

BOOK REVIEWS

Speaking for Ourselves: Unmasking the Hidden Agendas of the False Memory Controversy

Relational Remembering: Rethinking the Memory Wars. Sue Campbell. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003, 213 pages, \$24.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Pamela J. Birrell, Ph.D., Jennifer J. Freyd, Ph.D.

Lois Williams is a young woman who has difficulty with eating disorders and depression that does not seem to fit in her busy and successful life. In attempting to deal with seemingly overwhelming forces, Ms. Williams decides to enter therapy. There she finds support and safety that she had never before experienced. After a few months, she finds herself haunted with inexplicable images of rape and trauma and remembers a series of molestations by her uncle when he lived in her home from the time she was 5 years old until she turned 8 years old. The discovery is a shattering one for her and her family, but now so many things make sense to Ms. Williams that never had before. Her family sues the therapist and her therapy records are brought to trial.

How are we to frame Lois Williams' experience? Is she to be believed, or to be regarded as a suggestible victim of a field run amuck? In this important and difficult new book, Sue Campbell points out the polarizations and stereotypes that have entered our thinking as a result of the false memory syndrome foundation (FMSF) rhetoric. Campbell draws attention to the gendered nature of the discussion in its demeaning portrayal of women as well as the role of science as a supposedly neutral and objective enterprise, both of which have effectively and almost entirely taken away the voice of individual women abused as children. She says, in the introductory chapter, "In this book, I challenge our present understanding of the false/recovered memory controversies. I challenge, in particular, how we have come to represent both memory and women" (p. 2)

Campbell argues that the FMSF has framed the memory debate in terms of scientific objectivity, skepticism, and autonomy on one side versus the suggestibility of women and thus their moral agency on the other and effectively suppressed the political and social context of the debate. She does so in some densely written chapters ranging from how we respect people as moral and remembering agents to the meanings behind subpoenaing women's therapy records. She constantly reframes the debate as she puts it into a political and social context.

Chapter 2 is "Respecting Rememberers," in which she points out that the crisis of women's telling about abuse has been presented as if it were primarily about memory and its nature. But can this be so when "[t]here is a much greater skepticism toward the memories of those who claim abuse than toward the memories of those who deny it"? (p. 27). In our culture we link personhood with memory and responsibility. In denying women their memories we, in fact, deny them their personhood. She argues for respect for those who have been harmed, and for showing respect for them as persons by responding to them as competent rememberers.

Chapter 3 is "Framing Women's Testimony: Narrative Position and Memory Authority." In this chapter, Campbell shows how the FMSF strategy has been to attempt to control the testimonial positions of women so that they are responsible for testifying under conditions of maximal distrust. In turn, this denies women their power and denies them memory authority. She shows how FMSF strategies frame abuse legally and skeptically, how they place perpetrators in the position of not having to testify, and put women in the position of defending necessarily fragmented memories and insisting on completeness and consistency. "In addition, ... women's abuse narratives in the West conflict with dominant social memory, which is the culture's authoritative articulated story of its past and its identity as formed by this past" (p. 54).

In chapter 4, "The Subjects of Memory: Revisiting Trauma and Recovery," Campbell defends the classic feminist book in the field of trauma, Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, while she criticizes Janice Haaken's position in *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory and the Perils of Looking Back*. Campbell firmly believes that truth matters, and Haaken's symbolic, reconstructivist approach is dangerous: "Haaken's sharp contrast between the literal and symbolic, with its associated implications that in investigating the symbolic, we leave behind the considerations of truth and accuracy, is misguided" (p. 89). In contrast, for Herman, good interpretation supports truth, and objective truth matters. A particularly important insight offered by Campbell is that memory can be interpretive and true: "All memory involves interpretation and [yet] this requisite is no bar to the objective truth of much memory narrative" (p. 18). More interesting, there are times our culture displays an appreciation for the improvement in memory accuracy because of the relational nature of memory for more banal events. For example, we witness the amnesic fish Dori, in the 2003 animation *Finding Nemo*, regain memory functioning in the context of relationship.

In chapter 5, Campbell deals with the ethical issues surrounding our skepticism around women's memories. In it, she presents a representation of women that she sees at the heart of the accusations of false memory syndrome, a representation that profoundly disrespects women as persons. She introduces the writings of Otto Weininger, writing in 1906, who saw the difference between men and women was that men's thoughts are clear whereas women's are not. For him, this was the reason that women were natural liars. Campbell relates this stereotype of women to "false memory" strategies in the following way: The FMSF charges that a large number of women who claim childhood abuse are prone to identity disorders; because the memories are false the identity is also false; the suggestion of identity disorder calls into question whether these women have adequately integrated selves to testify; and that any women who claims incest is implicated in this discrediting because of the above—that their identity is called into question. She further criticizes current models of memory that feminize it by comparing it to women and unruly children (Loftus, see p. 117), and that ignore the "necessary public and social dimensions to remembering" (p. 125).

In the remaining chapters, Campbell examines our current understandings of memory as an autonomous isolated process and questions research carried out with this assumption, arguing that they are overlooking the possibility that relational support may be fundamental to our ability to remember.

Science is a social practice influenced by cultural ideals of individualism and autonomy in its study of memory. Scientific work on the suggestibility of memory does represent people as remembering in contrived relational contexts, portraying these relationships as wholly negative in their impact on memory. This representation is likely to be especially problematic for groups already represented as lacking autonomy. (p. 147)

She also examines the meanings and harm to women when therapy records are subpoenaed and criticizes the work of Ian Hacking who worries about suggestibility and contagion only with respect to women's memories.

This is a significant book, one that takes our thinking about memory and abuse to a deeper level, unflinchingly pointing out the assumptions and stereotypes of those who simplistically view the "memory wars" as authoritative, neutral science versus gullible rememberers who cannot possibly have authority in their own lives. As Campbell states: "I do not believe we can come to an adequate understanding of the nature and importance of memory through a distorted view of rememberers" (p. 8). Memory is relational in that we all, not just victims of sexual abuse, are helped and hindered in our remembering and testimonies by the relationships in our lives. Campbell stands up for women such as Lois Williams, who have been denied their personhood in the memory wars. She asks us to examine the way we

portray such vulnerable members of our society and to treat them with the respect that they deserve. How can we do less?



ABOUT THE REVIEWERS

Pam Birrell is a senior instructor in the Psychology Department at the University of Oregon. She is also a licensed clinical psychologist with a practice specializing in trauma survivors and victims of political torture. She is currently active in the practitioner program at the Stone Center at Wellesley and is writing a paper on relational ethics in psychotherapy.

Jennifer Freyd is a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon. Her research is centered on trauma and memory. She is the author of *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic Of Forgetting Child Abuse* (1996) and was the coeditor of *Trauma & Cognitive Science* (2001).

An Exegesis of Psychological Ethics

Decoding the Ethics Code: A Practical Guide for Psychologists. Celia B. Fisher. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003, 283 pages, \$35.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by David J. Pittenger
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison wrote *The Federalist Papers* (1787/1987) to convince the wary residents of New York to support the newly drafted *Constitution* that would bring the 13 states together as a republic. These essays were, and remain, an essential explication of the instrument defining the federal government. Indeed, one cannot engage in a meaningful study of the history of the *Constitution* without reading *The Federalist Papers*. At the risk of hyperbole, the same conclusion stands for *Decoding the Ethics Code: A Practical Guide for Psychologists*. One can easily read the American Psychological Association's (APA) *Code of Ethics*. This book, however, offers the reader a careful clarification of the code and highlights nuances that one might easily overlook.

As most psychologists are probably well aware, the APA recently revised its *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Code of Conduct* (APA, 2002). This revision represents the 9th version of the code, which was first published in 1953 (APA, 1953). The many changes to the code represent the shifting landscape

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