russell, 1986). To claim that these numbers are highly controversial is just nonsense. Nothing in science can be considered to be absolutely "proven", but there is considerable support for the hypothesis that a significant proportion of the female and male population are sexually abused in childhood.

The memory question also must be addressed. Dr. Elizabeth Loftus has been an active member of the FMSF Board. Her area of interest is in the mechanism of memory. She has been able to create false memories in the minds of volunteers (Loftus, 1992). However, neither she nor anyone else have in any way recreated the traumatic situations which characterize our patients' experience. It is clearly injudicious, and scientifically invalid to generalize from research findings on normal subjects and apply these findings to traumatic memory. There is a growing body of research evidence based on human and animal data, that the mechanism of memory that is functioning during states

of terror and hyperarousal is quite different from that of normal memory encoding (Herman, 1993; Van der Kolk, 1993), so different in fact, that they are not really comparable.

Judith Herman and Mary Harvey have put the memory research problem quite cogently:

*"To generalize from these findings [laboratory findings of normal memory and the acquisition of false memory] to the real situation of adult survivors, it is necessary to make four assumptions. 1) The patient is as suggestible as a motivated student volunteer, and trusts her therapist as much as that volunteer trusts a brother or sister [the experimental situation]. 2) The therapist, unassisted by the patient's family, is capable of planting a wholly inaccurate, scripted scenario in the patient's mind. 3) An adult patient who has not been abused would find the idea of sexual abuse by a trusted caretaker or devoted parent as plausible as a moderately upsetting event that might occur even in the happiest childhood, such as being temporarily lost in a store, and finally 4) False memories inspired by therapists are not only theoretically possible, but also probable enough to warrant an especially high degree of skepticism. No evidence supports any one of these assumptions; to string all four of them together violates the rule of parsimony. Such speculations fail to meet minimal standards of serious social research (Herman and Harvey, 1993).*

It is also worthy of note that in all the studies used to discredit patient's memories, what is not recalled, or recalled falsely are relatively insignificant details of events. People falsely remembered where they were when the Challenger disaster occurred, but no one falsely remembered that it happened and people died. In fact, more recent evidence on the San Francisco earthquake by the same people who did the Challenger study indicates that "memories of the circumstances surrounding the earthquake for those subjects who actually experienced the earthquake were essentially perfect" (Olio, 1993).

Among the proponents of the "false memory syndrome", there are frequent claims that repressed memory does not exist, although apparently the concept of "normal forgetting" or "motivation driven memory failure" are not so open to question, even among the memory researchers critical of repression, although no one has satisfactorily demonstrated to us the differences between these terms (Olio, 1993; Watters, 1993). Yet, in a study done by Herman and Schatzow in 1987, most of the study group of sexually abused women reported delayed recall after a period of either partial or complete amnesia and 75% of them obtained independent corroborating evidence for the abuse. Another 9% found strongly suggestive but not conclusive evidence. Another 11% did not attempt to find confirmation. Only 6% could not find any supporting evidence (Herman and Schatzow, 1987).

In another recent study, Linda Williams of the Family Violence Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire found that of 200 children who had been part of an NIMH study on sexual abuse in the early 1970's, one in three did not remember the experiences that had been documented in their

hospital records twenty years before (Herman and Harvey, 1993; Williams, 1992).

The False Memory Syndrome Foundation has raised legitimate concerns, particularly about poorly trained therapists. Adults who have been abused as children often present with a complex array of symptoms that have been unresponsive to other interventions. To the extent that the "false memory" debate encourages the mental health field to be more rigorous in its scientific and ethical methodologies, it serves a highly constructive purpose. To the extent that the debate encourages a resurgence of social denial of abuse and protects the perpetrators, it serves a highly destructive purpose. Although there is no good documentation for the consistent presence of false memory on the part of victims, there is a great deal of documentation for the presence of false memory on the part of perpetrators. The organized and motivated torture of other human beings for political, financial, religious, and ideological purposes can be found throughout history. If an entire movement can be founded denying the reality of the Holocaust as an "other side" of history (Lipstadt, 1993), then it is entirely conceivable that large portions of a society can deny the more covert forms of abuse that originate within the family structure. As has been well- documented, there is a long history of denial and false memory on the part of the mental health profession and the society it represents (DeMause, 1990, 1991; Greaves, 1992; Herman, 1992; Masson, 1984; Rush, 1980; Summit, 1987,1988,1989,1992; Van der Kolk, 1990). But, when we are able to stop denying the reality of the cruelty that human beings inflict upon each other, then we are able to look at the role that trauma has played in the creation of many of the world's problems including many psychiatric disorders.

## DENIAL AND SHIFTING PARADIGMS

**"The root of the kingdom is in the state. The root of the state is in the family.  
The root of the family is in the person of its head."**

**Mencius, 372-289 B.C.**

The most profoundly interesting aspect of the entire false memory- ritual abuse controversy is the heated and emotionally-charged nature of the discussion under the guise of academic dialogue. This is not surprising since in focusing on child abuse - particularly incest and the even more provocative cult behavior, it is the family itself that is under attack, the fundamental building block and school for our present culture, the place where children receive their first indoctrination in how to fit into our society. The cynical playwright, Strindberg, called the family, "...the home of all social vices, where children are taught to tell their first lie." The relationship between the family and the society is intimate and reciprocal. Carl Jung said, "The little world of childhood with its familiar surroundings is a model of the greater world. The more intensively the family has stamped its character upon the child, the more it will tend to feel and see its earlier miniature world again in the bigger world of adult life (Jung, 1953). The fundamental role of the family is to guarantee the survival of the species by providing for the protection and training of its members. The family has been under attack for some time; treatises have been written about the nature of this attack, its causes and proposed solutions. But no matter how

many suggestions are offered, nothing much seems to change - the traditional family system continues to deteriorate.

In fact, none of our traditional systems appear to be working very well. Violence is escalating rapidly, educational standards are continuing to decline. The political system does not appear to be adequately prepared to meet the demands of rapidly changing times. Environmental pollution continues to be an ever-present even if denied, threat. War is breaking out all over and the world community is helpless in the grip of ethnic hostilities. It seems clear that we have reached the limits of our present knowledge base, our way of viewing the world. Though conservatives throughout the world repeatedly urge citizens to revert to the "old ways", the tide of change and information cannot be stopped without sacrificing the benefits of modern civilization. We seem to need a major shift in our way of thinking, doing, and being. In his book, *The Creative Moment: How Science Made Itself Alien to Modern Culture*, Joseph Schwartz sums up the present dilemma:

Creative moments are not mysterious products of genius but represent the conjunction of complex social events....Taken in historical sequence, the creative moments of Western science tell a story of the rise and present stagnation of the West. The industrial revolution has failed to materialize the hopes of universal emancipation raised by the promise of material abundance. Instead of global plenty and of the creative engagement of the human being with all aspects of culture that was envisaged by the scientific romantics of the nineteenth century, the human race is trapped in a web of exploitative relationships, with nature and with each other, which produces a dazzling culture of consumption for a minority in the North and a culture of acute poverty for the majority in the South. But at the same time our science, more than any other single human activity, shows clearly that we as a species have the capacity to create our world. The promise is still there(Schwartz, 1992).

According to Thomas Kuhn, who wrote "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions", a "paradigm shift" is a radical change in the underlying assumptions upon which knowledge is based. A paradigm shift is a cultural phenomenon that occurs gradually following a certain hypothetical course. For years, often for centuries, the established paradigm is felt to account quite successfully for most of the observations and experiments easily accessible to the science's practitioners. Certain anomalies are noted, but are used as the exceptions that "prove the rule". Anomalies are not enough to change a paradigm. There must be a growing state of crisis, a period characterized by pronounced professional insecurity. Something happens and the old rules just do not work anymore and many workers in the field begin questioning the old rules and begin searching for new rules that work more effectively.

There has been a growing crisis in psychotherapy for quite some time as indicated by all of the many theories and practices that have sprung onto the scene since Freud introduced psychoanalysis. There is usually an inverse relationship between the number of potential cures and effectiveness of treatment, meaning, if we really had our hands on a technique that was reliable, widely effective, efficient, and had few detrimental side effects, we would not require so many different alternatives. In reality, we are only beginning to understand how, when, and why psychotherapy works - it is, after all, a very young area of study, partly science and partly art, and profoundly influenced by the culture within which it is practiced. Such a situation,

however, leads to a great deal of experimentation and recently, as a result of information about trauma, workers in the mental health field have been widely questioning old rules and searching for new rules that work more effectively. The discovery that uncovering childhood trauma dramatically improves symptoms in cases considered previously untreatable has had a profound effect on many clinicians.

At this point in a paradigm shift, scientists struggle to fit all the anomalies into the existing paradigm. It is clear, according to Kuhn, that scientists only give up one paradigm when there is an alternative. "The decision to accept one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another.... to reject one paradigm without simultaneously substituting another is to reject science itself" (Kuhn, 1970). However, before this switch occurs, scientists will attempt, sometimes going to extreme lengths, to fit the new material into the old paradigm and make it fit, something like Cinderella's stepsisters trying to jam their big feet into the tiny glass slipper. When an anomaly, or many anomalies, come to seem more than just another puzzle of normal science, the transition to crisis and to extraordinary science has begun. The anomaly itself now comes to be more generally recognized as such by the profession. More and more attention is paid to it by increasingly imminent scholars. For them, the field will no longer look quite the same as it had earlier. More and more anomalies will be noted, the rules of normal science become increasingly blurred, few practitioners agree about what exactly is going on but they know something is. "All crises begin with the blurring of a paradigm and the consequent loosening of the rules for normal research". At this point there are three possible courses. Sometimes normal science proves able to handle the crisis and the established paradigm reasserts itself. On other occasions, the crisis is recognized as unsolvable and set aside for future generations to solve. OR - and this most concerns us - a crisis ends with the emergence of a new paradigm and with the ensuing battle over its acceptance.

The above description suits the present reality. Representatives of the old paradigm, clinicians who have had relatively little experience in understanding the effects of trauma or treating people who have recognized the trauma in their backgrounds, continue to try the same old explanations that have not been terribly effective in bringing about change in the past in the patients who we are describing. This is entirely understandable. We have all invested a great deal of time, energy, money, and expertise at learning all the old theories, all the old methods. It is shattering to have to entertain the possibility that much of what you have been doing over the years has been either flatly wrong or inadequate to meet the needs of the patient. After all, for many years clinicians have labeled much of our patients' inability to heal, "resistance", when we have now discovered that much of their "resistance" was actually our reluctance to really listen to what they had to say, much less to extend ourselves to empathize with their very real pain. But regardless of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, the voice of the victim cannot be silenced now. There are just too many anomalies crowding in on us, too many inexplicable phenomenon - like overcrowded prisons, increasing rates of violence, teenage murders - that demand explanations that cannot be encompassed by the old theories.

A new paradigm is not an extension of an old paradigm. "Rather it is a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well

as many of its paradigm methods and applications....When the transition is complete the profession will have changed its view of the field, its methods, and its goals... The resulting transition to a new paradigm is scientific revolution.... Confronted with anomaly or with crisis, scientists take a different attitude toward existing paradigms, and the nature of their research changes accordingly. The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit content, the recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research" (Kuhn, 1970).

Kuhn points out the relationship between scientific and political revolution and notes that the choice between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life. As is typical of human nature, and maybe of the process of creation itself, competition emerges between the two rival paradigm with each vying for the allegiance of the scientific community. But representatives of the two paradigms essentially live in different worlds; they see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. The switch from one paradigm to another is often made as a conversion, as a change in a gestalt, all at once. But it is a switch that cannot be forced and sometimes will be absolutely refused, particularly by those whose productive careers have committed them to an older tradition. This "old guard" in their resistance to a change in paradigm, guarantee that scientists of the new paradigm will do their homework and do it thoroughly. "The very fact that a significant scientific novelty so often emerges simultaneously from several laboratories is an index both to the strongly traditional nature of normal science and to the completeness with which that traditional pursuit prepares the way for its own change."

Eventually, a generation or so later, the entire profession will have switched to the new paradigm. The rapidity of changeover will be determined to a great extent by the new paradigm's success in solving formerly unresolvable problems.

It is no coincidence that the results of child abuse have been noted and are being discussed all around the world. We are in the early stages of a revolution not unlike earlier periods like the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. When the fifteenth century scientists recognized that the Earth - and therefore man and the Church - were not the center of the universe, they risked burning at the stake to say so. To save their lives, those scientists gave over the study of the mind to the church in order to be free to pursue the study of nature and the body (Schwartz, 1992). The ideas of the Enlightenment began the overthrow of the rule of kings, the patriarchs, to be replaced by democracy, freedom, free speech, equal rights, integration. The objective of this revolution is to reclaim the mind, the psyche, the soul, the spirit as valid objects of study so that unconscious wishes, desires, motivations, and hopes can be made conscious and open to choice. In this revolution it is therapists who are under attack because we are the "astronomers" of the late twentieth century - only it is inner space, not outer space, that is the site of this monumental shift. The aspirations of the Enlightenment can not be fulfilled until man has made a shift in consciousness. Consciously we desire a global community, organized around democracy, freedom, justice, and prosperity - yet our actions betray unconscious desires that are contrary to our conscious wishes. The ideals that we teach our children in our families are contradicted by the way we act in the

world - and in the dark hours within the family. To make conscious what is unconscious we must start at home.

The “false memory” controversy is one of the dying gasps of the old paradigm and the ferocity of the anger, the defensiveness of the arguments are evidence of the ferocity with which the old fights the new. Under the guise of an academic argument over the details of memory, family arguments and ancient family wounds are placed upon the public stage. It is fascinating that without any substantiating data, the claims of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation have been embraced in the press as equal in “truth” to a body of knowledge that encompasses years of careful study, research, documentation and experience. Why? Because we all would prefer to go back to the hypothetical days of “Father Knows Best”, imagined times when Father was all-knowing, all-loving and wise, when Mother was his helpmeet, and Children were safe, secure, well-behaved

The cult world, as described by ritual abuse survivors, epitomizes the negative extreme of a world view that is simply no longer tenable, but still exerts significant sway over the functioning of major global systems. Cult abuse then becomes a useful metaphor for a system of values that can be seen as the root of all our present, seemingly inescapable problems. Ritual abuse survivors, therefore, are able to poignantly and painfully give voice to their victimization within a value system that is only the extreme end of a continuum within which we are all both victims and perpetrators. This confusion between subject and object, this subliminal recognition that the experiences that cult survivors describe are uncannily similar to experiences that go on in an attenuated form in our everyday lives, may serve to explain the magnitude of our resistance to this material. We choose to deny the reality of cult abuse without noticing the similarities between the behavior described and reports of atrocities in Germany under Hitler, Russia under Stalin, the United States in the nineteenth century; Cambodia, Vietnam, Bosnia, Somalia, and other sites of torment and torture throughout the apparently civilized world.

The values of the cult world are the troublesome values of the Western, Judeo-Christian, patriarchal, dichotomized, fragmented, materialistic, capitalistic system which are then stood on end, exaggerated, and hypertrophied. Within such a system the world is neatly divided into good and evil set within an endless dialectic of an eternal combat for power. The hierarchical leaders of this combat, God and Satan, are both archetypically male figures. In God's system the goal is to be free of all materialistic concerns; in Satan's the goal is to be totally involved in materialistic concerns, but as mirror opposites of each other, the engagement with the world of matter is inevitable and unresolvable. Both systems are characterized by the degradation and humiliation of other beings, human and nonhuman, in service of a subgroup of other humans, or a proposed ideal, or a material need. The decision about which group of humans will be victims and which will be perpetrators varies over time and place, but the dichotomy of inferior-superior, holy-unholy, worthy-unworthy, powerful-powerless remains. It must be kept in mind that the tendency to form cult beliefs appears to be an essential component of all humans since we manage to take virtually any useful theory and turn it into a rigid system of belief that then must be defended and protected, be it psychoanalysis, behaviorism, biological psychiatry, capitalism, communism, Catholicism, Protestantism, conservatism, liberalism, feminism, pacifism, or just about any other -ism. We pay little attention to how we are going to integrate apparent dichotomies into

a functioning whole, much less imagining the potential emergent qualities that could become arise as a result of such an integration. Organized cults are simply the extreme end of this all-too-human proclivity.

For many today, ritual abuse is an impossibility and for members of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, "it couldn't happen in my family". Chamberlain thought Hitler could be appeased. The victims of the Holocaust said it could never happen here, even while they were en route to the camps. The danger of denial is that we will miss the opportunity to respond to threat before it is too late. It is time for healing to begin. The perpetrators need to be confronted and they need to be stopped - but lest we see ourselves in the role of vengeful angels - there is a perpetrator inside each of us and every family has a skeleton in the closet. Hitler isn't out there - he lives within the unconscious confines of each human mind. Revenge is not sweet - it only leads to the need for more revenge. We need to listen to the voices of the survivors because they have so much to teach us about ourselves.

**Rejected by mankind, the condemned do not go so far as to reject it in turn. Their faith in history remains unshaken, and one may well wonder why. They do not despair. The proof: they persist in surviving - not only to survive, but to testify.**

**The victims elect to become witnesses.**

**Elie Wiesel**

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The author would like to thank J. Foderaro, R. Ryan, J. Vogel, M. DeArment, and E. Mayro for their assistance in the preparation of this paper.