

**HONORING THE TRUTH:
A RESPONSE TO THE BACKLASH**

by ELLEN BASS and LAURA DAVIS

from

**THE COURAGE TO HEAL:
A GUIDE FOR WOMEN SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

THIRD EDITION, 1994

published by HarperCollins

“Honoring the Truth” is a response to the current backlash against adult survivors of child sexual abuse. If you’ve watched TV, listened to the radio, or read newspapers or magazines in the past two years, it’s likely that you’ve heard about the “false memory syndrome” and have witnessed attacks on survivors’ memories and credibility. It is these attacks we are responding to here.

As in the rest of *The Courage to Heal*, we have included the experiences of survivors as well as practical self-help information. Unlike the rest of the book, however, we also incorporate here the work of therapists, researchers, and other experts—and more than a hundred footnotes—to place this backlash in a historical and political perspective.¹

A number of survivors and professionals have read “Honoring the Truth.” Most appreciated having clear information and an analysis of the issues. One survivor wrote to us, “I felt a lot of the cloudiness of the issue fall away—I felt reassured and validated.” Another said, “I am not as likely to get sucked into the fear and doubt that the backlash is trying to perpetuate.” Yet this same survivor said it had been a lot harder to read than she

¹ In writing *The Courage to Heal*, we listened to survivors of child sexual abuse and presented what we learned in a clear, practical, and respectful way. In writing “Honoring the Truth,” we again listened to survivors, as well as therapists who work with survivors, researchers, and other professionals and activists whose views have very much informed our thinking. We thank all of you who have written and spoken—publicly and privately. We also thank all those who contributed by generously sharing both information and feedback:

Our irreplaceable and irreverent research assistant, Shana Ross, for whom no job was too big—or too small. Our editor, Janet Goldstein, for her commitment to ensuring that *The Courage to Heal* continues to address the needs of survivors with integrity. Our agent, Charlotte Raymond, for her encouragement, advocacy, and dedication.

Our colleagues at *Moving Forward*, Lana Lawrence, Linda Palmer, and Susan Neill, for their hard work and willingness to make “Honoring the Truth” available prior to its publication in *The Courage to Heal*.

Our readers, whose careful critique informed our thinking and infused our work with their collective wisdom: Sherry Anderson, Kathy Barbini, Sandra Butler, Christine Courtois, Abram Davis, Jill Freeland, Denise Gaul, Evelyn Hall, Mary Harvey, Judith Herman, Leslie Ingram, Jaimee Karroll, Richard Kluff, Dan Lobovits, Teri Ray, Shauna Smith, Maxine Stein, Mary Tash, Ellie Waxman, and Judy Wilbur-Albertson. Special thanks to the Dayenu Club—Lucy Diggs, Jennifer Freyd, Barb Jackson, Lana Lawrence, Susan Frankel, Larry Klein, Karen Olio, Nona Olivia, Anna Salter, Margot Silk-Forrest, and Roland Summit—who not only read the manuscript but shared their time and knowledge in countless other ways. Many others contributed time, information, and resources: Brian Abbott, Patricia Alexander Weston, John Backus, Mary Jo Barrett, Pamela Birrell, Laurie Braga, John Briere, Jennifer Carnes, Teri Cosentino, Renee Fredrickson, Gail Gans, Faye Gorman, Jaime Guerrero, Cory Hammond, Val Hartouni, Lisa Lipshires, Elizabeth Loftus, Màiri Mc Fall, Chrystine McCracken, Kee McFarlane, Rebecca Northcutt, Jackie Ortega, Sherri Paris, Judith Peterson, John Rhead, Margo Ross, Lynne Sansevero, Mark Schwartz, Jane Sinclair, Gary Stickel, Gayle Stringer, Patricia Toth, Heidi Vanderbilt, Charlotte Watson, and Linda Meyer Williams.

had thought it would be:

If I had read this in 1988 at the beginning of my healing, I would have been overwhelmed and fearful. Hell, it is five years later and I'm still a bit overwhelmed. It is difficult to hear that there is an entire organization working against me and my healing. For me, survivor work is basically something I do on my own. It isn't political; it isn't a matter of social responsibility; it's simply living or not living. Now, however, I understand that there is much more at stake. Staying in my closet of isolation was certainly challenged by reading it.

There is material in “Honoring the Truth” that may be deeply disturbing to you. We have included information about the patterns and behavior of perpetrators. We have also documented the extensive backlash against survivors. This information may feel distressing or overwhelming to you. Memories and feelings from your original abuse could be restimulated. For this reason, we want to stress that reading this section is not a required part of the healing process. The way you read it—or whether you read it at all—is up to you. If you're struggling to keep your equilibrium as it is, you may not want to delve into information that could distress you further. If, on the other hand, the backlash has already upset you, you may feel less threatened if you educate yourself about the forces behind it.

If material disseminated by the backlash has you confused, worried, or angry, you may want to turn right to the suggestions in “Personal Strategies for Dealing with the Backlash” on page **XXX** or to “Rachel's Story” on page **XXX**. If you're looking for a social, political, or historical perspective, start at the beginning. Throughout, we present accurate information about sexual abuse, memory, the impact of trauma, and healing.

Check in with yourself as you read. If you find yourself spacing out or feeling overwhelmed, take a break, put the book down, or turn to a different section. Skip any parts that contain more information than you want. Read a little bit now and more later. Or save this entire section for another time. The choice is up to you.

THE EMERGING BACKLASH

Since 1992 we have watched with growing concern the emerging backlash against survivors of child sexual abuse, their supporters, and the significant social progress they have made made. There has been a barrage of articles, magazine stories, and radio and TV talk shows that have attacked the credibility of sexual abuse survivors, their therapists, and support books such as *The Courage to Heal*. Headlines like “Repressed Memories, Ruined Lives,” “Beware the Incest Survivor Machine,” and “When Memory Holds a Family Hostage” have appeared in newspapers across the country.² A typical article began:

This is a series about people who say it didn’t happen, people whose grown children entered psychotherapy or counseling and ended up accusing their parents of incest or even satanic ritual abuse. Speaking in the past tense of families that were once close and loving—but now are ripped to shreds—these parents believe their pain is because of a type of treatment gone awry: recovered memory therapy.³

Another started even more bluntly:

You’ve raised them, praised them, wiped their tears and noses, and finally bid your kids farewell on their voyage to adulthood. Now they’re back . . . to accuse you of rape.⁴

Many of those who challenge the credibility of survivors claim that recovered memories of child sexual abuse are untrue, that substantial numbers of people are falsely accused, and that those who say they are survivors often have been misled—or even brainwashed—by naive or manipulative therapists, authors, and book publishers.

Initially we thought the wisest response was to ignore these attacks, that the obvious truth of child sexual abuse would prevail. But to our dismay, highly biased

² *The San Jose Mercury News*, October 11, 1992, p. 21; *The New York Times Book Review*, January 3, 1993, p. 1; and *The San Francisco Examiner*, April 4, 1993, p. A-15.

³ *San Francisco Examiner*, April 4, 1993, p. A-15.

⁴ *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 17, 1992.

stories, lacking in historical context or political analysis, kept appearing in major newspapers across the country. Story after story passed off nearly identical quotes, distortions, and misinformation as fact. *The Courage to Heal* and other books were quoted out of context. Studies on the nature of memory were misrepresented. Extreme cases of abuse were presented as the norm so as to provoke disbelief about child sexual abuse. And stories of family strife were almost always told from the perspective of the people accused.

Most of the coverage has been extremely adversarial, belittling survivors, depicting them as gullible victims, vengeful children, or simply crazy. Unfortunately, survivors have heard this all too often.

As the backlash became a major media event, we began to hear from survivors, many of them alarmed by this nationwide assault on their integrity. One survivor wrote:

I was shocked and angered at the attacks against survivors and those who support survivors. The articles attacked so much of what I have gained strength from.

Some survivors have been deeply distressed by the hostility of the backlash. Others, especially those far along in their healing, have not been personally shaken by these attacks. They recognize the serious threat that such attitudes pose, but they have been able to maintain their equilibrium in the midst of this storm.

But for those new to the healing process or just beginning to sort through their histories, these public attacks on their credibility have been particularly devastating. To be suffering from intrusive flashbacks and frightening memories and then to be told that you're making it up—not just by your family, but by the national media—can make you feel that you are under siege. One survivor said simply, “It’s horrible to be uncovering memories in the face of a society that’s attacking you.”

The questions raised by the backlash feed on the self-doubts that are a natural part of the healing process. Many survivors have spent their lives pretending the abuse didn't happen, wishing it hadn't happened, or hearing their families tell them that they're crazy. In such circumstances it can be exceedingly difficult to accept and believe that the abuse

really took place.⁵ And now, bombarded with reports of “false memories,” survivors may find it even harder to trust themselves.

The fact that the public debate mirrors so much of the pain that survivors have known in their families makes it even more difficult. One woman explained, “For me this all goes back to my childhood, when I tried to tell and nobody believed me.” Another said:

This is a new page in my family’s sick history. My father has gotten wind of this. He’s called a family meeting and he wants to take a lie detector test. It’s such a joke. We haven’t had a family meeting in thirty years. We’ve never been a family.

For many survivors, it’s as if the abuse were happening all over again. Only this time, it’s not just their own families; it’s talk-show programs on the radio, it’s television, it’s newspaper articles, neighbors, and sometimes even friends. The trauma is retriggered, and feelings about the original abuse come rushing to the surface. One survivor explained:

I feel like there’s this sword of Damocles hanging over my head and the rope keeps fraying, and at any moment the sword is going to drop. It feels dangerous and scary, just like the original abuse.

Many survivors have been concerned about the impact this public wave of denial will have on their healing. They’ve expressed how excruciating it is to have their hard work in healing—and in changing the attitudes in our culture—undermined. One woman said:

The attacks being made on survivors and those who help them really scare me. It is frightening to think that therapists and people who

⁵ For a more thorough description of the role of doubt in the healing process, see “Believing It Happened,” on p. 96. And if you find yourself doubting your memories, see p. 78.

help survivors could come under such pressure—legal and otherwise—that they would no longer be able to provide their services. It feels like a real war.

And another:

The recent surge of attacks may cause an untold number of survivors to continue to suffer in silence, thereby protecting their abusers . . . and effectively perpetuating the already out-of-control cycle of abuse in this country.

Other survivors have been angry and asked what they could do to fight back. Still others have asked us, as authors of *The Courage to Heal*, for support and leadership:

On Saturday, I got a letter from my father urging me to “put aside my anger and bias” and read a pile of crap he sent me about “false memories.” For me, receiving the materials felt like an assault. I am hoping you can make a public response to some of this trash.

It was because of letters like these, and out of concern for the impact of this backlash on all survivors, that we decided to respond.

Our goals here are fourfold. First, we want to reassure you and offer you support—to remind you that you can trust yourself, your perceptions, your body, your memories—and to let you know, once more, that you’re not alone. Second, by putting this current backlash into historical perspective and analyzing some of its tactics, we hope to give you a deeper understanding and insight into the nature of these attacks. Third, we want to help you cope with any personal impact you may be feeling. If you are confused, are questioning your memories, or are angry and want to know what you can do, we’ll offer specific suggestions. And finally, we will recommend some future directions for moving forward in a positive and respectful way.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Since 1860, child abuse has been discovered and then discredited every 35 years by the most visionary clinicians of the day, each faced with the alternative of denouncing the discovery or succumbing to scorn and disgrace.⁶

—Roland Summit

This is not the first time survivors of child sexual abuse have been told they were lying, misguided, vindictive, imagining it, wanting it, or just plain crazy.

Early in his career, Sigmund Freud identified child sexual abuse as the cause of much mental and emotional illness in adulthood. By listening to his patients (a revolutionary idea in itself), he learned that many of the women and men he was treating had been sexually traumatized.⁷ Many had initial amnesia for the trauma, but when they were able to recall the events and talk about them, their contemporary symptoms subsided. When he put forth this discovery, Freud was criticized and ridiculed by his colleagues. Ultimately he recanted, and proposed instead that his patients had either fantasized the sex or had desired it.⁸ Thus scientific knowledge was put on a fast train backwards, and sexually abused children—and the adults they grew up to be—were left bereft.⁹

⁶ Roland Summit, “The Centrality of Victimization: Regaining the Focal Point of Recovery for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse,” *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 12, no. 2 (June 1989), p. 427. (Roland Summit is clinical associate professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine.)

⁷ Freud published his findings, “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” in 1896. His theory was based on his work with twelve women and six men.

⁸ Jean Goodwin, in “Credibility Problems in Multiple Personality Disorder Patients and Abused Children,” in *Childhood Antecedents of Multiple Personality*, ed. Richard P. Kluft (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1985), p. 6, points out that “Freud published several cases in which a patient’s account of prior sexual abuse was corroborated by a co-victim, a witness or by the adult participant. He never published a case of a corroborated false account of sexual abuse. Yet, Freud later expressed embarrassment at his ‘credulity’ in having believed stories of sexual seduction in childhood.”

⁹ The first to publish on Freud’s recanting of his theories was Florence Rush, in her article “Freud and the Sexual Abuse of Children,” in *Chrysalis*, a feminist journal, in 1977. Her subsequent book, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children*, Jeffrey Masson’s *The Assault on Truth: Freud’s Suppression of the Seduction Theory*, and Judith L. Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery* also extensively document this early history. For further information, see descriptions of these titles in the Resource Guide.

But Freud is not the only pioneer whose discoveries of child abuse were rejected. Even earlier, in 1860, French forensic physician Ambroise Tardieu published an exposé on battered children and later one on rape and child sexual abuse. His findings were immediately denounced by his contemporaries.

Also in France, Pierre Janet independently came to the same conclusions as Freud. He learned that the severe physical, mental, and emotional symptoms from which his patients suffered were caused by early trauma. He, too, was unsuccessful in convincing the medical profession, though he never recanted.

Freud's student Sandor Ferenczi confirmed not only that child sexual abuse could lead to severe psychological distress, but also that being listened to and comforted is healing. He spoke out on behalf of his patients until his death in 1933, yet his brilliant insights were never accepted.

In 1870 Josephine Butler campaigned against child prostitution, comparing the traffic in young girls to the slave trade. She was harassed by the London police and assaulted by the owners of brothels. Although her cause was supported by other prominent crusaders in Europe and in the United States, it wasn't until 1910 that the U.S. Congress passed the Mann Act, forbidding the transport of women and children across state lines for sexual exploitation.¹⁰

In 1946, when John Caffey discovered the physical evidence of child battering by means of x-rays, people still would not accept that abuse took place. They preferred to believe in genetic bone problems rather than face the reality that these children had been beaten. It was not until 1962, with the publication of "The Battered Child Syndrome," that child battering was finally recognized.¹¹

The acknowledgment of sexual abuse has met similar, if not greater, resistance.

¹⁰ Roland Summit documents Butler's, Tardieu's, and Ferenczi's work in "Hidden Victims, Hidden Pain: Societal Avoidance of Child Sexual Abuse," in *Lasting Effects of Child Sexual Abuse*, eds. Gail Elizabeth Wyatt and Gloria Johnson Powell (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), pp. 45–50.

For a fuller account of Josephine Butler's work, see Florence Rush, *The Best Kept Secret*. For more about Ferenczi, see Jeffery Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, and for more on Janet, see B. A. van der Kolk and O. van der Hart, "Pierre Janet and the Breakdown of Adaptation in Psychological Trauma," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 146 (1989): 1530–40 (summarized in Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*).

¹¹ C. H. Kempe, F. N. Silverman, B. F. Steele, W. Droegmuller, and H. Silver, "The Battered Child Syndrome," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 181 (1962), pp. 17–24.

Even when there were clear physical signs of incest, doctors refused to identify sexual abuse. Instead they fabricated rationales such as “victim promiscuity; congenital problems, such as absence of the hymen; or the consequences of excessive masturbation.”¹²

Until the 1980s, emerging accounts of child sexual abuse were met primarily with denial, minimization, and blaming the victim. In the first three-quarters of this century, sexual abuse was primarily considered the fault of the child. In 1907 Karl Abraham described a nine-year-old girl who had been led into the woods by a neighbor who then attempted to rape her. The child fought off the man and managed to run away, but Abraham wrote that she had “allowed herself to be seduced” and had “allowed him to go a long way in carrying out his purpose before she freed herself from him and ran off. It’s not to be wondered at that this child kept the occurrence secret.”¹³

In 1937 Loretta Bender and Adam Blau wrote, “These children undoubtedly do not deserve completely the cloak of innocence with which they have been endowed by moralists, social reformers and legislators.” Referring to the children’s “unusually charming and attractive . . . personalities,” they went on to conclude that “the child might have been the actual seducer rather than the one innocently seduced.”¹⁴

And in 1953, Alfred Kinsey and his fellow researchers documented the prevalence of child sexual abuse but minimized its impact. In a sample of over one thousand women, one in four reported sexual abuse. Eighty percent of these said they had been frightened by the encounters, but Kinsey and his colleagues discounted their accounts, writing, “It is difficult to understand why a child, except for its cultural conditioning, should be disturbed at having its genitalia touched.” They went on to express their belief that penalties for perpetrators were overly harsh: “In many instances

¹² Jean Goodwin, “Rediscovering Sadism,” in *Rediscovering Childhood Trauma* (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1993), pp. 90–91.

¹³ Karl Abraham, “The Experiencing of Sexual Traumas as a Form of Sexual Activity,” in *Selected Papers* (London: Hogarth, 1927), pp. 50–53. This and the following examples are drawn from Anna C. Salter’s *Treating Child Sex Offenders and Victims: A Practical Guide* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), pp. 22–40, in which she documents this history of denial, victim-bashing, and mother blame.

¹⁴ Loretta Bender and Adam Blau, “The Reaction of Children to Sexual Relations With Adults,” *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (October 1937), p. 514. As cited by Anna Salter.

the law, in the course of punishing the offender, does more damage to more persons than was ever done by the individual in his illicit sexual activity.”¹⁵

In 1962 Eugene Revitch and Rosalie Weiss wrote, “The majority of pedophiles are harmless individuals and their victims are usually known to be aggressive and seductive children.”¹⁶

And when sexual abuse was not being blamed on the victim, it was blamed on the mother. In 1966 Noel Lustig and his colleagues said that mothers of incest victims were really the ones responsible for the abuse: “While rejecting their husbands sexually and generating in them considerable sexual frustration and tension, they played conspicuous roles in directing the husbands’ sexual energies toward the daughters.”¹⁷

Numerous authors have concluded that mothers *want* their daughters to take over their sexual duties. In 1979 Blair and Rita Justice concluded that by “inviting the daughter to take over her role, she [the mother] is suggesting that the daughter also become her mate’s sexual partner.” Mothers, they went on to state, were to blame for incest because they were “weak, dependent, indifferent, absent, depressed or promiscuous.”¹⁸

In recent years, the whole family has been held responsible for the perpetrator’s actions. As late as 1983, Adele Mayer wrote, “In father-daughter incest, the entire family is involved and each member is active in perpetrating the abuse.”¹⁹

Interestingly, while some professionals were blaming everyone but the perpetrator, others were insisting that child sexual abuse didn’t happen at all—or only very rarely. As late as the 1970s many clinicians were still taught that incest was

¹⁵ Alfred C. Kinsey, et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953) pp. 121 and 20. As cited by Anna Salter.

¹⁶ Eugene Revitch and Rosalie G. Weiss, “The Pedophilic Offender,” *Diseases of the Nervous System* 23 (1962), p. 78. As cited by Anna Salter.

¹⁷ Noel Lustig, et al., “Incest: A Family Group Survival Pattern,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 14, (1966), p. 34. As cited by Anna Salter.

¹⁸ Blair Justice and Rita Justice, *The Broken Taboo* (New York: Human Services, 1979), p. 34. As cited by Anna Salter.

¹⁹ Adele Mayer, *Incest: A Treatment Manual for Therapy with Victims, Spouses and Offenders* (Holmes Beach, FL: Learning Publications, 1983), p. 22. As cited by Anna Salter.

extremely rare, affecting only one in a million children.²⁰

Considering this history, our present ability to recognize and confront child sexual abuse is nothing short of phenomenal.

The advances of the past twenty years are a direct outgrowth of the women's liberation movement that gained force in the 1970s. Women courageously spoke out about rape and battering, wrote books analyzing the ways in which our society condoned such violence, and worked to establish battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers. Simultaneously, a few pioneering clinicians and researchers, both men and women, were beginning to study child sexual abuse and set up models for treatment. It was from this visionary thinking—and grassroots activism—that the current movement to end child sexual abuse was built.²¹

We began to insist that children be protected, survivors be supported, and perpetrators be held responsible for their acts. This monumental advance in our willingness to be aware, to care, and to respond has come about only in the past two decades—most visibly in the past decade. This is the first time in history that children and adults who were sexually abused have been listened to, respected, and believed.

Adult survivors of child sexual abuse now have a voice and the power of community. Survivors are educating the medical profession, mental health workers, teachers, law enforcement officers, and the media. Laws are being changed. As a nation we are stunned to learn that our children are being harmed in great numbers. We have begun to break through our collective wall of denial—a wall that has been at least as hard as the Berlin Wall to bring down. This is revolutionary change, and such change does not come without opposition.

²⁰ I. B. Weiner, "Father-Daughter Incest: A Clinical Report," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1962), pp. 607–632. And S. K. Weinberg, *Incest Behavior* (New York: Citadel, 1955, 1976). As cited by Anna Salter.

²¹ Some of the pioneers whose work our present movement is built upon are Diana Russell (*The Politics of Rape*, 1975), Susan Brownmiller (*Against Our Will*, 1975), Suzanne Sgroi ("Sexual Molestation of Children: The Last Frontier in Child Abuse," 1975), Ann Burgess and Lynda Holmstrom ("*Sexual Trauma of Children and Adolescents*," 1975), A. Nicholas Groth (co-author with the previous three of *Sexual Assault of Children and Adolescents*, 1978), Sandra Butler (*The Conspiracy of Silence*, 1978), Kee McFarlane (*Sexual Abuse of Children*, 1978), Karen Meiselman (*Incest*, 1978), Louise Armstrong (*Kiss Daddy Goodnight*, 1978), David Finkelhor (*Sexually Victimized Children*, 1979), Florence Rush (*The Best Kept Secret*, 1980), Linda Sanford (*The Silent Children*, 1980), Judith Herman (*Father-Daughter Incest*, 1981), Susan Griffin (*Pornography and Silence*, 1981), Jean Goodwin (*Sexual Abuse: Incest Victims and Their Families*, 1982), Roland Summit ("The Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome," 1983), Henry Giarretto, founder of Parents United (1972), and researcher and practitioner Lucy Berliner.

There is a documented history of backlash against every progressive movement to redress the rights of the disenfranchised and oppressed. No significant steps are won without it. Although the attacks on survivors of child sexual abuse are extremely upsetting, they are also an indication of the substantial social progress we have made. Our movement has attained sufficient momentum, visibility, and clout to attract such opposition.

The current backlash is in direct response to the activism of survivors. It was not until survivors started challenging and changing the laws regarding the accountability of perpetrators—and suing their abusers—that claims of “false memory syndrome” started to appear. (See page 495 for more.)

And this denial, although it has a new name and a new face, is really the same old thing. Judith Herman, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, explains:

For the past twenty years, women have been speaking out about sexual violence, and men have been coming up with denials, evasions, and excuses. We have been told that women lie, exaggerate, and fantasize. Now [we’re being told] that women are *brainwashed* . . . Once again, those of us who have labored for years to overcome public denial find ourselves debating victims’ credibility. How many times do we have to go over the same ground?²²

WHO SUPPORTS THE BACKLASH

The supporters of the backlash are varied. Some people get involved because they *are* indeed innocent and have been falsely accused. But for many others the backlash provides a convenient cover. Abusers, obviously, would be eager to take advantage of any group whose mission is to vindicate those accused of abuse. Likewise, pedophiles and pedophile advocacy groups, such as the René Guyon Society and NAMBLA, stand to

²² Judith Herman, “Backtalk,” *Mother Jones* (March/April 1993), p. 3.

benefit from the silencing of survivors.²³

Spouses who are unable to face the fact that their partner abused their child have embraced the idea that many reports of sexual abuse are false. Family members and well-meaning friends often find it more tolerable to believe in false accusations than to accept that someone they know and love could have abused a child.

Among professionals, a number of those who endorse the “false memory” theory have little or no clinical experience with survivors. Some have specialized in unrelated areas and are uninformed about the impact of trauma or the patterns of perpetrators. Others have been moved by the obvious pain of accused parents who, whether or not they abused their children, are clearly suffering. Still others, concerned with issues of suggestibility, have erroneously gone on to challenge the credibility of all survivors who remember their abuse as adults. And finally, those who serve as expert witnesses for the defense of accused perpetrators have a clear professional and financial stake in discrediting survivors.

Journalists have played a role as well. By presenting sensationalized and distorted stories, they have legitimized a climate of disbelief. Anna Salter, adjunct professor of pediatrics at Dartmouth Medical School, has served as an expert witness for child victims and has been shocked by the subsequent media coverage:

I've been in court on cases that I didn't recognize on television. That happened to me last year. When they told me the case I was seeing on television was the case I'd testified in, it was hard for me to believe it. A reporter decided that this was a case of overzealous prosecutors, that the father was falsely accused. The reporter completely neglected to bring forth the man's history of molesting children. Yes, you would have gotten incensed by what was presented on TV. The problem is it had nothing to do with the facts of the case.²⁴

²³ The René Guyon Society is an organization that advocates sex between adults and children. Their motto is “Sex before eight or else it's too late.” NAMBLA is the North American Man-Boy Love Association. Although the backlash as a whole does not endorse pedophilia, there are occasions on which these lines blur. See p. 493 for more.

²⁴ Anna Salter, interview by Laura Davis, September 16, 1993.

Why do so many journalists present one-sided, erroneous accounts? The subject is dramatic and controversial. It sells papers, improves ratings, makes great sound bites. It grabs the attention of even the most jaded reader.

The appeal of these stories, however, goes far beyond our national obsession with sex, violence, and broken families. Anti-survivor propaganda has found a receptive audience with the public at large. People read about the “false memory syndrome” and are readily convinced. Why? Because denying the reality of child sexual abuse appeals to a basic human need: the need to distance ourselves from human cruelty.

It is painful to face the reality that so many children were—and continue to be—severely abused. There are times when the stories we hear are so horrible, we want to deny their truth. It is far easier to call it fantasy, manipulation, fabrication; easier to say that someone has been brainwashed into believing they were abused than to face the possibility that this person endured such torments as a child.

But we know—history has taught us—that atrocities happen. We have only to think of recent history—the Holocaust, the gassing of the Kurds, the massacre at My Lai, the rape of women in Bosnia—to illustrate the extent of human cruelty and our reluctance to confront it.

Today there are groups who propound the belief that the Holocaust didn't happen; that documents such as Anne Frank's diary were fabricated; that Auschwitz, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen did not exist.²⁵ How much easier to smother the truth of an individual's personal torture.

This is not to say that our movement is beyond reproach. Any time there is such massive social progress, serious and harmful mistakes are inevitably made. Children have been retraumatized in courtrooms, interviewing procedures have been flawed, and families have been reunited prematurely. Some therapists working with adult survivors have pushed clients to acknowledge abuse or have attributed problems to abuse that did not occur. False allegations have been made. Such transgressions need to be confronted

²⁵ A Roper poll, sponsored by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League in 1993, found that 22% of adults and 20% of high school students say it's possible the Holocaust never happened. For a thorough and thoughtful analysis of Holocaust denial, see Deborah Lipstadt's *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

and challenged, but in no way do they diminish the pain suffered by the vast majority of men and women who are coming forward to say they were sexually abused or the integrity of the dedicated professionals who work with them.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE BACKLASH

When you watch shows or read reports about “false memories,” you may feel angry and betrayed but not know how to respond. When the coverage of this debate is filled with interviews with well-credentialed experts, sympathetic portrayals of accused parents, and scientific-sounding evidence about the nature of memory, it can sometimes be hard to keep your equilibrium. By analyzing the claims of the “false memory” argument and examining the organizations behind the backlash, we hope to give you a clearer perspective on these attacks and to provide information you can use to respond effectively.

There is no such thing as a “false memory syndrome.”

The cornerstone of the current backlash is the promotion of the concept of a “false memory syndrome.” In fact, no such syndrome exists, as psychotherapist Karen Olio makes clear:

“Syndrome” usually refers to a documented group of signs and symptoms that characterize a particular abnormality. In this case, however, there have been no clinical trials, no scientifically controlled comparison groups, no research to document or quantify the phenomena. “Syndrome” is used simply to create an aura of scientific legitimacy . . . The creation of an “official” label seeks to establish by its mere existence the legitimacy of a phenomenon that has yet to be verified.²⁶

²⁶ Karen Olio, “The Truth Behind the False Memory Syndrome,” *Minneapolis Papers: Selections from the 31st Annual ITAA Conference* (October 15, 1993), ed. Norman L. James, p. 295. (Available through Family Violence Sexual Assault Institute, 1310 Clinic Drive, Tyler, TX 75701.)

Mary Harvey, director of the Victims of Violence Program at Cambridge Hospital, concurs:

There is no such thing as a “false memory syndrome.” There is psychosis; there is hallucination and delusion, and there is outright lying and malingering. There is also bad clinical practice. There is, however, no “false memory syndrome” and no evidence to support the proposition that such a syndrome—or a “genuine memory syndrome” for that matter—ought to be placed in our DSM-IV lexicon of psychiatric diagnoses.²⁷

Seventeen distinguished academic researchers in the fields of memory and trauma were so concerned about the use of the term “false memory syndrome” that they wrote a letter to the *APS [American Psychological Society] Observer*:

We, a group of researchers from diverse areas, share a common concern for the responsibility of psychology as a science. . . . While we strongly support research aimed at understanding the veracity of memory, we urge a more even-handed approach to this topic. In particular, we object to the term “false memory syndrome,” a non-psychological term originated by a private foundation whose stated purpose is to support accused parents.²⁸

Psychiatrist Judith Herman adds: “The very name FMS is prejudicial and misleading: there is no such syndrome, and we have no evidence that the reported memories are false. We know only that they are disputed.”²⁹

²⁷ Mary R. Harvey, “Principles of Practice with Remembering Adults,” keynote address at the 9th Annual Abuse and Victimization Conference, at the Family Violence Program of Children’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School, Boston, April 1993.

The DSM-IV is the forthcoming fourth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*.

²⁸ “Letters to the Editor,” *APS Observer* (March 1993), p. 23.

The “false memory syndrome,” then, has been created, not by scientific research, but through the use of highly emotional anecdotal reports and an effective public relations campaign.

When Pamela Freyd, Executive Director of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, was interviewed by David Calof in *Treating Abuse Today*, she was unable to provide even a basic definition of “false memory syndrome,” excusing her inability by saying she was not a clinician. When Calof insisted that the Executive Director of a national organization would be expected to know such information, Freyd responded in the following exchange:

TAT: If I was talking to the Executive Director of the Muscular Dystrophy Association, who presumably is also not a clinician, I’ll bet he or she could give me the signs and symptoms of muscular dystrophy. But in the case of false memory syndrome, so far no one seems to be able to say.

FREYD: Gotcha. I’m in agreement with you. There are some soft areas here that need to be clarified.³⁰

The False Memory Syndrome Foundation is an advocacy group for people who say that they have been falsely accused of child abuse.

The group most frequently cited in promoting the idea of “false memories” is the False Memory Syndrome (FMS) Foundation. Despite their official-sounding title, this foundation is not primarily a scientific research organization; rather, it is an advocacy group for people who say that they have been falsely accused of child sexual abuse.³¹

²⁹ Judith L. Herman, “Adult Memories of Childhood Trauma: Current Controversies,” position paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, May 26, 1993.

³⁰ David L. Calof, “A Conversation with Pamela Freyd, Ph.D., Co-founder and Executive Director, False Memory Syndrome Foundation, Inc. Part I,” *Treating Abuse Today* 3, no. 3, 39.

³¹ Although the FMS Foundation’s mission statement says they will sponsor scientific and medical research into the existence and cause of false memory syndrome, the only research we are aware of is their member surveys in which members of the Foundation provide their version of their family’s history and current events, socioeconomic status, and information about their

The foundation prints dramatic accounts about women who say they were mistreated by unethical and incompetent therapists. These stories are presented as though they represented the customary practices of counselors who work with survivors. The foundation disparages the contributions of both individual survivors and those who have worked to support them. When interviewed for newspapers, magazines, or talk shows, members of the organization and its scientific advisory board repeatedly debunk the testimony of survivors.

The FMS Foundation presents information that is out of context, and distorted. Psychiatrist Richard Lowenstein, a past president of the International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality and Dissociation, explains:

The FMS Foundation's written materials are selective, biased, and incomplete in their fragmentary reviews of selected articles and books in the childhood trauma literature. [Their] main goal is media propaganda dressed up in the garb of apparent objectivity."³²

The FMS Foundation has an advisory board of well-credentialed professionals from prominent universities. However, a founding member of this board (who has since resigned) has engaged in questionable practices designed to intimidate therapists, and squelch academic debate.³³

children's therapists.

Clinical psychologist Pamela Birrell questions the objectivity of such research: "Can the goals of objectivity in science be met by an organization that appears dedicated to proving that memories of abuse are false? How many of you give the same credence to research on the effects of smoking done by the American Tobacco Institute compared to the same research . . . supported by neutral grants at universities." (Pamela J. Birrell, Open letter to board members of the FMS Foundation, September 1, 1993).

³² Richard Lowenstein, *ISSMP&D News* volume 10, no. 6 (December 1992), pp. 1–2.

³³ Psychologist Anna Salter has been sued in California and Wisconsin for criticizing former FMS Foundation advisory board member Ralph Underwager (in both cases, the charges were dismissed by the judges before trial). Underwager has appealed. Attorney Patricia Toth and a number of others involved in a TV show critical of Underwager have also been sued by Underwager in Illinois, Virginia, and Maryland. Those cases are on hold, pending the outcome of the appeals. In one deposition, Underwager acknowledged hiring a private investigator to get information on a monograph Anna Salter was writing, *Accuracy of Expert Testimony in Child Sexual Abuse Cases: A Case Study of Ralph Underwager and Hollida Wakefield* (Deposition of Ralph Underwager, Ralph Underwager and Hollida Wakefield vs. Anna Salter and Patricia Toth, Madison, WI, April 15, 1993, Case No. 92-C-0229-S). That private investigator called Anna Salter,

The FMS Foundation has distributed questionnaires to accused parents, requesting information about their adult child's therapist.³⁴ Their literature has encouraged parents to file complaints against these therapists with state licensing boards, professional associations, and in California, even with the Victims of Crime Program.³⁵

Although they concede that “parents would seem to have no cause for malpractice against the therapist,” they go on to suggest that “the parent may have a cause for libel and slander or for tortious interference with a family relationship.” As if such challenges to therapists were not sufficient, they go on to propose the possibility that parents usurp legal control over the entirety of their adult children's lives: “Lastly, and even more remotely, the parent may take the legal position that the accusing child is incompetent and seek guardianship proceedings.”³⁶ Psychiatrist Richard Kluff believes that the use of such tactics diminishes the legitimate concerns of the FMS Foundation:

My argument with the FMS people is not their point of view. It's that they advocate hurtful means of repair. . . . This group is trying to intimidate those who work in the abuse fields by saying in essence, “If you and a patient conclude they've been abused when they didn't say so in the first place, we're coming after you—and a lawsuit will take up a lot of your life.” . . . That's why I'm so dead set against this group.³⁷

pretending to be an attorney in a custody case involving allegations of child sexual abuse (transcript of telephone conversation between Dan Lundy, private investigator, and Anna Salter 10/23/89, pp. 1–9, Exhibit D). He tape-recorded the phone call and it was later used as evidence in a defamation suit Ralph Underwager filed against Anna Salter.

³⁴ “Therapist information,” part C of survey no. 92.1, distributed by the FMS Foundation in October 1992.

³⁵ In the April 6, 1993, *FMS Foundation Newsletter*, this admonition to report complaints was presented as an unsigned request from FMS contacts in California.

³⁶ “Legal Aspects of False Memory Syndrome,” written and distributed by FMS Foundation (June 1992), p. 3.

³⁷ Richard P. Kluff, “Advanced Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder,” lecture presented on December 4–5, 1992, in Oakland, CA by Westword Institute.

The FMS Foundation was started by one set of parents after their daughter confronted them about having been sexually abused.

The FMS Foundation was founded largely by one set of parents, Pamela and Peter Freyd, who claim that accusations of sexual abuse by their adult daughter, Jennifer Freyd, are false. As psychotherapist David Calof put it, “There is persuasive evidence that this organization grew out of one family’s feud that’s overgrown its boundaries and come into the popular culture.”³⁸

One week after she entered therapy in 1990, Jennifer Freyd, professor of psychology at the University of Oregon, recovered memories of sexual abuse by her father, Peter Freyd. She confronted her parents about the incest, and they denied it. Six months later, her mother, Pamela Freyd, published “How Could This Happen? Coping with a False Accusation of Incest and Rape” under the pseudonym Jane Doe.³⁹ The article contained personal information about Jennifer—some of which was inaccurate, much of which was embarrassing—and Pamela Freyd sent copies of the Jane Doe article, along with letters clearly indicating that she was the author, to her daughter’s colleagues. Among the recipients were members of Jennifer Freyd’s own department at the university, where she was being considered for a promotion to full professorship.⁴⁰

The following winter, Pamela Freyd founded the FMS Foundation, and since then she has crisscrossed the country promoting the idea of “false memories” and talking about the destruction of families through false allegations.

In the meantime, Jennifer chose not to speak publicly about her childhood abuse

³⁸ David Calof, speaking at the Fifth Anniversary Eastern Regional Conference on Abuse and Multiple Personalities, June 3–8, 1993, Alexandria, VA.

³⁹ Jane Doe, “How Could This Happen? Coping with a False Accusation of Incest and Rape,” *Issues in Child Abuse Accusations* [Ralph Underwager’s journal] 3, no. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 154–165.

⁴⁰ Peter Freyd acknowledged to Jennifer that aspects of the Jane Doe story were fictitious. In an electronic mail letter he wrote that a reporter he knew thought he could “put together stuff from the Jane Doe article and the Darryl Sifford columns, but in both cases fictional elements were deliberately inserted.” As quoted by Jennifer Freyd, “Theoretical and Personal Perspectives on the Delayed Memory Debate,” presentation for The Center for Mental Health at Foote Hospital’s Continuing Education Conference “Controversies Around Recovered Memories of Incest and Ritualistic Abuse,” August 7, 1993, Ann Arbor, MI. Jennifer Freyd’s story, as told here, is taken from this paper as well as the interview she did with the *The Oregonian* (August 8, 1993). Information was also drawn from Steven Fried’s “War of Remembrance,” in *Philadelphia* (January 1994). The full text of Jennifer Freyd’s speech is available by writing to *Moving Forward*, P.O. Box 4426, Arlington, VA 22204.

or about her mother's role in founding the FMS Foundation, as she still hoped for a private resolution of these matters. Finally, in 1993 she broke her silence and told her side of the story, stating, "I have already lost so much of my privacy, and in such an unclear and distorted way, that I have come to desire clarity and public truth as the lesser of two undesirable situations."

Jennifer Freyd reported that she was sexually abused by her father from the time she was three or four years old until she was sixteen. Although the sexual abuse ended when she was a teenager, Jennifer detailed a continuing pattern of sexualized talk, boundary violations, and invasive and demeaning treatment that continued into her adult years. She described her father showing her a replica of his penis and testicles that he displayed in the living room. She recounted being humiliated in front of visitors by her father's excessively sexual comments. And when she tried to discuss a memory of sexual abuse with her parents, she related that her mother's reaction was that the memory had to be false because if it were true, their dog would have made a lot of noise . . . as the dog always joined, apparently noisily, in human sexual events.

Jennifer Freyd described a family in which denial, minimization, and distortion were commonplace. Throughout her growing-up years, her father was an active alcoholic; he was eventually hospitalized for alcoholism in the early 1980s.⁴¹ She related that during her childhood, her father "sometimes discussed his own experiences of being sexually abused as an eleven-year-old boy. He discussed these experiences, however, not in terms of 'abuse' but in terms of precocious sexuality, calling himself a 'kept boy.'"⁴²

The Freyds have made every effort to discredit Jennifer's testimony. And as she explains, attempts to discredit her are not totally new:

My father told various people that I was brain damaged at various times throughout my childhood and adult years. I was reminded of this

⁴¹ Both Peter and Pamela Freyd have publicly acknowledged that Peter was hospitalized for alcoholism in 1982. Peter contends, however, that his drinking never affected his family. "Memories of A Disputed Past," *The Oregonian* (August 8, 1993), p. L6.

⁴² Peter Freyd himself confirms that he had a sexual relationship with a pedophile when he was nine. At about the same time, Peter met his future wife, Pamela, whose mother married Peter's father, making Peter and Pam stepbrother and stepsister. From Steven Fried, "War of Remembrance," *Philadelphia* (January 1994), p. 151.

theory of brain damage by a family friend who had heard it from my father while I was a graduate student at Stanford University on a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship.⁴³

It is hard for Jennifer Freyd to understand why her father would say such things—or why he would be believed:

I am flabbergasted that my memory is considered “false” and my alcoholic father’s memory is considered rational and sane. . . . Is my father more credible than me because I have a history of lying or not having a firm grasp on reality? No, I am a scientist whose empirical work has been replicated in laboratories around this country and Europe, and until the last few years of parental invasion I enjoyed an excellent professional reputation without any scandal attached to my name. . . .

Am I not believed because I am a woman? A “female in her thirties” as some of the newspaper articles seem to emphasize? Am I therefore a hopeless hysteric by definition? . . . Indeed why is my parents’ denial at all credible? In the end, is it precisely because I *was* abused that I am to be discredited despite my personal and professional success?

Most incomprehensible to Jennifer is Peter and Pamela Freyd’s invitation to her to join the advisory board of the foundation, an organization whose very existence is predicated on discounting her reality. In a letter expressing surprise that she declined, Peter Freyd revealed, “I still insist on thinking of our Newsletter, indeed the whole project, as being primarily a way of communicating with our daughters.”⁴⁴

The idea that the FMS Foundation is seen by its founders as a way to communicate with their daughters is alarming. As Jennifer states:

⁴³ Jennifer Freyd’s father is not the only one of her parents to malign her intelligence or her sanity. In a newspaper article published in the Portland *Oregonian* the day after Jennifer’s public disclosure (August 8, 1993), Pamela Freyd is quoted as saying of Jennifer, “By thinking of her as temporarily deranged, I have been able to keep feelings of love alive.”

⁴⁴ Electronic-mail letter from Peter Freyd to Jennifer Freyd on November 11, 1992.

The weight of a whole Foundation stands behind my mother's frenzied denial of my reality. . . . For my parents' sake I hope they can find a way to look inward, to do their own healing, instead of waging a kind of war at the national level.

The FMS Foundation is only the latest incarnation of the backlash against victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

Although the foundation grew directly out of the pain and dysfunction of one family, it did not arise in a vacuum. The backlash had been gaining momentum for some time. In 1984 Victims of Child Abuse Laws (VOCAL) was established in Minneapolis to champion the rights of the accused in child abuse cases, claiming that children's allegations of sexual abuse are frequently false and that children do not make credible witnesses.⁴⁵

VOCAL was born in the aftermath of a highly publicized child sexual abuse trial in Jordan, Minnesota. In that case, accusations of sadistic ritual abuse of dozens of children led to one conviction, two acquittals, and charges being dropped for twenty-one other defendants. Because this was the first trial involving such massive and unprecedented allegations, the investigation was flawed and questions remain, but it's clear that children had been abused.⁴⁶

In his book *The Battle and the Backlash*, David Hechler dates the origin of the backlash to the Jordan case and specifically to September 19, 1984, the day Lois and

⁴⁵ VOCAL newsletters include information on cases and attorneys, book reviews, conference reports, and writings from those accused and convicted of child abuse—sometimes from jail. And VOCAL regularly sent “courtesy” newsletters to prisoners. Reported by David Hechler, *The Battle and the Backlash: The Child Sexual Abuse War* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1988), pp. 118–119.

⁴⁶ A state commission investigating the case concluded that some of the charges could have been successfully prosecuted if they hadn't been dropped. The commission wrote, “Those defendants who were guilty went free, and those who were innocent were left without the opportunity to clear their names. Those children who were victims became victims once again. The commission has concluded that the wholesale dismissal of the twenty-one cases was not justified.” (Report to Governor Rudy Perpich, Commission Established by Executive Order No. 85–10 Concerning Kathleen Morris, Scott County Attorney, pp. 52–53.) Cited by David Hechler, p. 115.

Robert Bentz were acquitted of abusing their son and four other children.⁴⁷ One month later, VOCAL had its first organizing meeting in Minneapolis. Robert and Lois Bentz and another Jordan defendant were on VOCAL's first board of directors.⁴⁸ Psychologist Ralph Underwager, expert witness in the Bentz trial, participated in VOCAL's initial meetings, acted as the group's first public spokesman,⁴⁹ and spoke at VOCAL's first four national conferences.⁵⁰

Underwager and his wife, psychologist Hollida Wakefield, went on to publish *Issues in Child Abuse Accusations*, a journal that primarily prints articles supporting the idea that most sexual abuse allegations are false. Underwager was also pivotal in the formation of the FMS Foundation. Its original membership was drawn from a list of 202 families who had contacted him through his Institute for Psychological Therapies.⁵¹ And he served as an advisory board member of the foundation until the summer of 1993. (See page 494 for more on the circumstances of his resignation.)

VOCAL and the FMS Foundation take much the same stance. VOCAL claims that children aren't credible witnesses, that they are too young and are prone to fantasy. The FMS Foundation says adult survivors shouldn't be believed because they've been misled by manipulative therapists. VOCAL accuses investigators of asking leading questions to get children to "admit" to abuse that never really happened. The FMS Foundation says therapists brainwash adult clients. VOCAL accuses child protective workers—or "child savers" as they call them—of incompetence and says they're responsible for breaking up families. The FMS Foundation similarly accuses therapists—and self-help books—of doing the same. Both groups talk about "witch hunts" and "child abuse hysteria," and claim it is impossible for defendants to get a fair trial in sex abuse

⁴⁷ David Hechler reports that the Bentzes' six-year-old son testified from the stand that his parents *had* sexually abused him. Hechler writes, "When asked by a defense attorney if he feared his father would sodomize him, the child turned to his father and said, 'You won't do that no more, right?'" Hechler, *Battle*, p. 111.

⁴⁸ Hechler, *Battle*, p. 119.

⁴⁹ "Defense Advocates Visit," *Update*, American Prosecutors Research Institute, National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse, vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1988).

⁵⁰ Glenn Cooly, "Disavowing Memory," *NOW: Toronto's Weekly News and Entertainment Voice* 12, no. 5 (October 1–7, 1992), p. 18.

⁵¹ *FMS Foundation Newsletter*, February 29, 1992.

cases because there's a presumption of guilt rather than innocence. Both groups say they are as concerned about the guilty going free as they are the innocent being falsely accused, but publish only articles dealing with false accusations. And neither group has a way to tell which of their members are falsely accused—and which are guilty.⁵²

⁵² David Hechler reports that Leslie Wimberly, California coordinator for VOCAL, acknowledges that her group has supported people through their trials who were later convicted of child molestation. She says, however, that VOCAL has also expelled members with prior child abuse convictions. When asked specifically if VOCAL had a way to know whether its members were guilty or not, she responded, "Neither does the Boy Scouts, or church groups, or the general public. I mean, you could be a child molester for all I know, right? See? I mean, that's a silly question, isn't it?"

According to Hechler, Gerald Maloney, who served as the VOCAL coordinator for Washington State, was a convicted child molester (Hechler, *Battle*, pp. 124–125).

FMS Foundation co-founder and executive director Pamela Freyd has repeatedly acknowledged that the FMS Foundation also has no way to tell whether its members are really falsely accused. When asked in an interview if members of the Foundation could be perpetrators of sexual abuse Freyd responded, "Of course. We are not clairvoyant" (Lana Lawrence, "Backlash: A Look at the Abuse Related Amnesia and Delayed Memory Controversy," *Moving Forward* 2, no. 4, p. 14).

In an interview in *Treating Abuse Today*, Freyd stated: "I have said from the beginning, we don't know the truth or falsity of any story. . . . There is no way we can know the truth or falsity of events to which we're not a party."

Later in the same interview, when the subject of the anonymous list of 2000 "false memory families" came up, the following dialogue ensued:

TAT: But at this time you really cannot tell us with any degree of certainty whether or not any of those individuals on your anonymous list are perpetrators or not?

FREYD: I don't like the use of that term.

TAT: How about whether they have committed sexual offenses? You apparently cannot tell us that.

FREYD: Not without some validation.

TAT: Precisely. So you don't know for sure at this time.

FREYD: I'm going to ask you: How do you know that? Or, how am I to know if you have stopped beating your grandmother? How do you prove or show negatives?

TAT: I'm not talking about negatives, I'm talking about testing for possible existence of alcoholic blackouts, dissociative disorders, sociopathology. Those aren't negatives.

FREYD: Absolutely. You're right.

(David Calof, "A Conversation with Pamela Freyd, Ph.D. Co-Founder and Executive Director, False Memory Syndrome Foundation, Inc. Part I," *Treating Abuse Today* 3, no. 3, pp. 34–39.)

Both VOCAL and the FMS Foundation make some legitimate claims. False allegations have occurred, some investigators have asked leading questions, and therapists have, on occasion, misconstrued a client's history. But the extent of these problems has been greatly exaggerated by both groups, who then go on to draw distorted conclusions that they use to manipulate public opinion.

Although particular organizations like VOCAL and the FMS Foundation may rise and fall, the backlash is likely to continue to evolve—and to find supporters—in other incarnations. Until we as a culture face the reality of sexual abuse, our collective denial will continue to feed—and need—such groups.⁵³

Both VOCAL and the FMS Foundation have ties to people whose views on child sexual abuse are alarming.

LeRoy Schultz, a featured speaker at VOCAL's first two national conferences and an editor for Ralph Underwager's *Issues in Child Abuse Accusations*, has written about the possibility of consensual sex between adults and children.⁵⁴ Of child victims, Schultz writes, "Their cooperation is usually needed to at least initiate the sex act, if not complete it." He goes on to say that police and other reports "do not adequately explain the portion of guilt that may be attributable to the victim." And finally Schultz states, "So great can the role of the victim be in sex offenses that many should be considered offenders themselves."⁵⁵

⁵³ A more extreme group defending the "falsely accused" is The Coalition of Concerned Citizens in Seattle. David Hechler interviewed its founder, Marilyn Gunther. She said, "The primary function we perform is not to determine whether these people are guilty or not guilty, but whether or not these people have received due process in their case." Of the eight hundred cases she had reviewed so far, she said she didn't know of a single case where the person accused had lied, but she acknowledged that it could have happened. When asked about molesters, Gunther said, "Sometimes they make excellent parents. There are a lot of people who sexually offend their own children who are excellent parents, despite that one little hangup. It's not as if they abuse them all the time. It may be two or three times a week over a prolonged period." She went on to say that children weren't necessarily damaged by the experience. "Usually all they require is to be told, 'Hey, it wasn't your fault, and we're going to see that it doesn't happen again. Forget about it.'" As reported by David Hechler, in *Battle*, pp. 125–126.

⁵⁴ Hechler, *Battle*, pp. 126–127.

⁵⁵ Leroy G. Schultz, "Interviewing the sex offender's victim," *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science* 50, pp. 448–452. As cited by Anna Salter in *Accuracy of Expert Testimony in Child Sexual Abuse Cases: A Case Study of Ralph Underwager and Hollida Wakefield*, p. 8.

Richard Gardner, a professor of child psychiatry at Columbia University and a frequent expert witness for the defense in child abuse cases, has appeared numerous times on television promoting the idea of a “false memory syndrome.” In an article published by Underwager’s *Issues in Child Abuse Accusations*, he writes,

Sexual activities between adults and children are a universal phenomenon. . . . Such encounters are *not* necessarily traumatic. The determinant as to whether the experience will be traumatic is the social attitude toward these encounters. As Hamlet said: “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

Of relevance here is the belief by many of these therapists that a sexual encounter between an adult and a child—no matter how short, no matter how tender, loving and non-painful—automatically and predictably must be psychologically traumatic to the child. This belief justifies lengthy, ongoing therapy. . . . Obviously, if the therapist did not take this position, then she would not be able to enjoy the financial rewards attendant to this belief.⁵⁶

Ralph Underwager and his wife were interviewed in *PAIDIKA: The Journal of Paedophilia*, published in the Netherlands. In response to the question “Is choosing paedophilia for you a responsible choice for the individual?,” Underwager replied:

Certainly it is responsible. What I have been struck by as I have come to know more about and understand people who choose paedophilia is that they let themselves be too much defined by other people. That is usually an essentially negative definition. Paedophiles spend a lot of time and energy defending their choice. I don’t think that a paedophile needs to do that. Paedophiles can boldly and courageously affirm what they choose. They can say that what they want is to find the best way to love. I am also

⁵⁶ Richard A. Gardner, “Belated Realization of Child Sexual Abuse by an Adult,” *Issues in Child Abuse Accusations*, 4, no. 4 (Fall 1992), p. 191.

a theologian and as a theologian I believe it is God's will that there be closeness and intimacy, unity of the flesh, between people. A paedophile can say: "This closeness is possible for me within the choices that I've made." . . .

What I think is that paedophiles can make the assertion that the pursuit of intimacy and love is what they choose. With boldness they can say, "I believe this is in fact part of God's will."⁵⁷

When this interview came to the attention of survivors, their supporters, and subsequently the media in the summer of 1993, Underwager resigned from the FMS Foundation advisory board. However, his wife still serves on its advisory board.

A primary motivation for the backlash is the establishment of a legal defense for those accused of child sexual abuse.

Over the past decade, survivors have begun to lobby the legislatures in all fifty states to make it possible for adult survivors to bring civil suits against their perpetrators for abuse they suffered in childhood.⁵⁸ It was only when these legislative and judicial reforms began to take place that we started to hear about the "false memory syndrome." Judith Herman believes these suits, and the political activism that enabled them to occur, are the motivating force behind the current memory controversy:

I believe that the intense popular and professional interest in this question is not fueled by a sudden fascination with academic memory research. Rather, the debate is being driven by forensic questions. We are

⁵⁷ "Interview: Hollida Wakefield and Ralph Underwager," conducted in Amsterdam in June 1991 by Joseph Geraci, published in *Paidika: The Journal of Paedophilia* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1993).

Additional quotations—equally outrageous—from this interview are included in *Moving Forward: A News-journal for Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Those Who Care for Them* 2, no. 4, p. 13, along with an accounting of the FMS Foundation's initial responses to these revelations. Subsequent issues of *Moving Forward* follow up on further developments.

⁵⁸ See "Considering a Lawsuit" on p. 318 and "Legal Resources" on p. 546 of the Resource Guide for more information on these suits.

witnessing a struggle over issues of accountability.

Up until very recently, sexual assaults in general, and sexual abuse of children in particular, have been essentially perfect crimes. . . . Victims have been effectively denied access to the justice system, and perpetrators have been practically assured of impunity. As a result of feminist consciousness-raising and legal reforms, recently some victims have begun to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes. . . . This is a very real threat to the power and privilege of perpetrators. It is natural to expect that they will fight back.⁵⁹

This struggle over the credibility of abuse victims is not new. In fact, the history of the backlash corresponds directly to the evolution of defense arguments in child sex abuse cases. Patricia Toth, executive director of the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse, says, “Twenty years ago, there weren’t a large number of cases of abuse—either physical or sexual—being criminally prosecuted. It happened every now and then, but they were few and far between. If a family member was involved, it was left up to the civil system to remove the child from the home. Parents weren’t convicted of crimes, but they might lose custody of their children.”⁶⁰

Toth says the emergence of rape crisis centers, and the increased attention given to adult rape cases, led to more focus on child sexual abuse. “Children started showing up as victims. Ten to fifteen years ago, you began to see the first specialized child abuse units in police departments and prosecutors’ offices. Victim witness programs became more plentiful and started to devote more attention to children as victims. All of this converged. We started taking child abuse cases more seriously. And as we began to file more cases and get more convictions, the people who found themselves in the position of being accused, some of whom had means, got more serious about fighting back.”

Initial defenses in sexual abuse cases were rather unsophisticated. “The first defenses were things like ‘I’m a good person. I couldn’t have done it.’ Now that there’s more recognition that abusers don’t have to look like monsters, the defense has moved on

⁵⁹ Herman, “Adult Memories of Childhood Trauma,” p. 7.

⁶⁰ Patricia Toth, interview by Laura Davis, September 16, 1993.

to other arguments.”

As more cases were filed that involved suspected abuse of groups of children, the defenses evolved. “When a group of children all describe similar activities by the same suspect, they could no longer say, ‘This kid just has something against this suspect. That’s why she’s making it up.’ So they resorted to, ‘These ideas were planted in the kids’ heads.’ The ‘suggestibility of children’ defense has really grown with this backlash.”

Laurie Braga, who co-directs the National Foundation for Children with her husband, Joseph Braga, explains how the development of false memory rhetoric—and the FMS Foundation—is a logical extension of this battle over the viability of children’s testimony in sexual abuse cases:

Those of us who were working to establish the credibility of abused kids in court were glad when adult survivors began coming forward in large numbers. We felt that their stories would give credibility to kids as witnesses. The backlash feared the same. So it was a natural progression for them to attack not only kids as witnesses, but adults too.⁶¹

Clearly, there has been much legal maneuvering in abuse cases to save perpetrators from conviction. Yet Patricia Toth says that some of the questions that have been raised are legitimate: “Not all of the issues raised are bogus. I think there are some folks that got carried away, who got careless in their investigation and preparation of cases. People cut corners—they’re ‘experts’ after all—they can ‘just tell’ if a child’s been abused—so why shouldn’t they be able to testify to that effect? Those kinds of attitudes lead to mistakes being made. We’ve had to step back and say, ‘Whoa. Wait a minute. What *are* we doing? Where do we need to improve?’ And when they’re wrong, we need to *show* that they’re wrong, not just with an emotional reaction, but with facts, with research, with solid evidence.”⁶²

Although the legitimate rights of defendants must be upheld, this should not be

⁶¹ Laurie Braga, interview by Laura Davis, September 13, 1993.

⁶² For an example of how one defense expert’s testimony was scrutinized, see p. 512.

achieved by sacrificing children. We disagree vehemently with the philosophy of those expert witnesses for the defense who are in sympathy with the principle that “it is better to let 100 guilty men go free than to convict one innocent man.”⁶³

One person wrongly convicted is a tragedy. But a hundred perpetrators allowed to continue to abuse what could be thousands of children is *not* less of a tragedy.⁶⁴ The violation of children must be considered to be at least as serious as the violation of the rights of adults. Because children are more vulnerable than adults, they need and deserve the fullest possible protection.

Progress has been made, both in protecting children and in establishing legal options for adult survivors. As Patricia Toth concludes, “If these cases weren’t being treated as serious crimes, there wouldn’t have been a backlash. It’s a measure of our success.”

In reality, false claims of sexual abuse are uncommon.

As with every other crime, false denials are much more common than false accusations—and, tragically, real child sexual abuse is all too frequent.

According to the best measures available, as many as one in three girls and one in six boys are sexually abused as children. In a survey of a random sample of over nine hundred women in San Francisco, sociologist Diana Russell found that 38 percent had been sexually abused before the age of eighteen. Of these, 28 percent had been seriously

⁶³ Richard A. Gardner, *The Parental Alienation Syndrome and the Differentiation Between Fabricated and Genuine Child Sex Abuse* (Cresskill, N.J.: Creative Therapeutics, 1987), pp. 175–176. Richard Gardner writes that he endorses this principle for two reasons. “First, I am in sympathy with the aforementioned American legal principle. Second . . . many perpetrators are so shaken and sobered by the investigations into their sexual activities that they ‘cease and desist’ from further molestation of children, even though exonerated.” This last assumption—that abusers stop abusing solely because they are investigated—is not supported by the vast majority of people working with perpetrators. To the contrary, without intervention by the criminal justice system and court-mandated therapy, it is highly unusual for perpetrators to stop. Even in the most successful treatment programs, the recidivism rate is still quite high.

As quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* (February 11, 1985, p. 14), Ralph Underwager takes this idea of protecting the accused even further. He says, “It is more desirable that a thousand children in abuse situations are not discovered than it is for one innocent person to be convicted wrongly.”

⁶⁴ For information on the number of children one child molester can molest, see footnote 83 on p. 501.

abused before the age of fourteen.⁶⁵

Bud Lewis, director of a *Los Angeles Times* poll that questioned 2,627 men and women nationally, found that 22 percent (27 percent of the women and 16 percent of the men) said they'd been sexually abused as children.⁶⁶ If these numbers are applied to the present population, there are as many as 38 million adult survivors of child sexual abuse today.⁶⁷

Despite the advances that have been made, most abuse continues to go unreported. Less than 10 percent of child sexual abuse cases come to the attention of child protection agencies or the police.⁶⁸ Yet inflated claims about the number of false allegations are now commonplace. In cases involving children, these claims are often based on the number of “unfounded” or “unsubstantiated” cases. These terms, however, do not necessarily mean that an accusation is false. Patricia Toth explains that “unfounded” only means that—for whatever reason—the abuse couldn't be proved:

“Unfounded” or “unsubstantiated” can mean that it was false, but it can also mean a variety of other things. In most cases, child protective services only has responsibility for familial or caretaker abuse. If the abuser doesn't fit into those categories, for their purposes, it's unfounded. If you have an infant who has gonorrhoea of the throat and can't talk, with no eyewitnesses and no confession, you can be pretty darn sure that child was sexually abused—but you might not be able to identify the offender—

⁶⁵ Diana E. H. Russell, “The Incidence and Prevalence of Intrafamilial and Extrafamilial Sexual Abuse of Female Children,” *Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal* 7, no. 2, pp. 133–139. Reprinted in *Sexual Exploitation: Rape, Child Sexual Abuse and Workplace Harassment* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984).

⁶⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 1985, p. 1. One-third of those who were abused said they'd never told anyone about the abuse before being asked in the survey. Of those who told, 70% said no effective action was taken.

⁶⁷ For an in-depth analysis of prevalence studies for child sexual abuse, see David Finkelhor, *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1986); Anna Salter, *Treating Child Sex Offenders and Victims*; and D. G. Kilpatrick, C. M. Edmunds, and A. K. Seymour, *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation*, (National Victim Center, Arlington, VA, 1992). Also see John Crewdson, *By Silence Betrayed: Sexual Abuse of Children in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988).

⁶⁸ In the *Los Angeles Times* poll, only 3% had reported the incident to the police or other public agency. In Diana Russell's 1984 study, less than 5% of the sexual abuse had been reported.

and it's unfounded. Or you might have a totally overloaded caseworker who has fifty cases to investigate in a month, so she picks up the phone and says, "We have a report that you abused your child. Is that true?" And they say, "It's not true." And the caseworker says, "Thank you." It's unfounded—because they don't have the skills or resources to properly investigate. Or the report comes in, they try to find the family, and the family has moved to another jurisdiction. Again, unfounded.⁶⁹

Clearly, it is erroneous to use the rate of unfounded cases to assess the number of people falsely accused. Similar misrepresentations are made in cases involving adult survivors. Just because a case isn't successful in court—or a prosecutor declines to prosecute—doesn't necessarily mean the abuse didn't happen. It only means that there wasn't enough evidence to prove it in court. (See "Legal principles do not apply to healing," p. 505.)

This is not to say that false allegations don't exist. They do. But they are not at all the norm. John Briere, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Southern California School of Medicine, writes:

I do assume that some small number of people—by virtue of their injury, confusion or despair—will say things that may not be true.⁷⁰

Any given individual reporting repressed memories may be prey to the same afflictions found in the rest of the human race, including psychosis, confusion, desperation, and misrepresentation.⁷¹

Those who wish to discount and disbelieve abuse survivors grab onto these few cases where there may in fact be incorrect memories and publicize these as obvious examples of why everyone should be

⁶⁹ Toth interview, September 16, 1993.

⁷⁰ Margo Silk Forest, "An Interview with John Briere, Ph.D.," *Treating Abuse Today*, 3, no. 1, p. 22.

⁷¹ John Briere, "Adult Memories of Childhood Trauma: Current Controversies," abridged and revised version of a presentation to the American Psychiatric Association, San Francisco, CA, May 26, 1993, p. 3.

disbelieved.⁷²

False claims of sexual abuse do exist, but compared to the astronomical numbers of survivors who truly were abused, such claims represent only a minuscule percentage of survivors' accounts. Even if all five thousand families who've contacted the FMS Foundation were indeed falsely accused, that amounts to only .01%—or one one-hundredth of a percent of the estimated number of adult survivors of child sexual abuse in this country.⁷³

Perpetrators rarely tell the truth about what they've done.

While it's likely that some who claim to be falsely accused are innocent of the charges against them, it is clear that pedophiles and abusers have much to gain from not telling the truth.

And you can't tell the innocent from the guilty by looking. Lawrence Klein, clinical director of the Wood County Mental Health Center in Bowling Green, Ohio, explains:

The striking thing about sexual offenders is that the vast majority of them are not striking. Contrary to our expectations they bear no outwardly distinguishing features. They look the same as our neighbors and members of our families. . . . They commonly function in an apparently normal, unremarkable way. Yet they routinely commit acts of chilling insensitivity, egocentricity and destructiveness.⁷⁴

Child abusers come from every walk of life, as Brian Abbott, executive director

⁷² Forest, "Interview with John Briere."

⁷³ As of August 1993, 5,000 families had called the FMS Foundation (FMS Foundation fundraising letter, September 21, 1993).

⁷⁴ Lawrence R. Klein, "Perpetration Issues in the Treatment of Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse," presented at the Eighth Regional Conference on Trauma, Dissociation, and Multiple Personality, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, April 1993, p. 6.

of the Giarretto Institute, makes clear.⁷⁵

Offenders run the gamut of every socioeconomic and ethnic group. I've seen guys who dig ditches or are on unemployment, as well as people who are pillars of the community—attorneys, doctors, people who are doing extremely well in their lives.⁷⁶

Many of the abusers we've met have been charming, personable people.⁷⁷ If we didn't know better, we too would have said, "He [or she] could never have done such a thing." Most abusers aren't monsters. Even the ones who've done monstrous things are often successful and well liked in the rest of their lives, as psychologist Anna Salter illustrates:

Several times I have seen members of a community write letters or sign petitions insisting the police had the wrong man, only to have the offender eventually confess.⁷⁸

A well-publicized example is Sol Wachtler, sixty-two-year-old former Chief Judge for the New York State Court of Appeals. In April 1993, he pled guilty to charges that he threatened to kidnap the fourteen-year-old daughter of his former lover, a well-known and influential Republican fundraiser. Numerous phone calls and letters came to light during the FBI investigation, in which Wachtler spelled out the sexual perversions he planned to inflict on the girl. All this while he was serving as a respected judge and was campaigning for a Senate nomination.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ The Giarretto Institute is the home of Parents United, a nationwide organization that works with abusers, spouses, children in incest families, and adults molested as children. See p. 540 of the Resource Guide.

⁷⁶ Brian Abbott, interview by Laura Davis, September 9, 1993.

⁷⁷ This is one of the arguments given by FMS Foundation founder Pamela Freyd when asked how she knows her group isn't harboring perpetrators. See p. 507.

⁷⁸ Anna Salter, *Transforming Trauma: A Guide to Treating Sexual Abuse* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, in press, 1994), chapter 1.

How could this happen? How can someone serve as an esteemed judge, run for Congress, and at the same time plan an elaborate reign of sexual harassment and terrorism? Psychiatrist and medical historian Robert Jay Lifton has come up with a concept called “doubling” to explain this capacity to lead a double life.

Lifton studied Nazi doctors who participated in the Holocaust. He wanted to understand how men could kill, torture human subjects in “medical experiments,” select who was to live and who was to die, and then go home, attend church, and play with their children. To explain their seemingly unthinkable behavior, Lifton came up with the idea of “doubling,” a dissociative defense that enabled the doctors simultaneously to commit heinous acts and to maintain their respectable place in society.⁸⁰

Lawrence Klein explains the capacity of sexual offenders to live a dual life in a similar way. He says every offender has a “Kingdom” in his mind, a place that gives him the license to abuse:

The KINGDOM quite simply is a place in the perpetrator’s mind where he as King can do anything he pleases; when, where, how, and with whom he pleases. As King, he defines reality. He creates the rules that govern. . . . All others are things that exist for his ownership and pleasure. . . . From the Kingdom, perpetrators cannot see beyond their own needs. . .

A perpetrator lives a double life. There is the life of the Real World, a world that for the perpetrator has long been bereft of meaningful and genuine human contact. Then, there is the Revised World, or the world of the Kingdom. Over years of experience the perpetrator learns to pass unobtrusively between the two realms. Quite typically, the perpetrator is viewed by associates as an unremarkable, law abiding citizen. . . .

Perpetrators do not stop their pattern of abuse until they renounce

⁷⁹ Information drawn from Lawrence Klein, “When In Doubt,” a presentation for the Center for Mental Health at Foote Hospital’s Continuing Education Conference “Controversies Around Recovered Memories of Incest and Ritualistic Abuse,” August 7, 1993, in Ann Arbor, MI; and from Lucinda Franks, “To Catch A Judge: How the F.B.I. Tracked Sol Wachtler,” *The New Yorker* (December 21, 1992), pp. 58–66.

⁸⁰ Klein, “When In Doubt.” See Lifton’s book *The Nazi Doctors* (New York: Basic Books, 1986) for more on this phenomenon.

the Kingdom, and strive to embrace humanity. . . . When this happens, in almost all instances, it follows criminal prosecution. Only the jolt of pending incarceration can counter the allure of solitary gratification, in an individual who has lost faith in the viability of human relationships.⁸¹

Psychologist Brian Abbott works extensively with sexual abusers, particularly incest offenders. Ninety percent of the abusers in his program are ordered to attend by the courts as a condition of probation or bail. A large percentage have not yet been convicted of any crime, but Abbott says that in his experience, false accusations are rare. What he finds commonplace is denial:

Denial runs from absolute denial, “I didn’t do it,” “The child was abused but it wasn’t me,” to minimization, “It wasn’t that serious,” to rationalizing, “The child seduced me,” or “I was drunk or high.” If you define denial broadly like that, I see it with every offender who walks in the door.⁸²

Even when faced with clear and irrefutable proof, many offenders continue to deny that they did it, often with great emotion and conviction.⁸³ And their denial frequently continues even after they are convicted and jailed for child sexual abuse.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Lawrence Klein, “Therapists’ Page,” *Many Voices* (December 1989), pp. 3–4.

⁸² Abbott interview, September 9, 1993.

⁸³ In *Transforming Trauma*, Anna Salter tells the story of a 14-year-old sexual offender who thoroughly denied abusing a young girl even though the evidence against him was compelling. This boy was charged with sexual assault after grabbing a female classmate while walking her home from school, knocking her down, and threatening her with a knife. The whole event was witnessed by a friend of the offender, who testified against his schoolmate. A number of other children reported similar incidents with the same offender. Salter writes: “The examiner had 34 documents on her desk which testified to her client’s previous deviant sexual behavior and his predilection for knives. He admitted to owning 28.” Yet the youth “denied he had assaulted his classmate on the walk home, denied that he had ever assaulted or intimidated anyone, denied other sexually deviant behaviors, denied any deviant fantasies, denied that he had ever had a single non-deviant sexual thought or fantasy, and denied that he had masturbated. He further volunteered that he had never held his penis while urinating.”

⁸⁴ In a 1983 study J. S. Wormith investigated 205 sex offenders, one-third of whom were child molesters. Even after being convicted and incarcerated, only two-thirds admitted their crimes. Even then, they usually admitted only to the offense they were caught for, denying any other

Brian Abbott says offenders often get so psychologically invested in maintaining their denial that they can't break through it:

They may have convinced significant people in their lives—their wives, extended family, employers, preachers—that they didn't commit the offense. Now they've got this whole chorus of people saying, "We know he didn't do it." When you have that kind of strong alliance supporting you, it makes it much more difficult to admit what you've done. Sometimes "I know he didn't do it" is said so often, the offender begins to believe that's the reality of his situation.⁸⁵

There are other reasons abusers deny what they've done. They can't face it, they feel ashamed, they hope to get away with it, or they don't believe it was wrong. And some are just afraid. One survivor related the following story:

My father sexually abused me when I was eleven. When I confronted him about it initially, he denied it. But several years later, he admitted what he had done and even filled in some of the information I didn't know. Because of that, we were able to start healing the relationship. In a counseling session, I asked him why he had denied it at first. He said simply, "I was scared."

sexual abuse.

When offenders are granted immunity for sex crimes that haven't yet been disclosed, their level of self-disclosed reports rises dramatically. In a 1991 study, Mark Weinrott and Maureen Saylor interviewed rapists and child molesters who were currently in prison for their crimes. The 67 child molesters interviewed were known to have molested 136 children. When questioned with a guarantee of immunity, however, they admitted to more than 8,000 sexual offenses against almost 1,000 children.

And when offenders are guaranteed both anonymity and confidentiality, their own reports of sexual offenses go up astronomically. In 1987 Gene Abel and his colleagues studied over 500 sex offenders, offering them protections far exceeding those in previous studies. The 377 extrafamilial child molesters in the sample were responsible for 48,297 acts against a total of 27,416 victims. The 203 incest offenders in the group committed 15,668 acts against 361 victims. Abel also found that the chances of getting caught for child molestation were a meager 3%. These and other studies are described more fully in chapter 1 of Anna Salter's *Transforming Trauma*.

⁸⁵ Abbott interview, September 9, 1993.

The backlash reinforces denial.

Mary Jo Barrett, director of training at the Center for Contextual Change in Skokie, Illinois, says there are four stages of denial an offender needs to work through before he or she can be accountable for the abuse and can prevent further perpetrations:

The first level is denial of the facts: “I didn’t do it. It never happened. She’s lying.” The second stage is denial of awareness: “Maybe something happened, but I don’t remember it.” The third stage is denial of impact: “I didn’t hurt her.” And the last stage is denial of responsibility, “It happened, but she made me do it.”⁸⁶

In a gradual therapy process that eventually includes the whole family, Barrett and her colleagues help the offender break through each level of denial:

The denial is always to try to make the truth more comfortable, to protect them from the pain of acknowledging what they’ve done. If the offender is denying the facts, we don’t start by focusing on the facts. Rather we look at the offender’s social, political, cultural, economic and religious background, as well as his own family history. We ask: “Did he have trauma in his own family? Was he emotionally abandoned? Does he prescribe to a patriarchal belief system which demeans women and children?” Basically, we assess, “Does he have the variables which would make him vulnerable to being a sex offender?” And we say to the offender, “According to what you’re saying, you could have been vulnerable to turning to children.” And gradually, he or she is able to acknowledge that the abuse might have occurred.

⁸⁶ Mary Jo Barrett, interview by Laura Davis, November 11, 1993.

Barrett points out that similar stages of denial are common in all members of the family, not just the offender. The survivor, for instance, may deny that the abuse took place, may forget or have dissociated the experience, may minimize the impact the abuse has had on her life, or may blame herself instead of putting the responsibility where it belongs—with the perpetrator.

When denial is on the level of awareness, Barrett asks her clients, “What would happen to you if you found out you did this? What do you have to lose by remembering? What do you have to gain?” Gains, Barrett points out, are things like having real power for the first time:

. . . the power that comes from having genuine human connections rather than from hurting others; the benefit of trying to help their child for the first time, the benefit of not getting cut off and being totally isolated and alone, the benefit of not going to their graves with the secret.

We also ask them, “What would your child have to gain by making this up? Why would your daughter have a dream, wake up and believe she was sexually abused? If that happened to me, I’d just rub my eyes and say, ‘Wow, what a really bad dream.’ ”

The third level, denial of impact, is addressed through a confrontation with the victim—at a point when the offender is ready to listen and to recognize the pain the survivor has experienced. And the acknowledgment of responsibility usually follows closely once the perpetrator begins to feel empathy with the victim.

“The process is very slow,” Barrett says, “But I’ve seen real metamorphosis if they stick with it.” About half the time, survivors are able to maintain their own integrity—knowing they were traumatized—while still retaining a piece of their family relationship. For Barrett such resolutions are deeply gratifying: “It’s been miraculous seeing adult survivors and their families change together.”

In the past year, however, Barrett has worked with several families in which the parents came to therapy already steeped in backlash beliefs. These families have been much harder to work with.

Before, parents came in and it was just about their family and the facts of their lives. But now they come in with a pathological take on their kid: “You’ve been brainwashed.” So no matter what happens, the parents

say, “You’re under the influence of your therapist. You’re under the influence of a 12-step program. You’re under the influence of *The Courage to Heal*. You were a wonderful, happy child until all this happened to you.” They’re doing exactly what they accuse their kids of doing—buying a party line and swallowing it whole. Such polarization stops the healing. It’s made my work much harder.

Barrett says the worst thing about the false memory doctrine is that it retraumatizes the victim: “There’s no empathy for the survivor. And lack of empathy is one of the main reasons the abuse happened in the first place.”⁸⁷

Mark Schwartz, co-director of the Masters and Johnson Sexual Trauma and Compulsivity Programs, says he too has watched the propagation of the “false memory argument” reinforce the denial of perpetrators:

In our perpetrators’ program, many individuals who had previously acknowledged their perpetrations have begun carrying around “false memory” articles to fuel their denial, resulting in more perpetrations.⁸⁸

It is imperative that we create a climate in which people who commit abuse can acknowledge what they’ve done and be accountable for their actions rather than be bolstered by rhetoric that further reinforces their denial.

Reports of families “destroyed by false allegations” tell only one side of the story.

The typical profile of a survivor, as presented by the backlash, is that of a well-educated woman in her thirties, who had a basically happy childhood and then invented a

⁸⁷ Mary Jo Barrett and Terry S. Trepper’s book, *Systemic Treatment of Incest: A Therapeutic Handbook* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1989), is a useful guide for therapists working with families in which incest has taken place. It presents a positive and effective method of helping abusers and their spouses break through their denial, make necessary changes, and stop the sexual abuse. However, some statements in the book can be misleading if taken out of context. Therefore, it is important to consider the book in its entirety.

⁸⁸ Mark F. Schwartz, “False Memory Blues,” *Masters and Johnson Report* 2, no. 1 (Summer 1993), p. 3.

history of sexual abuse to explain her contemporary problems and get back at her parents.

In these accounts, it's always the parents who categorize the childhood as happy. They pull out family albums filled with photos of smiling children and talk about how wonderful things were until their daughter, or occasionally their son, came under the influence of a villainous therapist and suddenly began making these accusations "out of the blue." This depiction of therapists as evil manipulators allows the parents to blame someone other than themselves, or their child, for their current distress and conveniently makes the family the victim rather than the source of the problem. The lingering question "Why would my wonderfully happy, well-adjusted child level such serious charges against me?" goes unanswered.

The adult children, meanwhile, are rarely heard from in these reports. But many of them have spoken or written to us, and they do not characterize their childhoods as happy.⁸⁹ Instead, they describe years of trauma—much of which can be corroborated—as well as years of inner suffering. And many explain that, contrary to their parents' claims, they remembered their abuse without help from a therapist—or never forgot it:

It drives me crazy that my parents keep going around saying how my survivors' group put these ideas in my head. Why would I have gone to a survivors' group if I wasn't abused? I didn't need a therapist to convince me I was abused. I went for help *because* I was abused. And the part about how I'd always been such a happy child is pitiful. I'd always been a successful functioner. I looked good. But I wrote in my diary at age ten that I wanted to die, and my first suicide attempt was the next year.

Legal principles do not apply to healing.

Survivors have been criticized for making claims of abuse without enough evidence. Because they don't have the kind of proof that would be required to win a lawsuit, survivors are condemned for saying that they were abused, limiting contact with their families, or protecting their children from potential abuse.

⁸⁹ See Jennifer Freyd's story on p. 489 for an example.

Irate parents, and the professionals who defend them, rely on principles that pertain to the law, such as “You’re innocent until proven guilty,” to censure the choices of survivors. These parents complain that their adult children won’t tell them exactly what they’re accused of, won’t admit them into their therapy, or continue to see them. But choices about how one conducts one’s life are not bound by legal principles. We are all entitled to live our lives as we see fit, without providing evidence to justify our choices.

Healing—and simply living one’s life—is very different from suing in a court of law. Yet this obvious difference is often obscured in the media coverage of the backlash and sometimes in professional circles.

In a lawsuit, stringent standards of proof are necessary. We have a legal system that attempts to protect each party’s rights while pursuing justice. This is as it should be. However, outside the legal arena, adults have the right to explore their own history and to make their own choices without providing proof, evidence, or even an explanation. In healthy relationships, people naturally want to discuss their motives and feelings when making changes that affect others. But in relationships marred by abuse, such honesty is often impossible.

Most survivors repeatedly try to work things out with their families, hoping for healing and reconciliation. It’s only after coming up against intractable patterns of denial, minimizing, and continued abuse that they make the agonizing decision to pull away from their families.

When there are rifts in families that can’t be mended, it’s always a loss with much suffering involved. But some survivors have found that continuing contact with their parents or other family members is destructive to their mental health and to their ability to create positive, satisfying lives.

Being an incest survivor does not offer enough advantages to encourage anyone to “jump on the bandwagon.”

Those who seek to invalidate survivors like to claim that incest has become an attractive club to join, that people claim to be survivors in order to get attention, sympathy, approval from therapists, or to create an excuse for their contemporary

problems.

In reality, survivors usually minimize the abuse they experienced or pretend it didn't happen, rather than make up or exaggerate histories of abuse. It's excruciating to know that people you loved and trusted could have betrayed you in such a profound way.

Most survivors are not eager to name their abuse. On the contrary—they avoid facing the rigors of the healing process for as long as they can. As Judith Herman and Mary Harvey point out, recovering memories is so agonizing that survivors hold on to their denial for as long as possible:

When traumatic memories break into awareness, distress can be overwhelming. Survivors . . . tend to cling to their doubts long past the point where most impartial observers would be convinced. That is why many therapists and self-help books encourage survivors to have confidence in their suspicions.⁹⁰

In fact, as psychologist Christine Courtois points out, many survivors who do remember childhood abuse wish they didn't:

Those with access to memory usually wish to forget, repress, or minimize what they know. Those with absent, hazy, or fragmented memory are usually desperate to remember, until memory returns. They then move to the position of survivors with memory: they want to forget.⁹¹

Identifying as an incest survivor confers very few privileges. It does name a reason for an often complex and dizzying array of problems, but naming the root cause as abuse is only the beginning of the healing process. The responsibility for healing, inevitably, lies with the survivor. No one else can accomplish the arduous work of healing, feel the feelings, and make the changes needed to create a healthy life in the

⁹⁰ Judith L. Herman and Mary R. Harvey, "The False Memory Debate: Social Science or Social Backlash?," *The Harvard Mental Health Letter* 9, no. 10 (April 1993), p. 5.

⁹¹ Christine A. Courtois, "The Memory Retrieval Process in Incest Survivor Therapy," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 1, no. 1 (1992), pp. 15–16.

present. Although healing is ultimately rewarding and worth the work, it is not something one would choose if it weren't absolutely necessary.

One survivor, who has spent years struggling to heal from the wounds of her childhood, finds the charge that she made up the abuse not only absurd but painful. "Why," she asked simply, "do we have to fight to hold on to something we wish would go away?"

The propagation of the "false memory" theory reinforces some very old and powerful stereotypes about gender, class, and race.

The first stereotype is that of women as pawns: weak, gullible, and so impressionable that reading a book about sexual abuse or having a therapist suggest that they might have been sexually abused would be enough to convince them of a reality not their own. This stereotype is not only false; it's a gross insult to women, telling us we don't have the power or sense to know what happened to us. We do not believe most women are so easily led or manipulated.

Supporters of the backlash frequently talk about child sex abuse "hysteria." In Freud's time, "hysteria" was a legitimate term used to describe a condition of severe emotional and mental distress. The word has since acquired such negative implications and has been applied to women in such insulting ways that we suggest it's long past time when "hysterical" can be responsibly used to describe women's testimony. Clearly, supporters of the backlash have chosen this word for its inflammatory effect.

Another erroneous stereotype is that abuse doesn't happen in affluent white families. According to a fact sheet put out by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in June 1992, the median income level of parents who join their organization is over \$60,000. More than half are college-educated, and 25 percent have advanced degrees.⁹² In one newsletter, founder Pamela Freyd responded to charges that her group might be harboring abusers:

How do we know we are not representing pedophiles?

⁹² In a study of families served by the FMS Foundation, 92.2% reported that the accusing child grew up in a "middle," "upper middle," or "upper" class home; 7.2% reported their socioeconomic status as "lower middle" class; and only .7% said they were "lower" class (*FMS Foundation Newsletter*, May 3, 1993, p. 9).

This question keeps coming up, and it is critically important to our image and to our ability to get things done. . . . One person suggested that I take a camera to meetings so that when the opportunity for going public presented itself, we could suggest representatives who would have the best image. . . .

If I had taken a camera to any of the three meetings held here in Philadelphia, I would have been hard put to know whom to photograph. We are a good looking bunch of people: graying hair, well-dressed, healthy, smiling. The similarity of stories is astounding, so script-like and formulaic that doubts dissolve after chats with a few families. Just about every person who has attended is someone you would likely find interesting and want to count as a friend.⁹³

The implication is that well-to-do, good-looking people couldn't possibly have abused their children. This contradicts well-established facts about abusers.⁹⁴

Although they aren't always identified as such, the families presented in the media as victims of the "false memory syndrome" have all been white. The message here is that real abuse takes place in poor families, in African-American, Latino, Asian, and Native American families, but that "false memories" are to blame for the disintegration of well-to-do white families. This implication is both racist and false. Abuse crosses all lines of race, class, and gender.⁹⁵

It is unusual for therapists to convince their clients that abuse took place when it didn't.

The core of the "false memory" argument is that fictitious memories of child sexual abuse are implanted in the minds of impressionable patients by overeager,

⁹³ *FMS Foundation Newsletter*, February 29, 1992.

⁹⁴ See p. 499. Anna Salter further discusses this issue specifically in regard to members of the FMS Foundation in *Transforming Trauma*, chapter 1.

⁹⁵ For documentation of the universality of child sexual abuse, see David Finkelhor and Larry Baron, "High-Risk Children," in Finkelhor, *Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*, pp. 60–88.

manipulative, or greedy therapists, and that they use coercive mind-control techniques to do so.

This is not how responsible therapists work. The foundation of good therapy is a respectful relationship in which the therapist provides a safe space, genuine caring, and support. Good therapists don't lead—they follow their clients into the difficult and painful places they need to go. In doing so, their clients are empowered to do their own healing work, to uncover their own history, to find their own truth. As Judith Herman explains, “Psychotherapy is a collaborative effort, not a form of totalitarian indoctrination.”⁹⁶

If it were really possible for therapists to create new memories in their clients, survivors of child sexual abuse *would*, in fact, probably be the first to sign up. As one survivor put it, “If it is so common and so easily accomplished to alter or even implant memories, where can I get some new ones? Mine are all too real and sickening and frankly, I'm tired of them.”

This is not to say that there aren't bad or even abusive therapists. Unethical therapists have forced hospitalizations, overmedicated their patients, had sex with clients, and perpetrated a variety of other abuses. But such practitioners are not representative of the mental health profession as a whole.⁹⁷

All therapists, even good ones, do sometimes make mistakes. In the past, these mistakes—at least those relative to survivors—had more to do with minimizing and denying abuse than seeing it where it didn't exist. Even now, many therapists are reluctant to explore a history of abuse with their clients.⁹⁸

As awareness of sexual abuse has become more widespread, however, therapists sometimes have made the opposite mistake: concluding a client was abused before that person had a chance to explore this possibility herself. But even then, it is very unusual for clients to take on every suggestion a therapist makes. One woman, who'd come from a violent alcoholic home but who'd never been sexually abused, related the following

⁹⁶ Herman, “Backtalk,” p. 4.

⁹⁷ For resources on dealing with abuse by therapists, see p. 550 of the Resource Guide.

⁹⁸ And that reluctance is growing. Faced with attacks on their professional judgment and the threat of legal action and ethics charges by irate parents, a growing number of therapists are finding themselves in conflict between protecting themselves and following the best interests of their clients.

story:

Two times now, I've been in therapy with counselors who've told me I have all the symptoms of someone who's been sexually abused. One of them kept pushing at me. It made me mad. I'd given the matter a lot of thought, and I knew it wasn't what happened to me. A lot of other things happened—but not sexual abuse. So I told her to leave it alone, and finally she backed off.

When a therapist inaccurately surmises that someone has been sexually abused as a child, it is a serious error of grave concern. It has the potential to damage both the client and the family involved. Families who have suffered this kind of pain deserve acknowledgment and compassion.

Women who say they were misled in therapy, and that the abuse they once claimed never really happened, call themselves “recanters.” A number of these women report being mistreated through hospitalization, excessive and inappropriate drugs, and authoritarian and invasive methods that far exceeded simply asking the question “Were you ever sexually abused as a child?” or even the more leading “You show all the signs of being sexually abused. I think you were.” Recanters have described not just being asked if they were abused but feeling coerced by their therapists into coming up with a story of abuse. Some report that they made up a story, either to please their therapist or to fit in with members of their group. Only later, as time went by, did they begin to believe these stories themselves.

Some recanters talk about being subjected to mind control and feel as if they're recovering from being involved in a cult. Interestingly, a sizable number of recanters say they were involved in cults or cultlike groups at an earlier time in their lives. An article in a newsletter for recanters explored this common link in the histories of many of its readers:

We often share the *same vulnerabilities of high idealism, dependency weaknesses, basic resistance to change, spiritual hunger.* A

cult experience offers us a tempting escape from the hostile pain of the real world, a black and white answer, a righteous us-against-them stance. There was a desperate inner structure to be gained from our idealistic battle against perceived “perpetrators” and “abusers.”⁹⁹

The experience of these women is painful and must be acknowledged. However, it does not hold true for the majority of people who recover memories of child sexual abuse during therapy.

In their July 1993 newsletter, the FMS Foundation reported there were sixty women who said that the sexual abuse they initially described never took place. Even if all sixty cases were accurate, they represent only a tiny fraction of the millions of actual survivors of child sexual abuse.

Confronting one’s abuser and family is one of the most painful, frightening things a survivor faces. As with children’s disclosures, it is possible that some recantations are a result of enormous family pressures rather than an erroneous accusation. It is also of interest that a number of recanters acknowledge that they *were* sexually abused; what they now say is that their accusations snowballed beyond the truth, implicating people who did not actually abuse them.

There need be no schism between survivors and recanters. It is imperative that recanters speak out and tell their stories. But it is equally important that they do so without attacking all survivors of child sexual abuse, the validity of their memories, and the important social gains that have been made.

Therapy is rarely the sole or primary trigger for memories of child sexual abuse.

Proponents of the “false memory syndrome” promote the belief that most adult survivors regain their memories of child sexual abuse at the instigation of a therapist. This is not true. Many survivors never see a therapist at all. They struggle along as best they can without coming to terms with the abuse, or they work through their pain without the aid of a counselor. Of those who do seek therapy, many already know about the

⁹⁹ *The Retractor: Newsletter for Survivors of Recovered Memory Therapy* (Fall 1993), p. 2.

abuse. Either they've always remembered it and they now are ready to seek help, or something else has triggered the memories and they need help coping with the fallout.

There are three factors that are usually present when adults (or adolescents) recall abuse they have previously blocked out: distance from the original abuse, a life circumstance that leads to the letting down of normal defenses, and an external event that restimulates the memory.¹⁰⁰ These factors can exist in a good therapeutic relationship, and therefore some survivors do uncover abuse while in therapy. But recall of child sexual abuse is far more common in other circumstances.

Life transitions—puberty, childbirth, a commitment to an intimate relationship, the death of a parent, retirement, moving, menopause, aging, divorce, losses of any kind—frequently trigger memories. So does sobriety. Medical treatment—a trip to the dentist, an exam by a gynecologist or urologist, surgery or other invasive medical procedures—can also jar loose buried feelings and images. Adult experiences of victimization—a rape, a robbery, being fired from a job—often stir up memories of earlier violations. Parents sometimes remember their own abuse when their child is abused or when that child reaches the age they were when they were first abused. Survivors may also remember while making love, exercising, or getting massaged—when they use their bodies in a new way.

Of course any of these life events may occur while a survivor is in therapy. And a survivor may seek therapy for help in coping with such events. But a therapist's question, or even suggestion, about sexual abuse is rarely the only or most significant reason for memories to emerge.

There is a lot more to determining whether someone is a survivor than a single memory.

The “false memory” argument hinges on the assumption that an assessment of child sexual abuse is based solely or primarily on memory. But that isn't true. Long-term

¹⁰⁰ Discussed by Karen Olio and William Cornell in “Therapeutic Relationship as the Foundation for Treatment with Adult Survivors of Sexual Abuse,” *Psychotherapy* 30, no. 3 (in press). (Available through Family Violence Sexual Assault Institute, 1310 Clinic Drive, Tyler, TX 75701.) Also see Christine Courtois, *Healing the Incest Wound* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988).

trauma is reflected in the daily lives of many survivors. For some the injury is obvious—they have suffered from severe and debilitating symptoms for many years. Some have permanent physical damage that is unmistakably traumatic in origin.¹⁰¹ Other survivors have been successful at creating highly functional lives, but their inner world is self-hating or full of pain. These effects, which have frequently been present for years prior to uncovering a sexual abuse history, are not created in a therapist's office.

Reconstructing a history of child sexual abuse is a complex process based on a whole constellation of symptoms, of which memory is just a part. Phobias, flashbacks, intrusive imagery, chronic patterns of denial and dissociation, flooding of feelings, spontaneous regression, startle reflexes, numbness in the body, and terror of sex may all point to a history of trauma in childhood.¹⁰²

Those who say memories of sexual abuse can be implanted fail to explain the presence of these symptoms. A therapist cannot induce you to jump out of your skin every time someone comes up behind you. “False memories” cannot explain why you see your abuser's face when you climax (see Rachel's story on page 524), why you're terrified of subway cars (see Evie Malcolm's story on page 392), why you carve into your body (see Michelle and Artemis on page 446), or why you wake up terrified every morning at 4:00 a.m. (see Alicia Mendoza's story on page 421). These and hundreds of other distressing patterns fall through the cracks of the “false memory” theory and are, unfortunately, often explained by an all-too-real history of child sexual abuse.

Memory research is being distorted to validate the idea of a “false memory syndrome.”

The research cited to validate the existence of a “false memory syndrome” consists largely of studies designed to learn about variations in normal memory and to assess the accuracy of eyewitness accounts of incidents such as car accidents. Such studies show that memory is fallible and that people are often in error when they report what happened. However, this research does not apply to traumatic amnesia. To say that

¹⁰¹ See S. R. Benjamin's story on p. 428.

¹⁰² As described by Karen Olio, “The Truth Behind the False Memory Syndrome,” p. 299.

the errors in ordinary memory prove that fictitious memories of child sexual abuse can be implanted by therapists violates a basic tenet of science: Findings pertaining to one specific set of circumstances and one population cannot be assumed to hold true for a different set of circumstances and a different population.¹⁰³

One of the examples most often cited to prove the idea of a “false memory syndrome” is a study by Elizabeth Loftus, professor of psychology at the University of Washington and a member of the FMS Foundation advisory board. With the help of family members who insisted that a bogus event was real, Loftus was able to convince five subjects that they’d been lost in a shopping mall when they were children.

However, being briefly lost is in the realm of common childhood experience. There is no evidence that memories of something foreign, traumatic, and repugnant to us, like sexual abuse, could be similarly implanted. Psychiatrist Richard Kluft speculates on this question:

We might think the academicians have won the day. . . . However, there are some reasons for skepticism about skepticism about allegations of sexual abuse. Is Loftus’ laboratory equivalent to the family bedroom? Is the picture of an automobile accident equivalent to the imagery of a penis coming right at you? Is sitting in a nice air-conditioned university classroom the equivalent of being forcefully penetrated? Is it possible that the memories might be laid down a little differently?¹⁰⁴

In a letter to Karen Olio about the relevance of this study to survivors of child sexual abuse, Loftus herself wrote, “Being lost in a shopping mall is completely different from being sexually abused. . . . I’ve never tried to say they were the same.”¹⁰⁵ Loftus’s research, like the other studies cited as evidence of a “false memory syndrome,” have

¹⁰³ Discussed by Karen A. Olio and William F. Cornell, “Making Meaning, Not Monsters: Reflections on the Delayed Memory Controversy,” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, Vol. 3 (3), 1994. (Available in *Trauma, Amnesia, and the Denial of Abuse*, edited by Robert Falconer. See listing on p. 555 of the Resource Guide or order directly through the Haworth Press (800) 342-9678).

¹⁰⁴ Kluft, “Advanced Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder.”

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Loftus in a personal communication to Karen Olio, November 1, 1992, as cited by Olio and Cornell, “Making Meaning, Not Monsters.”

little relevance to traumatic memories of child sexual abuse.

Expert witnesses for the defense in sexual abuse cases have also given extremely misleading testimony about memory research. Anna Salter studied Hollida Wakefield and Ralph Underwager's book, *Accusations of Child Sexual Abuse*, as well as transcripts of Underwager's testimony:

I took a look at his transcript and I was horrified. He was talking about research I knew and books that I knew. He was saying things like, "All research in this volume demonstrates that children are very suggestible." In fact, the book mentioned a *number* of studies on suggestibility. Some found children were more suggestible than adults, some the same. At least one found that adults were more suggestible. One author summed up by saying, "No systematic relationship between age and suggestibility has been consistently documented." That was in direct opposition to what Underwager said.

That's when I became aware that nobody was going back and looking at the academic scaffolding for this.¹⁰⁶

Under the auspices of the New England Association of Child Welfare Directors and Commissioners, Salter wrote a monograph, *Accuracy of Expert Testimony in Child Sexual Abuse Cases: A Case Study of Ralph Underwager and Hollida Wakefield*, in which she examined more than five hundred articles to which Underwager referred in his book and in his court testimony.¹⁰⁷ She found a multitude of factual errors, both minor and serious:

In their book, Underwager and Wakefield cite a study that they say was done with younger and older children. Actually, the study was done with college students. Errors like that in court testimony in cases where

¹⁰⁶ Salter interview, September 16, 1993.

¹⁰⁷ This monograph is available from Anna Salter, Ph.D., Midwest Center for Psychotherapy and Sex Therapy, 426 S. Yellowstone Dr., Suite 225, Madison, WI 53719, (608) 829-3880; fax: (608) 829-1422.

the safety and security of children are at stake, is horrifying. . . . Cases of child sexual abuse are sometimes won or lost based on expert testimony.¹⁰⁸

Expert witnesses often come to court citing research they do not bring with them. By the time the other side can track down the research to see if the claims are accurate, the trial may be over. Salter writes:

If the defendant is acquitted on the basis of inaccurate expert testimony, there is no appeal. The defense may appeal a conviction, but the prosecution cannot appeal an acquittal. Thus it is very important that psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers testify as accurately as possible in these cases. It is not too much to say that justice depends on it.¹⁰⁹

WHAT WE DO AND DON'T KNOW ABOUT MEMORY

There are many unanswered questions about trauma and memory, but whether traumatic amnesia exists is not one of them. The fact that people experience amnesia for traumatic events is—or should be—beyond dispute. It has been documented not only in cases of child sexual abuse but among war veterans, battered women, prisoners of war, and others who have suffered severe ongoing trauma.¹¹⁰ Psychotherapist David Calof,

¹⁰⁸ Salter interview, September 16, 1993. Ralph Underwager's testimony has been partially or wholly excluded in at least nine instances. In *State v. Deloch*, 1990 WL 48536 (Minn. 1990) (slip opinion) the Court of Appeals ruled, "The record does not establish that the scientific basis for [Dr. Underwager's memory] theory is reliable and broadly accepted in its field." In *Oregon v. Herrick* (trial court decision) the court held that "Dr. Underwager did inadequate research. His preparation was inadequate and therefore it's lacking in sound foundation." And in *People v. Chuck* (New York State, April 26, 1988) the trial court held that Dr. Underwager was "not qualified to render any opinion as to whether or not [the victim] was sexually molested."

¹⁰⁹ Salter, *Accuracy of Expert Testimony*, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ See Joel Osler Brende and Erwin Randolph Parson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985); Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); Bessel A. van der Kolk, *Psychological Trauma* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1987); Jean Goodwin, "Rediscovering Sadism," in *Rediscovering Childhood Trauma* (Washington, D.C.:

who has worked with more than four hundred abuse survivors, explains:

What stood out in many of these cases . . . were symptoms common to other trauma victims, including survivors of such public horrors as the bombing of Dresden, the camps at Auschwitz, the massacred villages of Vietnam, Guatemala and Bosnia, the killing fields of Cambodia and the torture chambers of Brazil. Like survivors of these public traumas, my clients had dissociative symptoms, such as sleepwalking and memory disturbances, as well as signs of post-traumatic stress, such as flashbacks, sleep disturbances and nightmares. They wanted to be anonymous, or were socially withdrawn. They were depressed or had other mood disturbances. They often tended to minimize or rationalize painful present realities, and they suffered from feelings of numbness, emptiness and unreality.

Unlike the survivors of publicly acknowledged disasters, however, they did not know *why* they felt that way. Their memories of the traumas were often fragmented into bewildering mosaics or missing altogether. Often, they were veterans of intensely private wars that had taken place in barns, attics and suburban houses with the blinds drawn. Their wounds were never reported in newspapers or discussed with family members. There were rarely any witnesses other than the people who hurt them. . . . their childhood rapes and beatings were encoded into memory in fragments, in a state of terror, when their hearts and minds were flooded with adrenaline. They didn't remember them the way one remembers a walk in the park, and they doubted the fragments they did recall.¹¹¹

There is increasing documentation of traumatic amnesia specific to survivors of

American Psychiatric Press, 1993), and "Credibility Problems in Multiple Personality Disorder Patients and Abused Children," in *Childhood Antecedents of Multiple Personality Disorder*, ed. Richard Kluft (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1985); and Frank W. Putnam, Jr., "Dissociation as a Response to Extreme Trauma," also in *Childhood Antecedents of Multiple Personality Disorder*.

¹¹¹ David Calof, "Facing the Truth About False Memory," *The Family Therapy Networker* 17, no. 5 (September/October 1993), pp. 40-41.

child sexual abuse. In the much-publicized Father James Porter case, a Catholic priest admitted to sexually abusing between fifty and one hundred children. As adults, many of these survivors experienced amnesia, including Frank Fitzpatrick, the first man to come forward.¹¹²

Psychologist John Briere and therapist Jon Conte studied 450 survivors (420 women and 30 men) regarding amnesia for sexual abuse incidents. Fifty-nine percent of the survivors identified some period in their lives, before age eighteen, when they had no memory of their abuse. Amnesia was most common when the abuse took place at an early age, was extended over time, included multiple perpetrators, or was violent.¹¹³

Linda Meyer Williams, research associate professor at the Family Violence Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire, studied traumatic amnesia by interviewing 129 women who as children had reported sexual abuse and had been brought to the hospital emergency room for treatment and for the collection of forensic evidence. At the time of the original abuse, the girls and their families were all interviewed and information about the abuse was carefully documented. Seventeen years later, 38 percent, more than one in three, did not remember the abuse or chose not to disclose it.¹¹⁴

In a study by psychiatrist Judith Herman and psychotherapist Emily Schatzow of fifty-three clients, most of whom had recovered memories of child sexual abuse, 74 percent were able to find corroborating evidence. Most of these got confirmation from family members who knew about the abuse. Some found diaries or photos, talked to other

¹¹² See Elinor Burkett and Frank Bruni, *A Gospel of Shame: Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church* (p. 560 of the Resource Guide) for a thorough accounting of the Father James Porter case.

¹¹³ John Briere and Jon Conte, "Self-Reported Amnesia for Abuse in Adults Molested as Children," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 6, no. 1 (1993), pp. 21–31.

¹¹⁴ Linda Meyer Williams, "Recall of Childhood Trauma: A Prospective Study of Women's Memories of Child Sexual Abuse," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62(6), 1167–1176. The authors state that their research suggests that most of the women who didn't disclose the abuse in fact did not remember it. They write: "Most of the women told the interviewer about many other very personal matters—such as information on other sexual, physical and emotional abuse suffered in childhood . . . so it is unlikely that embarrassment was the reason that so many women did not tell about the 'index' abuse. Of the women who *did not recall* the child sexual abuse which brought them into the study, 68% told the interviewer about *other sexual assaults* (clearly involving different perpetrators and circumstances) that they experienced in childhood." (This article and others reporting findings from the same are available from Linda Williams, Director of Research, The Stone Center, 106 Central St., Wellesley, MA 02181, (781) 283–2834, fax (781) 283–3646.)

victims, or had perpetrators who admitted what they had done. (In several instances, the perpetrator even tried to reinitiate sex!) Nine percent found evidence that strongly suggested sexual abuse but was not conclusive, and 11 percent did not try to confirm their memories. Only 6 percent could not find any supportive corroboration.¹¹⁵ In their ability to find corroboration, there was no difference between the women who'd always remembered their abuse and those whose memories had been repressed.¹¹⁶

All too often, recovered memories are substantiated through the discovery that a child is being abused in the present by the same person who abused the adult survivor in the past.¹¹⁷ Frequently this tragic turn of events is the only thing that finally brings families to acknowledge that the adult survivor is telling the truth. As one survivor described:

I'd told my mother. I'd told my brothers. And my sisters-in-law.
I'd screamed at them to keep my niece and nephews away from my father.
They thought I was a raving lunatic. My mother believed me for about two weeks and then she collapsed. She couldn't face it. And nobody did anything. Now it's too late. The kids have all been abused and finally, everyone believes me.

This is not to say that memory is always 100 percent accurate. We know for a fact that it is not. Researchers Ulric Neisser and Nicole Harsh, for example, found that many people were mistaken in their recounting of where they were and what they were doing

¹¹⁵ Judith Herman and Emily Schatzow, "Recovery and Verification of Memories of Childhood Sexual Trauma," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 4, no. 1 (1987), pp. 1–14. (For a copy of this article, write to the Women's Mental Health Collective, 61 Roseland St., Somerville, MA 02143.)

In describing this study, Judith Herman added the following caveat: "I'd like to emphasize that the choice to take this action properly belongs to the survivors, not to therapists, researchers or anyone else. We may not impose a search for corroborating evidence upon our patients, as some have suggested, simply to satisfy *our* wish for certainty."

¹¹⁶ Judith Herman, "Adult Memories of Childhood Trauma," p. 5.

¹¹⁷ See *The Hidden Legacy: Uncovering, Confronting and Healing Three Generations of Incest* by Barbara Smith Hamilton (Fort Bragg, CA: Cypress House, 1992) for an illustration of how unacknowledged sexual abuse can devastate an entire family. Also interesting in this account is that some of the survivors always remembered (including the author, a grandmother), others regained memories as they healed, and some continue to have memory gaps.

when the *Challenger* crashed. None, however, were mistaken about the fact that the *Challenger* crashed and the astronauts died.¹¹⁸

So too in memories of child sexual abuse. It is inevitable that survivors will remember the details of their abuse with some degree of inaccuracy. Time sequences may be mixed up, multiple incidents may be telescoped into a single incident, whole portions of incidents may be missing, and the events before and after may be blurred. But the core of the memory, its emotional felt truth, has its own authenticity. (See “The Essential Truth of Memory” on page 89 for more.) One survivor explained:

There’s a lot I’m pretty sure I’ll never have straight. After all, it began before I can remember. I mean, there was never a time *before* the abuse. So a lot of it’s blurred. And I honestly don’t think it’ll ever come into focus. But I’ve gotten clear on the essentials—what I need to know to do my healing work and get on with my life. I know the main cast of perpetrators. I know the extent of the damage. Maybe I’ll get more bits and pieces as time goes on, but if I don’t, it doesn’t matter. The cards are on the table—which is a relief.

BUT HOW COULD YOU FORGET A THING LIKE THAT?

Even though you may intellectually understand the relationship between sexual abuse and traumatic amnesia, you may still have trouble imagining that it’s possible to “forget” something as significant as sexual abuse for twenty or thirty years. One survivor, who’d always remembered her incest vividly, could not comprehend how anyone could forget such violations. It was a struggle for her to believe the stories she heard from

¹¹⁸ Ulric Neisser and Nicole Harsch, “Phantom Flashbulbs: False Recollections on Hearing News About Challenger,” in *Affect and Accuracy in Recall: Studies of “Flashbulb” Memories*, eds. Eugene Winograd and Ulric Neisser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Although there has been enormous skepticism from the backlash that memories of abuse that took place decades ago could be accurately recalled, there is, in fact, research to suggest the opposite. Fran H. Norris and Krzysztof Kaniasty (“Reliability of Delayed Self-Reports in Disaster Research,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 5, no. 4 (1992), p. 586) found that while memories of ordinary events are continually modified by new experiences, distorted, and sometimes forgotten altogether, memories of events that have a major impact on our lives are more likely to retain striking accuracy.

women who didn't remember their abuse until adulthood.

Over the years I've been in several support groups for incest survivors and used to wonder about the women who were in the process of recovering memories of their abuse. After all, I could remember all the abuse I suffered. Why couldn't these survivors describe their abuse in the same vivid way? For instance, I can recall the exact pattern of the dress I was wearing at age nine when my grandfather pushed me down on the bed. Although I wanted to support these other women, I found it difficult.

However, the day after I confronted my grandfather about his abuse, I remembered an incident that happened when I was five. It came back to me with the same kind of vivid detail I've always recalled about the other times he molested me. I now believe in suppressed memories, but I think it is very difficult to understand this phenomenon if you have not experienced it yourself.

MEMORY AND ABUSERS

In all this debate about memory, much has been said about survivors' memories but little about the memories of the abusers. Since there are so many unknowns about memory, then why aren't those who claim to be "falsely accused" questioning their own memories of the past? As one survivor wrote:

It's perfectly rational to believe that parents who are abusive might repress the memories of the abuse and then deny it. Some of the anger I read in the parents' stories sounded like the anger of being discovered, rather than the anger of being accused of a wrong they did not commit.¹¹⁹

Perpetrators have a strong and clear motivation to bury what they've done. Psychologist John Rhead speculated on this probability in a letter he wrote to the director

¹¹⁹ Mairi Mc Fall, *Mama Bears News and Notes*, vol. 10, no. 3, April/May 1993.

of the FMS Foundation:

Recently a man I was working with recalled an event in which he was the abuser, and it reminded me how much more of an incentive the abuser has to falsify memories. When I attempt to imagine having abused one of my children I am filled with an anguish I can scarcely describe. . . . It seems to me that the anguish associated with having been the betrayer has to be at least as great as that of having been the betrayed. . . .

The parent probably has already [felt] such deep and powerful love for their offspring that to integrate those feelings with an awareness of having betrayed the child would be difficult to say the least. . . . I expect that the parent would be particularly vulnerable to . . . conjuring up a memory of a warm and loving relationship with their child, uncomplicated by memory of the abuse and betrayal.¹²⁰

Many offenders were victims of child sexual abuse themselves. Their subsequent perpetration against children is sometimes a reenactment of what they themselves experienced. They may or may not be aware of their own childhood trauma or connect it to their abuse of children now. But the patterns of denial, repression, or even complete amnesia that helped them cope with their own violation may limit their capacity to acknowledge and face their abusive behavior now.

Most therapists who work with offenders observe that denial operates more frequently than actual amnesia when it comes to their abuse of children. But in some cases this suppression of awareness is so strong, the offender really thinks he didn't do it. As psychologist Brian Abbott explains:

Most offenders are aware of what they're doing while they're committing the sexual offense, but there's a feeling of disgust, shame and guilt associated with it. In order to preserve some feeling of self-worth, the

¹²⁰ John Rhead, letter to Pamela Freyd at the FMS Foundation, June 1, 1992.

offender forgets what he has done. By not remembering, he doesn't have to be faced with those disgusting, shameful feelings about his behavior. Some offenders literally bury it in their mind to the point where they're not consciously aware of it anymore.¹²¹

In light of this, it's easy to see how even those whose perpetration has been clearly proven could still continue to believe in, and proclaim, their innocence.

FACING SADISTIC RITUAL ABUSE

If there is even a small chance that one ritual abuse claim is true, we owe it to all potential victims to explore the problem of ritual abuse in greater depth.

—Margaret Smith¹²²

Some of the propaganda of the backlash has attempted to discredit survivors' stories by ridiculing their reports of extreme abuse, including the torture of sadistic ritual abuse.¹²³ It is understandable that as a society and as individuals, we are reluctant to face such atrocities, but our inability to believe is what leaves victims vulnerable and survivors bereft of compassion—or even acknowledgment. Elie Wiesel, renowned author and survivor of the Holocaust, was recently interviewed by Oprah Winfrey. In response to her exclamation of how “unbelievable” his experiences were, Wiesel responded, “The enemy counted on the disbelief of the world.”¹²⁴

¹²¹ Abbott interview, September 9, 1993.

¹²² Margaret Smith, *Ritual Abuse: What It Is, Why It Happens, and How to Help* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), p. vii.

¹²³ In *Rediscovering Childhood Trauma* (pp. 95–111), Jean Goodwin proposes that we use the term “sadistic abuse” to name the “extreme and severe acts of interpersonal violence which in the 1980s came to be described as ‘ritual abuse.’” Discussing sadism through history, Goodwin concludes that the term “sadistic abuse,” being more inclusive, allows us to place this abuse within a context we already recognize: “If we understand ritual abuse as simply one of many forms of sadistic abuse, then other, more readily available data bases become relevant, including surveys of sadistic criminals, studies of users of sadomasochistic pornography, studies of war criminals, and descriptions of perpetrators of extreme family violence.”

This is the situation we face now, and the dangers of our collective denial are grave. Psychologist Susan Van Benschoten says:

To realize the danger in not taking patients' accounts of satanic abuse seriously, one only has to consider instances in which reports of atrocities were initially denied and later found to be true. Two vivid examples from this century are the tragedy at Jonestown, Guyana, and the Holocaust. In both instances, accounts of the events unfolding were available long before they were believed.¹²⁵

Although stories of sadistic ritual abuse are horrifying in the magnitude and perversity of the abuse, they are really not implausible considering the documented crimes we hear about every day. Chrystine Oksana, in her book *Safe Passage to Healing: A Guide for Survivors of Ritual Abuse*, explains:

Everything found in ritual abuse collectively (physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, incest, sadistic violence, murder, drugs, deception, manipulation, conditioning based on punishment, and unbridled veneration of power) is known to occur independently in our society. We also know that it is a tragically common occurrence for people in our society to organize to abuse others in pursuit of power (think of neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan). Ritual abuse combines all of the above. It is organized abuse, carried out by a group for the purpose of achieving power. The abuse aims to break a victim's spirit and to gain the ultimate in power—absolute control over another human being.¹²⁶

This does not mean that every detail of a survivor's disclosure is sure to be

¹²⁴ *Oprah*, July 16, 1993.

¹²⁵ Susan C. Van Benschoten, "Multiple Personality Disorder and Satanic Ritual Abuse: The Issue of Credibility," *Dissociation* 3, no. 1 (March 1990), p. 25.

¹²⁶ Chrystine Oksana, *Safe Passage to Healing: A Guide for Survivors of Ritual Abuse* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), preface.

accurate. In fact, when we are dealing with such extreme trauma, it is likely that there will be confusions, distortions, and reports of events that could not literally be true.

One survivor, for example, told her therapist that while she was being abused, a woman was killed. Her therapist had no way of knowing what literally took place, but she knew this survivor was telling her story as best she could. As this survivor was able to face more of her history, she recovered enough information to determine that while she was being abused, her perpetrators had shown a “snuff” film in which a woman was, indeed, murdered. In her child’s mind—in this ordeal of extreme pain and terror—the images on the screen seemed to be happening in the room.

Distortions like this are due, in part, to the nature of memory in situations of great pain and fear. But such distortions are also deliberately created by the perpetrators. Illusion is often used in sadistic ritual abuse in order to terrify, silence, or otherwise control the victim, as well as to lessen a survivor’s credibility should she or he seek help. For example, one survivor was told that she was going to be operated on and that a bomb would be put in her stomach. She was threatened that if she ever told anyone about what had been done to her, the bomb would go off, killing her. They told her that if she even thought about telling, she’d feel sick to her stomach, nauseous. Then she was drugged, superficially cut, and when she woke up, she saw blood and believed she had been operated on.

Psychologist Mark Schwartz explains:

Children see things through children’s eyes; but regardless of “what happened,” whatever was coded in the child’s perception and memory defined the traumatic experience. For example, if a child believes he’s seen someone killed, even if that person survives and is alive, the trauma can be as intense as if a death had occurred.¹²⁷

Under conditions of torture and terror, people dissociate to protect their minds from the total perception of the horror they’re subjected to. This pain, fear, and dissociation, combined with drugs, intentional brainwashing, and the use of illusion,

¹²⁷ Schwartz, “False Memory Blues,” p. 3.

make some degree of distortion almost inevitable. However, as Susan Van Benschoten explains, none of this lessens the ordeal of the survivor, the essential truth of her disclosure, or the heinousness of the abuse:

An experience is no less traumatic when it does not conform completely to literal reality. Neither can the perpetrated act be considered less brutal and inhumane, simply because the format may involve techniques such as illusion or the forced witnessing of another's abuse.¹²⁸

Some of the media coverage of sadistic ritual abuse has been particularly misleading. For example, in the McMartin day-care trial, preschool children testified that they were taken through underground tunnels and then sexually abused. The jury acquitted the teachers accused of abuse, and the press highlighted the fact that no tunnels had been found. The media concluded that millions of dollars in public funds had been wasted and that there was no proof of any abuse at the McMartin preschool. In 1990, long after the trial was over and the school had been sold, the parents of the children hired Gary Stickel, an archaeologist who teaches at the University of California at Los Angeles, to excavate the site. Using directions given by two of the children, Stickel found a tunnel exactly where the children said it would be. The tunnel he excavated, which ran between two classrooms, had been dug sometime after 1967, when the McMartin preschool opened. It had been filled in with debris.¹²⁹

The finding of the tunnel sheds a totally different light on the trial and on the children's claims. As Gary Stickel explains, "The defense used the fact that no tunnels were found as a major element in discrediting the children's testimony. Finding the tunnel supports the credibility of the children. If they were right about the tunnels they

¹²⁸ Van Benschoten, "Multiple Personality Disorder and Satanic Ritual Abuse," p. 27.

¹²⁹ The tunnel ran across the north axis of the school, between classroom #4 and classroom #3, and continued to an entrance under the west wall of the building. It was full of junk and debris—pieces of board, concrete slabs, and cans. Stickel said the most bizarre thing he found in the tunnel were four large containers, one and a half to two feet high, one made of crockery, two of metal, and the fourth a black iron cauldron that he said "would have made a good Halloween prop." All four were standing upright and had obviously been placed by someone in the middle of the tunnel.

could have been right about everything else they said.”¹³⁰ Yet the finding of the tunnel was barely mentioned in the press. Some people’s denial went so far as to suggest that the tunnel was actually a rabbit burrow!

There is much outcry from skeptics that there is no evidence of sadistic ritual abuse, but evidence has been found. Tunnels with cauldrons and debris are definitely not rabbit burrows. Animal mutilation and sacrifice exist. The U.S. Supreme Court recently passed judgment that such sacrifice as part of religious practices is legal.¹³¹ Child pornography and child prostitution are a \$2.5 billion-a-year business.¹³² Children are filmed and photographed in violent and sadistic acts.¹³³

We know that horrifying acts have been perpetrated on children, but this knowledge is so distressing that we try to explain it away. In Rupert, Idaho, the body of an infant girl was discovered in a remote rural area. According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, she had been “dismembered, disemboweled, possibly skinned, and burned.” When a local nine-year-old boy described having seen a baby sacrificed and burned—as well as relating his own sexual abuse, which included frequent mentions of the devil—the possibility of sadistic ritual abuse was obvious. But authorities concluded that the boy had made up his story and fabricated their own far-fetched explanation of a baby “who died of pneumonia and then was discarded and set on fire by a scared family illegally in the country to work the Idaho crops.” One official even proposed that “predatory animals could have mutilated the body.”¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Gary Stickel, interview by Laura Davis, September 17, 1993.

¹³¹ *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. et al vs. City of Hialeah*. Decided June 11, 1993 (93 Daily Journal D.A.R. 7368).

¹³² Sadistic ritual abuse is one of the most effective tools for controlling children and rendering them compliant so they can be exploited in prostitution and pornography. See S. R. Benjamin’s story on p. 428.

¹³³ Kenneth J. Herrmann, Jr., and M. J. Jupp, “A Request for Concern: The Sexual Exploitation of Children,” testimony before the U.S. Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, November 20, 1985. Also in Kenneth Herrmann’s “Children Sexually Exploited for Profit: A Plea for a New Social Work Priority,” *Social Work* (November–December 1987), p. 523. Herrmann reports: “There are about 100,000 to 300,000 child prostitutes in the United States. Thousands more are victimized by pornographers. . . . [Worldwide] children have been stolen, purchased from parents and others, found as street children, and adopted legally and illegally for the purpose of sexual exploitation. These children are used for pornography and prostitution; are abused, tortured, murdered . . .”

¹³⁴ Reported by Leslie Bennetts in “Nightmares on Main Street,” *Vanity Fair* (June 1993), p. 62.

Yet sadistic crime, including crime involving satanic belief systems, exists. Larry Jones, a police lieutenant in Boise, Idaho, reminds us:

We've got confessed killers on death row throughout the country who have said they killed because they worshipped Satan. We've got child molesters who have confessed that their satanic belief system places a positive value on torturing children. . . . Any detective knows there are unsolved murders in every jurisdiction around the country.¹³⁵

Idaho and Illinois have passed legislation that defines the ritual abuse of children and establishes provisions for its investigation and prosecution.¹³⁶ And sadistic abuse cases *have* been successfully prosecuted. One example, documented by Jan Hollingsworth in *Unspeakable Acts*, is the Country Walk daycare case in which Frank and Iliana Fuster were convicted. Although Frank Fuster continued to deny the massive evidence against him—even from prison—his wife, Iliana, confirmed that children had been assaulted sexually, including oral and anal penetration. They were drugged, urinated on, forced to eat feces, tied in bondage, and subjected to perverted rituals. Some of what the children reported sounded fantastic at first, but it all had its own horrifying cohesiveness. For example, some children told that Frank had “pennies” put in his bottom. At the trial, Iliana testified that she would powder Frank’s genitals, diaper him in a bedsheet, and give him suppositories wrapped in copper-colored foil.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid.

One of the common challenges from those who reject the idea of sadistic ritual abuse is “Where are the bones?” Referring to a study of sadistic sex offenders by P. E. Dietz, R. R. Hazelwood, and J. Warren, “The Sexuality Sadistic Criminal and His Offenses,” Jean Goodwin addresses this issue in *Rediscovering Childhood Trauma* (pp. 106–7): “In view of the difficulty of finding bodies to document ritual abuse, it is of interest that concealment of the bodies of victims was admitted by 20 of the 30 offenders [of sexually sadistic violence].” Goodwin goes on to ask, “How dangerous are these 30 sadistic offenders? Only 22 of the 30 had killed, but those 22 had logged 187 known murder victims . . . 5 of the men accounted for 122 of the murders. . . . Forty-three percent . . . had victimized children. Torture techniques included weapons, painful insertion, beating, electric shock, burning, amputation, cutting, and threatening with animals.” Also, 60% of those who were parents admitted to incest. And 30% had “impeccable reputations as solid citizens.”

¹³⁶ House Bill No. 817 was passed in Idaho in 1990. Public Act #87-1167 was signed into law in Illinois on September 18, 1992. Ritual abuse laws have also been passed in Louisiana and Missouri. Legislation is currently being considered in California.

¹³⁷ Jan Hollingsworth, *Unspeakable Acts* (New York: Congdon & Weed, 1986).

None of us want to believe such stories, but for the sake of the survivors we must. There are adult survivors of sadistic ritual abuse who bear the long-term damage of torture and abuse in their bodies—so much so that doctors who treat them now as adults are at first stymied, and then appalled by the residual damage.¹³⁸ And of course the emotional, mental, and spiritual devastation is profound.

Sadistic ritual abuse exists. We don't yet know how prevalent it is. We don't know that every report is accurate. But we do know that survivors are suffering from its effects. It is painful—devastating—to face this reality. But unless we face it, we allow it to continue. The Talmud asks: “To look away from evil: Is this not the sin of all good people?”

PERSONAL STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH THE BACKLASH

It can be valuable and empowering to read information that reveals the truth about the backlash. But if you're feeling angry, scared, hurt, or betrayed, you may also need help in taking care of yourself in the midst of such hostility.

As with all the other aspects of the healing process, you come first—your feelings, your needs, your choices. If you're confused or full of doubt, this section will offer you guidance in sorting through your feelings. If you're angry and want to fight back, we'll include some suggestions for responding effectively.

To begin, here are some general guidelines for maintaining your balance:

Get support for dealing with your feelings.

The attitudes and opinions propagated by the backlash may be reminiscent of your original abuse. Even survivors who are far along in their healing have been shaken and restimulated by this material. If this is happening to you, it's critical that you get support to work through your feelings.

¹³⁸ See S. R. Benjamin's story on p. 428.

Protect yourself.

You don't have to read every newspaper article or listen to every television show that reports on "false memories." If the material is difficult for you, give yourself a break and avoid it.

Keep telling your story to those you love and trust.

Don't let yourself be silenced. Your life experience is valid, and it needs to be shared with those who can listen with respect and compassion.

IF YOU'RE DOUBTING YOURSELF

Have patience toward all that is unresolved in your heart and . . .
try to love the questions themselves.

—Rainer Maria Rilke¹³⁹

When you've been told for your whole life that you're crazy, bad, and wrong, and then your daily newspaper questions your very capacity to remember and name what happened to you, it may become exceedingly difficult to hold on to the validity of your experience, or even to believe in your right to search for the truth of your past.

Yet this is a most crucial right for survivors, for all people: the freedom to explore and to understand their history. You have the capacity to know and name your own experience. And certainly you know more about your life than anyone else—you lived it. No author, book, therapist, expert, research psychologist, backlash group, newspaper article, or family member can tell you whether or not you were abused or if your memories are valid. You are the expert on your life. Honor your own truth.

If you are questioning your memories, the following guidelines can be of help.

Remember that doubt is often part of the healing process.

¹³⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (New York: Random House, 1984).

Moving into and out of denial is a natural part of the healing process.¹⁴⁰ Periodically having doubts does not necessarily mean that your memories aren't reliable or that the events in question did not really occur. Even survivors whose memories have been verified by external evidence may have times when they struggle to believe they were really abused. Very few people who truly think that they were sexually abused later find out they weren't. Although it is possible your doubt means it didn't happen, it's more likely that it's just a normal part of the healing process.

Look at the times doubts come up.

If doubts come up after you read a particularly nasty article, when you visit your parents, or right after you have intense memories, it's likely your doubts are related to these influences. If they persist even when you're calm and centered in yourself, there may be more reason to think you may have at least part of your story wrong. Yet even if you find that some of the things you believed are not true, it doesn't mean that all of your memories are unreliable. It's possible to be mistaken about one incident while remembering other events accurately. (See "The Essential Truth of Memory" on page 89 for more.)

HOW THE BACKLASH HAS AFFECTED ME: RACHEL'S STORY

Rachel is a thirty-year-old survivor who was sexually abused by her father.* Although she has always remembered some aspects of her abuse, new memories surfaced when she stopped drinking six years ago. The backlash has angered and upset Rachel so much that she has decided to speak out publicly.

* Rachel wanted to use her own name, but couldn't for legal reasons.

I was devastated by the incest for so many years. It was like I had this big stain on

¹⁴⁰ See "Believing It Happened" on p. 96.

my life. I kept trying to whitewash it, but it was like the kind of paint where everything bleeds through.

I started drinking when I was twelve. I did whatever drugs I could get my hands on—cocaine, crank, speed. I smoked pot, dropped acid, and stole prescription drugs from my parents. When I was seventeen, I joined the army to get away from my family. My whole life was lived in bars.

I was like a chameleon. Whatever situation I was in, I could adapt myself to fit it. I could be whoever you wanted me to be because I had no idea who I was.

I was into wild sex. But when I was emotionally intimate with someone, I couldn't perform. I'd have sex and then throw up. Or I'd have an orgasm and picture my father in the room. I didn't know why.

I never had amnesia about the fact that my father was a pornography addict. I always remember him reading it to me or making me look at it. He had pornographic tapes he made me listen to. When he grabbed a towel and a magazine and went into the bathroom, I knew what he was doing in there. But I did forget for years that sometimes I was in that bathroom with him.

I got sober when I was twenty-four. It changed the world for me.

About a year later, I had a very clear memory of an incident with my father. He was touching my breasts and I could see his hands—the fingernail that was broken and his hairy fingers and his hairy arms. It was very vivid.

I had flashbacks for the next six months. They were almost continuous. I had a lot of body memories. I had absolutely no question in my mind that they were true. I *knew*.

After a couple of years, I went to see my father. I still hadn't said anything to anyone in my family, but I think he sensed that something was going on with me. He sat me down at the kitchen table and started telling me how abused he had been when he was a kid, about how his father used to hit him and hold his hands over the fire. And how he had to sleep in the same bed with his father after his mother died. He kept saying how abused he'd been. He didn't specifically say sexual abuse, but I knew that's what he meant. And this is a person I'd never talked to before. I had never had a conversation with my father before, not once in my whole entire life.

At about that same time, my older sister called to ask if I was going to

Thanksgiving dinner. I still hadn't said anything about what was going on, so I told her, "No, I just can't handle seeing Dad." It was no secret that he'd emotionally and verbally abused us, to the point of decimating us. All of us have been suicidal at some point in our lives. And she said, "Yeah, I know. He's a real pain in the ass." Then I started crying. I said, "There's stuff that happened between me and Dad that nobody knows about." That's all I said. And she broke down crying and asked, "Did he sexually abuse you?" I couldn't believe she asked me that. I was crying and I said, "Yes." And she said, "He did it to me, too."

WHY ARE THEY TRYING TO TAKE MY HEALING AWAY FROM ME?

When I first heard about the "false memory syndrome," it felt really personal. I couldn't believe the audacity of these people to actually try to tell me what my experience was, to say that my experience wasn't valid or truthful. I was really angry.

Then I got scared. I still vacillate between anger and fear. On a core level, what I felt was, "These people are trying to get away with what they've done. These people are trying to make me a liar."

I've felt like I've been about eight years old, on and off, for the last nine months. That's how bad it's been. I feel like a little kid who's having to tell and tell and tell because nobody is really listening. Every day I have to try to settle that little kid down. And that's really hard. It's hard to show up in my adult life when I'm feeling like a child.

The survivor in me gets very pissed off, ready to go to any length to challenge these people, to take what they say, turn it back around on them, and expose it for what it really is. But the wounded child in me is freaking out and scurrying for protection, trying to find a good place to hide from all this. It's been really difficult.

I was doing really well before all this came up. I'd gotten to the stage where I didn't feel small anymore. I was in my body. I didn't dissociate anymore. I was in touch with my feelings. I was no longer afraid of what was inside of me. I was about to stop therapy.

It's like opening up a wound that had a really nice scar on it. It was all healed over nicely. And all this talk and baiting by the FMS has quite effectively torn that open.

I HOLD THEM RESPONSIBLE

The dynamic in my family was divide and conquer—my father kept us all separate, strangers to each other. This backlash operates on the same principles. Everybody in the greater family of incest and child sexual abuse survivors had been talking and telling each other what they knew. There's power in the truth. If everybody tells what they know, then there can't be any secrets anymore. And the closer we got to the truth, the more these people tried to throw up a smokescreen to disguise it. And the lengths to which they'll go to throw up that smokescreen is what is so scary to me.

Because I'd already done a lot of healing, the backlash hasn't affected me as severely as it has some other people. And because of that, I feel obligated to reach out to survivors who aren't as far along as I am. Like my sister, who just told. Or people who want to tell and can't. My mother is an incest survivor. She told my sister about it nine months ago. She had never told anyone else, and now I don't know if she will. And I hold those who've joined the backlash accountable for that. For the silencing of my mother.

I'm sure there are some people in these backlash groups who are innocent. Statistically, that would have to happen. But morally, I think these people should question what they're doing. How do you know that the guy next to you is not a perpetrator? How do you know that the leader of the group is not, in fact, guilty? It seems to me if these people had any conscience, that somewhere these thoughts would have to creep in: "I know I'm innocent, but what if this person next to me at this meeting really did molest his child?"

Regardless of whether particular individuals are innocent or not, they're perpetrating abuse just by aligning themselves with these backlash groups like the FMS. What these groups espouse is full of hate. Why can't they say instead, "Some people get falsely accused, but we're not going to denounce an entire movement over it."

THE BACKLASH IS PUTTING CHILDREN IN DANGER

The backlash hasn't caused me to doubt my memories, to think, "This never

happened to me,” but I have had doubts like, “Maybe I should never have told.” My sister has doubted that it ever happened to her, even though she clearly remembers. Her husband is an alcoholic and doesn’t believe her. She lives two blocks from my parents and my mother’s been feeding her all this stuff: “They say your therapist can really mess you up.”

My sister still wants contact with my mother because my mother helps out with the grandchildren. And here I am telling her, “Mom didn’t protect us. What makes you think she’s going to protect your kids?” My sister went over there one day and found my dad sitting at the table reading a *Playboy* with her little girls. She wants to protect her children, but she’s really struggling.

And now with all this publicity about false memories, my father is playing on her doubts. And that’s jeopardizing my nieces. All three of them are exactly at the age that my father, who’s a pedophile, happens to prefer. I find it appalling that this backlash is giving my father a soapbox to stand on. Right there in my own family you can see it—the backlash is putting children in danger.

Children are so disposable in our culture. They’re just treated like trash. This backlash is protecting an ingrained and established system of abuse. And that’s why I don’t think it’s anywhere near over. That’s why survivors need to mobilize—for each other and for society at large. We really need to be strong because this is not just about what happened to me as a child. It’s much bigger than that. It’s about what could happen to our children if we’re not careful.

Know that there’s a reason for your pain.

If you’re experiencing the level of anguish common to survivors of sexual abuse, there is some legitimate reason for that distress. It may not be sexual abuse; but there’s something there for you to identify and address. You’re not crazy to be feeling so much pain.

Heal from the things you are certain of.

For example, if you're sure you were emotionally abused but you're not certain if there was any sexual abuse, focus on healing from the emotional abuse. You'll be making progress in your healing even if you don't yet have a way to pin down other events that might have taken place.

It's okay if you're not sure.

Although you may feel under pressure to know exactly what happened, it may take time for you to discover the truth. Give yourself that time. It's okay to not know everything yet.

Don't affirm anything you're not ready to affirm.

If you're not sure whether you were sexually abused, don't feel pressured to say that you were—or that you weren't. You may need time and space to figure it out for yourself. People who pressure you either way—and this may include your therapist, your incest support group, or the people in your family—are not helping you. Talk instead with people who will hear your questions, respect your struggle to know, and give you the time to find out. Minimize your contact with those who insist it be one way or the other.

Assess your own therapeutic relationships.

If you're in therapy, talk about your doubts with your therapist. If your therapist is supportive, open to your questioning, and doesn't try to force answers on you, then you can feel confident that you're getting ethical help in exploring your history.

If you're in group therapy, you should feel that there's room for you to share your own experience, as it happened, without elaborating on it in any way. You should never feel that you need to stretch the truth or outdo someone else's story in order to be acknowledged. Whatever your childhood experience, it should be respected and taken seriously. And if you're not certain about what happened to you, there shouldn't be

pressure in the group for you to identify yourself as a survivor prematurely.

If you never really thought you were abused and your therapist insisted that you were, or if you thought you had to make up a story and now you don't know if it's true, you're going to need sophisticated and capable help. A consultation or second opinion can often help clarify the situation. Make sure you choose someone who doesn't have an investment either in validating your memories or in proving you were misled. Work with someone capable of keeping an open mind until your true history becomes clear.

One woman, upset by a prominent series of newspaper articles promoting the idea of "false memories," talked about her search to find her own truth:

I went to my incest survivor's group and said, "These articles are driving me crazy. I feel like I'm going nuts. I really don't know if I belong here. I don't know if it was sexual abuse." I wanted to quit the group, but since I was still having flashbacks, I decided to stay until I figured it out.

I went into a shell. I clammed up. I didn't know what to do with the feelings. I meditated and sat with the paradox.

Finally, I realized it was important for me to work this through. I had quit therapy, so I went to a new therapist. I told him, "For four years I've been uncovering the trauma that happened to me. It looks like sexual abuse. It feels like sexual abuse. And yet I'm also struggling with what the false memory people are out there saying. I want you to honor that I'm living a paradox. I want you to help me figure out if I really was sexually abused. I'm ready to go deeper into the confusion, but I need your help. I don't want you to make a judgment one way or the other or to tell me what you think happened to me. I want you to help me own my experiences and memories." And with him, I feel like there's room to explore it.

Look for corroboration only if you want it.

Even if you never come up with absolute proof to confirm your memories, corroboration of some kind may be available. In Rachel's family, for instance (see page

524), everyone knew that her father was emotionally abusive and exposed his children to pornography. Although this does not prove that he molested her, it certainly is consistent with Rachel's memories and gives them outside validation.

Verifying abuse is not always a direct process. Relatively few abusers admit what they did. And often family members didn't know the abuse was going on or don't want to acknowledge it now. But if you look clearly at your history, you may find information that helps you figure out what took place. Reexamining family photo albums, old diaries, or family stories may give you clues about your past. Sometimes talking to people who were there—family members, old friends, teachers, school counselors, or neighbors—can yield valuable insights. School and medical records may also contain revealing information.

This kind of information gathering, however, may involve risks. You may not find anything concrete to help you, and emotionally, the experience of going back to your childhood home and talking to people who knew you as a child can shake you to your roots. It's essential that you undertake such an investigation only when you're ready, and only if you truly want to—not because you feel pressured into coming up with “proof.” Such a search is definitely not a required part of the healing process.¹⁴¹

Unless you are suing your abuser, you need only enough corroboration to satisfy yourself, not the standard of evidence required to convict someone in a court of law. (For more on this, see page 505.)

If your family keeps bringing up the topic of “false memories,” it’s okay to set limits.

If your family sends you articles about gullible women being brainwashed by therapists or tries to engage you in debates about the validity of your memories, it's okay to protect yourself. If you don't want to read the articles, you can throw them away. If you don't want to talk about your memories, you can change the topic or end the

¹⁴¹ See Lana Lawrence and Mary Anne Reilly, “Corroboration and Evaluation of Delayed Memories of Abuse,” *Moving Forward 2*, no. 4, pp. 15–16, and “Research Your Childhood,” on pp. 228–30 of *The Courage to Heal Workbook*. Both offer specific advice on how to assess the possible benefits and dangers of investigating your history, how to prepare, get support, protect yourself, and how to gather information.

conversation. You have options. Learning to exercise them is an important part of healing.

Even if you're not sure about what happened to you, you can still limit or discontinue contact with your family if you need to. Though it may be difficult for you and for them, you're not victimizing someone by setting limits or even separating from them. Do what's best for you. Take as much time as you need.¹⁴² (For more on separating from your family, see "Legal principles do not apply to healing" on page 505.)

Hold off on confronting your abuser or disclosing the abuse to family members who are likely to be extremely upset.

Don't talk with your family about the abuse until you're ready. If you're uncertain about what happened, if you're still sorting through possibilities, it's usually best to postpone any confrontations. Wait until you're more clear and then assess whether or not a disclosure or confrontation is in your best interests.¹⁴³

If you've already told your family or confronted someone with abuse and now you're not sure, there's no shame in being honest. Depending on what's best for you, you can tell those involved that you're no longer sure or you can wait until you feel more certain to talk to them. In the meantime, it's your choice whether you continue to have contact or take some time away to get clear. And when you come to your own truth, talk about it with people you trust. If you've been in error or made mistakes, acknowledge them. Although it may be very difficult, honest sharing is at the very core of the healing process.

The whole survivors' movement does not rest on your shoulders.

If, upon further exploration, you become clear that you were not sexually abused, it's okay for you to claim that truth. You are not letting anyone down because you don't

¹⁴² "Disclosures and Confrontations" on p. 144 and "Families of Origin" on p. 299 provide extensive information on dealing with your family of origin, as does *The Courage to Heal Workbook*.

¹⁴³ If children are at risk, you will have to consider their protection as well as your own needs. (See p. 152 for more.)

share a particular trauma. The whole survivors' movement does not rest on your shoulders.

Your experience does not invalidate the experience of other survivors. Just because you were mistaken doesn't mean that they are. There's room for you—and for them—to have had different experiences. Respect their courage and integrity, and expect them to respect yours.

Remember, you can trust yourself.

Above all, trust your own sense of who you are and what your experiences have been. If the healing process is about anything, it's about learning to trust yourself, your feelings, your reality.

You are the best judge of what happened to you. Continue to value your own knowing, even if that changes as you discover more.

IF YOU WANT TO FIGHT BACK

Many survivors are concerned about how the current climate of disbelief will affect other survivors and children who are being abused today. If you want to take action to counteract the negative images of survivors being portrayed in the media, here are some suggestions.

Get informed.

Although your own personal experience is valid in itself, it can help to have information available from other sources, particularly if you're dealing with the media. There's quite a bit of relevant research and analysis that you can use to refute some of the claims of the backlash. Many of the studies, books, and articles cited in the footnotes in this chapter are rich sources of information. Further resources are included in the Resource Guide on page 564.

Write back.

Members of the backlash groups are enthusiastic about writing letters, making phone calls, and organizing. They contact the media, establish phone trees, and print newsletters. It's essential that survivors and their supporters also organize and speak out in great numbers. Every time a misleading or biased article is printed in the newspaper, there should be an avalanche of letters to the editor, setting forth the truth. Use your pen or your word processor to write a letter of protest, or dash off a postcard to set the record straight. Call your local radio and television stations, as well as the national ones—both in response to shows you find offensive and to encourage them to air shows on the truth about abuse.

Speak out.

What the supporters of the backlash want most of all is for you to keep your mouth shut. There's a real need for survivors to stay visible and to continue telling the truth of their lives. If you're feeling centered and stable enough to handle the public arena, this can be a powerful way to fight back. But don't feel pressured to take a public stance if it doesn't feel right to you.

Organize locally.

Get together with other survivors and supporters in your area. Strategize about the best responses to particular articles and radio and TV shows. Track the activities of the backlash groups in your area, look at the things they're targeting, and brainstorm the best ways to respond. Share information and ideas. It's less scary, and more powerful, to respond with the power of a group behind you.

Join an organization that is responding to the backlash.

Many organizations, both regional and national, are working to counteract the

backlash. Groups that provide services for survivors, offer information and resources, work for legal reform, or support other efforts toward recognizing and stopping child sexual abuse all may be good vehicles for confronting the current backlash. If you want to contribute your energies and efforts toward this work, call or write to some of the groups included in the Resource Guide.

Remember, it's okay if you don't do anything.

Many survivors see the need to do something, but because they're still in the vulnerable stages of their own healing, they're not yet in a position to respond themselves. That's fine. Your own healing is your first responsibility. As you grow stronger, you can share that strength, but it's crucial that you take care of yourself first. As author and activist Sandra Butler says, "For a woman in this culture, to take herself and her life seriously is the first act of politics."¹⁴⁴

FUTURE VISIONS

The strides we've made in recognizing and dealing with child sexual abuse in the past fifteen years have been both positive and far-reaching. As a society we have begun to assert the right of children to grow up free from battering, emotional abuse, and sexual terrorism. We have challenged the status quo—children as property—and as a result, our hard-fought gains are being attacked. The current backlash against survivors of child sexual abuse is a destructive, undermining force, and the use of that force has been intentional.

We are at a crossroads. As a society we can continue to fight for the integrity of every child and the healing of every survivor, or we can give in to our collective denial and once again bury the truth.

It is crucial that we reaffirm our commitment to children, to adults who've been abused, and to stopping the abuse that is still going on. We have progressed from silence about abuse to awareness. Yet there is still formidable work to be done. Children

¹⁴⁴ Personal communication, October 10, 1993.

continue to be abused in appallingly large numbers, adult survivors continue to suffer, and families struggle to come to terms with these violations. To meet this challenge, therapists, law enforcement officials, and the courts need continuing education and training.

Our academic institutions need to address the massive problem of child sexual abuse.¹⁴⁵ Counselors and other professionals must be taught how to assist survivors through the healing process in a respectful, compassionate, and skilled way.

We need to establish an environment where survivors of child sexual abuse can come forward and be believed and where the protection of children is a priority. We need to create a climate that encourages honesty rather than defensiveness, where people who have abused can acknowledge their behavior and be accountable, rather than join an organization that further reinforces their denial. We need to provide programs in which offenders can get help in stopping their abuse of children as well as help in their own healing.

This is essential. Educating the public, helping survivors heal, and prosecuting abusers are all very necessary, but we must also stop people from abusing. Treatment for offenders, especially juvenile offenders, is critical.¹⁴⁶

In the courtroom we need to establish safeguards to ensure accuracy in expert witness testimony. Nonbiased standards for the evaluation, investigation, and prosecution of child abuse cases must be implemented as well.

We need to differentiate more clearly between the legal arena and the private arenas of therapy and healing. The healing process has its own integrity, which should not be judged by forensic considerations.

We need more research on memory, traumatic amnesia, and how best to treat people who've suffered trauma. We need to ensure that such research is not manipulated

¹⁴⁵ Only in the last few years have universities begun to offer instruction in this field. As recently as 1989, when we lectured to counselors, we'd ask groups comprised of psychologists, marriage, family and child counselors, social workers, doctors, nurses, and even a few psychiatrists. "How many of you ever had the opportunity, during the course of your education, to take classes in working with survivors of child sexual abuse?" On a good day, four out of four hundred raised their hands.

¹⁴⁶ The Safer Society Program has published an excellent series of books and resources for work with perpetrators. See p. 541 of the Resource Guide.

toward political ends but instead is rooted in open-mindedness and a genuine search for the truth.

We must reaffirm that survivors of child sexual abuse are the true experts on their experience. Many professionals have spoken out eloquently on behalf of survivors—and many others have insulted, pathologized, or dismissed them. Yet in the midst of all this debate *about* survivors, we need to remember that our greatest understanding comes not in listening to professionals, but to the survivors themselves. As psychiatrist Roland Summit reminds us:

Survivors can lead us, one by one, into the oblivion of their past, but only if we are willing to follow. . . . We have to consider that even the distorted recollections of someone who has survived the journey might be more reliable than the beautiful engravings of landlocked geographers.¹⁴⁷

THE WORLD SPLIT OPEN

Once the truth is exposed, regardless of how much anyone tries to cover it up again, things can never be the same. Survivors have had the courage to speak what had been unspeakable. As poet Muriel Rukeyser wrote, “What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life . . . the world would split open.”¹⁴⁸ And in fact, it has. The world has split open, revealing that millions of children have been sexually abused and that those children—those who survive—grow up into adults who suffer, but who also retain enormous strength and integrity. And we will not be silenced. Psychologist John Briere says:

The thing that gives me . . . hope is that just as when women [won] the vote, or when slaves learned to read, or—at whatever level—when those who are disempowered are given important new tools, the culture

¹⁴⁷ Roland Summit, “Hidden Victims, Hidden Pain: Societal Avoidance of Child Sexual Abuse,” *Lasting Effects of Child Sexual Abuse*, eds. Gail Elizabeth Wyatt and Gloria Johnson Powell (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), p. 52.

¹⁴⁸ From “Kathe Kollwitz,” in *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982).

can never return to its former state of ignorance or denial. . . . Because a vast number of survivors have found a voice, no amount of what is now trendy disbelief will silence them.¹⁴⁹

As a culture we are learning the value of remembering, of witnessing, of commemorating. We are creating memorials that allow us to acknowledge tragedies, to mourn, and to learn. We have the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Names Project's AIDS quilt. We have The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. At its dedication on April 22, 1993, Elie Wiesel spoke:

The essence of this tragedy is that it can never be fully communicated. . . . And yet, we are duty-bound to try. Not to do so would mean to forget. To forget would mean to kill the victims a second time. . . . Memory is not only a victory over time, it is also a triumph over injustice.¹⁵⁰

The poet Marge Piercy wrote, "Memory is the simplest form of prayer."¹⁵¹ Maybe this is why attacks on our memories affect us so deeply—because memory is such an integral part of our being, of our healing, of our social change, and even of our prayer.

One never moves forward without opposition. All worthwhile social struggles take time and commitment on the part of many people, whether it's preserving our environment, ending discrimination, achieving peace and justice, or ending child sexual abuse. When the struggle is difficult, we like to remember the words of educator and nonviolent activist, Danilo Dolci:

There are moments when things go well and one feels encouraged. There are difficult moments and one feels overwhelmed. But it's senseless to speak of optimism and pessimism. The only important thing is to know

¹⁴⁹ Forest, "Interview with John Briere," p. 21.

¹⁵⁰ Elie Wiesel, "For the Dead and the Living, We Must Bear Witness," *Bostonia*, 2 (Summer 1993), p. 15.

¹⁵¹ Marge Piercy, "Black Mountain," in *Available Light* (New York: Knopf, 1988).

that if one works well in a potato field, the potatoes will grow. If one works well among men [and women, we would add], they will grow—that's reality. The rest is smoke. It's important to know that words don't move mountains. Work, exacting work, moves mountains.

Survivors of child sexual abuse and their supporters are willing to do that work. We've come too far to stop now.