

Freyd, J.J. & Middleton, W. (2024). Power, courage, trauma, betrayal, and memory: An interview with Professor Jennifer Freyd. In W. Middleton & M.J. Dorahy (Eds) *Contemporary Perspectives on Freud's Seduction Theory and Psychoanalysis* (pp. 97-112). Routledge.

## 6 Power, Courage, Trauma, Betrayal, and Memory

### An Interview with Professor Jennifer Freyd

#### Jennifer J. Freyd and Warwick Middleton

Warwick

When did you first meet Jeffrey Masson?

Middleton (WM):

Jennifer

Freyd (JF):

That was when I went on sabbatical the first time to New Zealand in early 2002, and I was officially a guest of the University of Auckland. He found out I was there, so somebody must have connected us. He invited me over to his house. One time he also came over to the house we were living in. The only times I met him in person were those two visits.

WM:

What was your first reaction to reading "*The Assault on Truth*"?

JF:

I was not a clinical psychologist by training, so I was learning a lot quickly. I had very superficial knowledge, and still do really, of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic theory. I had heard about the Oedipus complex, but I knew nothing about the history of Freud's life or anything like that until I read the book. It was incredibly eye opening, and it all made sense, because at the same time I was learning about the actual prevalence of child sexual abuse including in families, so what Jeff exposed was consistent with the empirical evidence that was emerging already in the 1990s.

WM:

How important do you think "*The Assault on Truth*" (Masson, 1984) has been?

JF:

That's hard for me to answer. I think it's probably been very important but the problem in social movements and intellectual movements is that peoples' work builds on other peoples' work, so it wasn't like he was all alone out there changing people's understanding. You had activists and survivors, other theoreticians, and researchers, all pointing to similar truths. I think what *The Assault on Truth* gave us was a historical understanding of why Freud's initial insights were suppressed, and how he changed his mind. I don't know – maybe some other people knew that before

Jeff's book, but I think Jeff's book brought that to people's awareness and that was probably very radical. But, if it was just that, if he had written the book but there wasn't also the emerging information about the prevalence rates and so on, I don't know that the book on its own could have done that. I think it was synergy, right? Different forces coming together.

Given what happened when Freud first offered a "seduction" theory for hysteria, and given the fate of those prior to Masson who followed a broadly similar theoretical path, what is your take on why the modern trauma field, despite at times very vocal opposition, gained the traction to become substantial and enduring over a period now of decades? These are really hard questions and they're kind of outside of my expertise in the sense that I'm not a historian or cultural critic. I also don't totally understand how people's consciousness about things changes over time. If you look at Bessel van der Kolk's earliest work and Judy Herman's writings, they describe these periods of "amnesia" and of knowing, of this cyclical awareness of trauma, and how it would get buried, between moments of awareness. My experience, since I first delved into this field in the early 90's, has been that it [i.e., appreciation of the extent and impact of trauma] has not gone away. Sure, there's always ups and downs, but I have not seen awareness of trauma completely suppressed the way it clearly had been, at different times in history.

It's 40 years since 1984. Maybe that's too short a period, maybe in 20 years it'll all be suppressed again. I hope not, and I don't think it will because there's the other thing, which is the Internet. Something may have shifted in the current acknowledgement of the impact of trauma, and it may be just that it was like a critical mass thing, like enough force pushing awareness, that it could not be pushed back down this time. And it could be a combination of factors, like *The Assault on Truth* showing us how it came to be that Freud flip-flopped, at the same time as data from researchers were saying "No, really large numbers of people are being sexually abused in this way – including by fathers", and at the same time as what we called the "women's movement" found traction. It all happened somewhat in parallel, but it's interesting because all through the 90's, where there was this bitter fight about false memories, it seemed like a period of suppression was going to happen again.

I think it's really interesting that around the year 2002, the Boston Globe had their big Spotlight series where they devoted enormous resources, and then newspaper coverage to the sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church. I think that was a watershed too. Some people think it all started with "#MeToo". No way! This was all building up over decades until #MeToo emerged. #MeToo pushed general awareness that sexual violence happens into yet another level of awareness, but even #MeToo is still more about adults in the workplace than about children. There's still a long way to go. There's still insufficient attention to the plight of children I would say, but there's been ongoing progress ... There's Dr Nassar and his abuse of US gymnasts and all these things, and I feel like it's out. I think it would be really hard to put it back under the covers now. Then there's the Internet... That information is much more retrievable and permanent than it used to be. I do think about Freud's letters being so important in understanding what really happened. If those had been on the Internet it would be really different, right?

That's one of the things that Jeffrey did: he had access to original Freud material that no one else had ever published before and he made that public, which is different to everyone else that commented on these issues.

Yes, his approach was very empirical too. It was just that the tools of his discipline were different from those used in psychological science.

What parallels do you see between the "Oedipal fantasy" explanation of reported memories of childhood sexual abuse and the later "False Memory Syndrome" explanation of reported memories of childhood sexual abuse?

That's a good question. Not surprisingly, I see this a little bit in terms of this concept I have developed of DARVO (Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender) where you kind of flip things around. So, in both these cases the credibility of the person saying "this bad thing happened to me" is attacked and the abuse is denied. But then it makes the false memory people sort of complicit through Freud's Oedipus theory – that the wronged party is the father who is being accused: he is the true victim. And then by default the perpetrator is the person saying they were abused. So, it just flips victim and offender very effectively and serves the purpose of suppressing the information about the abuse. It's very effective.

WM:

What is your take on the thesis that Jeffrey Masson put forward in the *The Assault on Truth* – that Freud suppressed his own theory on the etiology of hysteria? He would have known from first-hand contact during his time at the Panopticon morgue of deadly abuse perpetrated on children. But including significant sexual components. Then, without providing any hard evidence by way of proven fantasy, he found it professionally expedient to adopt a "fantasy" explanation for the accounts that his patients provided regarding childhood sexual abuse? In other words, Freud seemed to pivot on a dime and then, without any hard evidence, introduced a new theory which he defended endlessly and with very little reference from then on to actual childhood sexual abuse?

JF:

Yes, I feel like a lot of people know more about this than I'm interested in your take on it because you've absorbed this sort of controversy, I guess, in multiple ways, for a long time.

JF:

Yes, I find it very understandable. Another concept that we're developing is called the "betrayal blindness", which is an ability to not know about the betrayals in one's mind because in not knowing you get to retain your relationships with people when those relationships are dependent upon the suppression of information. Clearly for Freud, it was extremely costly for him to know about the sexual abuse. It was costly financially and socially, so if he could sort of unknow it, then he regains a much more comfortable position in society. I know he could be accused of selling out, but I think that's a judgement that we must be cautious about, because we don't know what it would've been like to be alive then and maybe it was just too much to know. It was like knowing had become too dangerous and it was a survival thing to unknow it. So, I feel some compassion for him. I wish he could have been, in some sense, stronger and stood up against the denial, but people are human and there was really no space in society for his point of view, it was so threatening to the patriarchy.

WM:

What do you think of psychoanalyst Bennett Simon's (1992) conclusion after an extensive review of the psychoanalytic literature that "[n]either Freud, nor, to my knowledge, any other analyst, published a case wherein a woman, not psychotic, told of an incestuous relationship with the father and then in the course of the treatment it turned out to be a fantasy"? So, he could not find anywhere, within the entire publications of psychoanalysis, a single study that

supported Freud's Oedipal Fantasy being the focus of analysis whereby the victim of the Oedipal Fantasy recovered from the fantasy?

JF:

That doesn't surprise me because the whole hypothesis is so absurd. The world is very big and there are billions of people, so anything you can imagine a person can do, probably somebody has done it. Therefore, probably somebody has had this fantasy and made it all up. Probably such a thing has happened, but it is so implausible that it would happen very often and therefore be the foundation of most psychiatric distress, so it's not surprising that it is not documented because it's probably so rare.

WM:

Yes, but Bennett Simon did something that no other analysts did. He was enraged, like most psychoanalysis seemed to be at the time, by Masson's theory, but instead of just leaping into print castigating him publicly – like putting him in stocks in the village square and throwing things, he at least resolved to test his hypothesis. And then he did an exhaustive review of the psychoanalytic literature and ended up effectively saying, "Well, actually Jeffrey is right".

JF:

Yes. So, he gets credit for that. I love it when data overrides people's biases. It's great.

WM:

And Bennett Simon went on to be co-author of a book on the first psychoanalytic case after Freud's Dora for which the case notes survive (written by Louville Eugene Emerson). It was in America and dates to 1912. The case was of a victim of severe ongoing incest into adulthood. Fantasy in that case wasn't pushed at all. Bennett Simon was a co-author of that book (Lunbeck & Simon, 2003). I appreciate your point about data overriding dogma. Jeffrey has made the point that when he was training as a psychoanalyst, the issues of Oedipal fantasy and hysterical mendacity were endlessly emphasized, not to mention penis envy, and all the rest that goes with it... which probably haven't stood the test of time very well outside certain closed, entrenched analytic groups. Now it sounds like a spoof! It sounds like if you were going to make up a silly satire of the patriarchy you would come up with something like "penis envy", right? You'd invent these as satirical extensions?

JF:

Yes. Have you ever come across the writings of Florence Rush?

WM:

No.

JF:

She occupied the same sort of area that Masson did. They did not meet prior to the publication of *The Assault on Truth*,

and yet, she's a great writer from back in the 70s, about these issues.

You had for over two decades been the editor of *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation*. (And by the way, the congratulations on what an amazing achievement that is!) How significant was it in terms of the recognition that (a) sexual abuse that Freud himself did not embrace the concept of dissociation?

JF: Well, I don't know, but it was inevitable that the concept would come to light again because of the data. It is so fundamental to the survival of many child sexual abuse victims that it was inevitable. It's interesting, back maybe 10 or 15 years ago I did a project with librarians at the University of Oregon to put together an archive of the work on dissociation over time and while different words were used for it on some occasions, nevertheless, people kept observing it. So, whatever kept Freud from embracing it, it didn't stop it from becoming understood.

WM: Yes. Joseph Breuer wrote about "hypnotic states", which were pretty much dissociation. Janet beat Freud into print on some of these areas, but Freud seemed to massively need to distance himself from Janet.

JF: Yes. Have you ever looked at the archives we have?

WM: Yes, I have. You have made available all the old editions of the journal, *Dissociation*?

JF: There are two archives. One is with the old books, and then one is with all the old issues of *Dissociation*. It was hard to find them all. That was part of the challenge – getting those hard copies because there was no electronic record at all.

WM: Yes, when you look back on it, *Dissociation* as a journal, was quite a monumental feat. Richard Kluff carried that. Yes, he was doing it all. He was trying to be editor and publisher. That's crazy. It's really hard.

JF: You would know that more than anyone. You can see how hard it is just being an editor, let alone doing the rest! Without in any way seeking such a role, you found yourself a reference point for public polarizations regarding childhood sexual abuse and "recovered memories" of trauma. In navigating such challenges, were there guiding principles that you employed?

JF: Probably not. I'm pretty intellectual, so I tend towards wanting to understand and so I tried to read things and do research and understand at an intellectual level, and I really value honesty and truth, so those things were there but it was a really strange time. It was very weird. I didn't really

have anything. Nothing prepared me for it, and I didn't have a sense of other people or situations I could sort of draw from. It was this weird thing of being in a situation that was very unfamiliar to me and so I was just trying to understand it. People were behaving in ways that I could not entirely understand, like my own colleagues joining the False Memory Syndrome Foundation – it just did not make sense to me and so I was really trying very hard to make sense of it.

WM: Looking back now, because you actually have in an exemplary way navigated your way through it, it seemed like you were very careful about not being baited into conflict and it can be tempting to sort of charge into battle, but it's much smarter to take a mindful, careful, considered approach and not be drawn into grandstanding activities. This, I guess, is what a lot of those associated with the false memory syndrome perspective wanted to do. Some colleagues were being picketed.

JF: Totally. I got picketed but I think one of the benefits I had was that I'm really shy in a lot of ways and really a pretty private person and so part of what was so horrifying for me was my privacy being so violated and people talking about me all the time, with my name in the newspapers, those things... I didn't want to do anything to increase that. I was really trying to protect my privacy, but at the same time, I want to say I didn't entirely avoid conflict because a lot of what I ended up writing was pretty much questioning all that stuff. I just think I had a more academic approach.

WM: A word that comes to my mind is that you exhibited dignity. Thank you. I think it helped too that I had my husband, JQ (John Quincy), who you met. He was incredibly supportive. I had this wonderful nuclear family with JQ and our children and I had friends. So, I had a really secure situation. I think if I was all by myself and wasn't educated, there's lots of circumstantial things that would have made it much harder to hold on to my dignity.

JF: Did you have a reaction to the folding of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in December 2019?

WM: One of my reactions to this whole thing has been embarrassment. I just find the whole thing embarrassing and the fact that I share a pretty rare last name with my parents makes it sort of cringey. I think it was primarily relief.

JF: Were you surprised at all that it folded when it did? WM: I didn't know about it directly. I think I read about it from somewhere and so there was a little bit of surprise at new

information, but it wasn't shocking. Back in the early 90s, they definitely had the upper hand culturally, but by the time they folded they really didn't. There's still really a problem with the influence of the false memory syndrome movement on textbooks, and on the court system, at least in the US. But compared to the way it was in the early-to-mid 90s when all the media believed it, they really lost that hold and I think it was just because the research that had come forward through those many years did not support the position of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF). So again, given the data it wasn't shocking to me that they would fold.

One of the things that I've done over the years is kept a log on where their website was going. Back when they founded the FMSF in 1992, with great fanfare, there was the formation of a Scientific and Professional Advisory Board. The thing that struck me was that it virtually never changed from the early 90s, and over the years as members of this group progressively died, they maintained their membership on the board! So, by the time the FMSF formally folded, virtually half the members of the Scientific and Professional Advisory Board were actually dead!

What is your take on why psychoanalysis became so fixated on "Oedipal Fantasy" and historically placed so little emphasis on actual childhood sexual abuse despite it being Freud's initial focus?

I think it's in the same category of answers in terms of people's comfort level and the status quo. It's very threatening to the social order to accept that reality, so although the whole fantasy explanation is implausible really, it is much less threatening to the power structure.

What do you think of the fact that a movement, or an organisation, that's supposedly so focused on understanding psychology and human behaviour and motivation should have been so aligned with a theory for which there was so little evidence, as Bennett Simon pointed out, and yet people were steeped in this belief system?

You know it's not just that theory, the histories of mental health fields have been complicit with the forces of oppression. That's pretty bad: there were theories in diagnostic manuals about the mental state of slaves that essentially justified slavery, where it was a disorder for slaves to want to run away. And at various times there have been diagnoses for women who are being abused or want freedom or whatever. Mental health fields do not have a clean record on social justice, just the opposite. So, I see this as one

more example of that. Even more recently, the American Psychological Association (APA) have been complicit in work on psychological torture – it's just a repeated problem, but fortunately it's not the whole story.

There's also been wonderfully important liberatory forces as well from the mental health fields. But one of the things I think should be corrected is how people are trained in the mental health fields, all of them. They should learn these histories, because what they currently get is so whitewashed. They get exposure, whether it's psychiatry or psychology or social work or whatever it is, to a narrative that their field only does good. They don't learn about these terrible collusions with oppressive forces and therefore they are more prone to fall prey to that same dynamic. It's the old adage, "You're going to repeat history if you don't learn about it". We need to avoid repeating all this.

What do you think the mental health field in the broader sense needs to do to safeguard against perpetuating these sorts of mistakes?

This is probably time for this concept I have of "institutional courage" because I think that there are certain steps organisations can take to be less prone to these betrayals and in this case, education has got to be a big piece of it. For a couple of years before I retired, I was teaching a course that historically had been called "History and Systems" and it was required for clinical psychology students and required by the APA. The textbooks tend to be an example of whitewashing, focusing on all the glory moments, like 'psychology did this, it's so wonderful' and when I taught it I tried to balance that with all the times psychology went the wrong way and did harm so that the students would learn both things. But without that education I think students are just going to go out there and think that by virtue of their degree they are immune from doing anything harmful. That's a very dangerous thing. You need to learn all these dangers so that you don't act them out.

As you know, Jeffrey wrote, among other books, one called *Against Therapy* (1988) and another one called *Final Analysis* (Masson, 1990) which represented his critique of mental health and also psychoanalysis.

I assigned *Against Therapy* in the graduate seminar I taught and it's very threatening to students in clinical psychology. And I argued with Jeffrey about that book because I felt he had gone a bit further than I could accept, and then I gave him this example of a psychologist therapist I know who

believes in kindness and in her power to be truly respectful of her clients and honestly helpful. She is a counterexample to the sort of sweeping claim by Jeffrey that there's no possible way that therapy is not going to be corrupt. We were arguing about this, and he said, "Are you saying your whole argument is that you know one person?" And he kind of got me there because I was sort of arguing from one example. But I think he makes an extremely important point, and whether his most radical position is correct or not, it's a really important point or position for people to grapple with because if he's not correct that it's inevitably bad, it's often bad. So many people get mistreated in the context of therapy and it's a power abuse as he points out.

One of the people he mentions is Masud Khan who was one of those baying for his expulsion from the Freud Archives. But Khan, of course, was an appalling abuser, with the full extent of his abuse only coming out in later years. Unfortunately, we see this happening repeatedly with very prominent people in this psychoanalytic saga: individuals who have very questionable backgrounds in terms of their own abuse tendencies. Another one that comes to mind is Ernest Jones, who was to Freud what Saint Paul was to Jesus. He was the propagator of psychoanalysis and yet very credible evidence would indicate that he had very poor sexual boundaries and that he sexually abused children.

Well, I think it is really a problem for all of us that there are abusers in our midst and some of those abusers have a lot of power, not just in their relationships with others, but in their ability to define knowledge through their professional positions and it's dangerous of course to go around accusing people you don't agree with of being personally motivated. That's a risky position to take. On the other hand, sometimes it's true. Sometimes people are personally motivated to hold certain viewpoints. Maybe we all are to some extent. There are some people who I have interacted with who I know from other sources are abusive people in particular contexts and then when I'm dealing with them in some other context, they are espousing a viewpoint that conveniently in some sense justifies their abusiveness, or denies it, or whatever.

Do I keep the argument entirely intellectual? Do I just take them at face value? What do I do with this knowledge of their behaviour in this other context? I find that very challenging. If someone tells me about somebody, I try to keep an open mind about it because sometimes it's just not true and you can do reputational damage to somebody with just a

rumour. But, if I have directly seen this person behave in an abusive way in the workplace, it's often an abuse of power but not a crime per se, and then they are in this other context in which they are speaking with the authority of an intellectual, but the particular thing they're saying is in some way relevant to excusing or denying their other behaviour. I find that a challenging situation. I ask myself, how do I hold those bits of information? Do I just focus on the pure intellectual context or content? I don't really have the answer to that, but when it's occurred, I have found that very hard. It's slightly amusing that when Jeffrey first mentioned to me about doing this book, he had a sense of wry humour about asking, of all people on earth, a psychiatrist to edit it.

But you know, one of the things that I remember so distinctly about you ... you said something to me that changed things for me, and part of it was that you were a psychiatrist who said this to me, because I didn't necessarily have the most flattering view of psychiatrists...

And Jeffrey certainly didn't either.

But you picked me up, I think it was like our first car ride soon after I met you, and you were driving me somewhere, and you said to me something like, you've "never encountered a case of a person who was really suffering, their mental health was really suffering, who did not have some experience of mistreatment". That mental health problems and distress are related to the mistreatment that people have experienced. It was a radical thing to hear from you because I had not put it myself that clearly. And as soon as you said it, I knew it was absolutely true. But I also was really shocked, you would say it because it's the opposite of the pathologizing viewpoint that dominates, and maybe dominates a little bit less now than it did, but it's still been the dominant paradigm – that people who are suffering from emotional distress or other mental health issues have something wrong with them. And the way you put it shifted that. What was wrong was the mistreatment and people have now said this in a million different ways, but you said it to me a long time ago and it was striking to me that here you were, this white male psychiatrist, clearly with professional success, saying this to me. So, thank you.

Thank you. You make a focus in your writings on "betrayal trauma" (Freyd & Birrell, 2013) and the role played by institutions. Indeed, you have established the Centre for Institutional Courage, which applauds the role of whistleblowers within institutions. What has been the role of



institutions in facilitating or covering up the sexual abuse of children? Do you conceptualize Jeffrey Masson as a whistle-blower?

JF: I don't know if before your question I would have come up with the term but as soon as you asked, I thought it is appropriate. Jeffrey was being a whistle-blower – at least at the time he was doing *The Assault on Truth*, and the response he got was typical of what happens to whistle-blowers. He was retaliated against. He was ostracised. He was turned into the perpetrator to dare to say these things. So yes, it's the right term.

WM: In the broader sense, what do you see is the fate of whistle-blowers? You've probably seen quite a few.

JF: Yes. Well, they get DARVO'd. What they say gets denied and they get their credibility attacked and they are put into the perpetrator role. But I think also they get ostracised, people stop talking to them, even people who don't disagree with the facts that they're putting forward. Even people who are not DARVOing them are afraid of them – like whistle-blowers are really scary and are threatening all sorts of relationships. If you are seen with a whistle-blower or affiliated with a whistle-blower, then you're going to pick up some of that stigma. So, it can be really costly to you to befriend a whistle-blower even if you are not saying anything about anything: just being their friend is costly. So, I think whistle-blowers are often very lonely and they get painted as if there's something weird about them. It's tragic because the people that blow the whistle usually are some of the most caring, loyal people who do it because they want things to be better and they care for and often love the organisation or whatever it is. They're identifying what is happening as a problem. So, it's really poignant, because they are the people who really should be revered and it's why one of the steps in institutional courage is to cherish the whistle-blower.

WM: Jeffrey's then-career was destroyed by his role as a whistle-blower, if we call it that, and he was dismissed from the International Psychoanalytic Association and from his local psychoanalytic association. He was pilloried and ostracised and attacked and people wrote incredibly harsh reviews about his book, and he ended up moving to the other side of the planet and writing about the emotional life of animals. It's an unusual trajectory, but in your experience do you see many whistle-blowers who have a reasonable outcome, or do they suffer the effects of their whistleblowing indefinitely?

JF: I've seen it all. I've certainly seen people be destroyed by it. I have seen people just crumble, the consequences of the retaliation and ostracism are just too much, and their life becomes small, and they often die prematurely whether it's through suicide or chronic illness. But I have seen people, I think Jeffrey is one of them, who emerge, get through it, and find their way. So, I think there's the whole range and where somebody is going to land probably has a lot to do with the social supports, they have around them, both at the time, but also earlier in life, like the things that support people developing their strengths. I really think we often try explaining variations in people's outcomes in terms of something intrinsic about them when probably so much of it's just about luck – like who was around you: like if you're an abused kid, was there another adult around who was giving you enough nurturing and support to counter that abuse? That's not a kid's choice, that's luck.

WM: What lessons can the modern trauma field take from the saga involving Jeffrey Masson, psychoanalysis, and the press? I think we have seen a few cautionary tales around the press. We can't assume the press is going to cover these issues very well. Doing more to educate the press is probably important for the field. One of the things I found the hardest in the 90's concerning the FMSF was the fact that the press seemed so gullible about it. They would just publish repeatedly the same sort of fluff pieces about these poor innocent accused fathers and these deranged daughters and therapists. That was very disillusioning to me. I had thought such organisations had more of an educated sceptical mind and they seemed to just fall prey to the forces of protecting the status quo. It's probably important to figure out ways to educate the press and to some extent the field has done that. There are awards that get given to good press coverage. The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma is famous for fostering better journalism around trauma. So, I think there's been some efforts but probably we could keep doing more of that.

JF: Is there anything in respect to what happened to Jeffrey Masson regarding his treatment by the press that you'd comment on because he's not been without controversy. He obviously had the saga not only of the *Assault on Truth* but of suing Janet Malcolm.

WM: You know he's feisty, like where I'm shy, he's not shy. So, he'll go out there and do battle. So, part of it is somewhat – that's him.

JF:

Yes, I don't think there's an introverted bone in his body really. Now there is a question that you have touched on and will no doubt say more about. What are the implications of the modern trauma field of advances in communication technology and online interconnectivity that have become available in the years since the publication of *The Assault on Truth*?

JF:

Yes, I think that the main thing is that it makes it harder for information to disappear because you can search for a word and get all these documents, so in that sense I think it's been very beneficial. But we know from all the pitfalls with social media in particular, that there are also dangers out there and now we've got this explosion in AI sophistication too. I think that this part of the human experience is becoming so dominant, it's so much more of our reality than I think, especially people our age, can really comprehend. But the trauma field totally needs to stay on top of that. What happens around these topics is really important now and there are scary things that happen out there in social media. Echo chambers, rather than helping people heal, can increase people's suffering through the electronic media so I would say that the field just really needs to take advantage of and celebrate the ways that information technology can help preserve information and help maintain awareness. But the field should also be wary of the ways it can be used to harm people.

JF:

How strong are the forces in the world that seek to discredit, disbelieve or nullify the testimony of victims of trauma, including victims of child sexual abuse?

JF:

Very, very strong. The forces of denial are very, very strong. Do you see any changes?

JF:

I think those forces still are there and it's not so much that the forces have changed, the counterforce has changed. I think there's more counterforce. The nature of social liberation movements is that as soon as you start to make real headway towards liberation, the backlash strengthens. We saw it around Q Anon, where people (it's sort of very insidious) use the claim that they are against paedophiles to discredit anyone they don't like. So that's a really dangerous thing for our field and we must really be on guard against that. The awareness that child sexual abuse is real can be weaponised in these bad ways because that label, 'paedophile', can be attached to your enemy whether they are, or not, a paedophile.

JF:

Do you think it would have been possible for Jeffrey Masson to have got his message outlined in *The Assault on Truth* in a way in which it provoked less polarisation or controversy? Or was the dynamic always going to be there no matter who was the speaker or how it was said?

JF:

Well, probably the answer is that it was always going to be there to some extent, but my guess is that if he were to write that book now the opposition would have way less power and there would be more acceptance of what he had to say, because it fits in better with what we know. But this is so counterfactual because the very fact that we've gotten to the point of awareness that we have now, is probably dependent in part on that book – like somebody must be first, somebody must be out there trailblazing, and that's what he was doing. But then of course, he had the reception of a person who was viewed as really, really threatening.

JF:

Jennifer, is there anything that, in a more broad global sense that you would like to comment on?

JF:

I'm not sure how well formed this is but I do think there's something that we could have more of in this world which is what I refer to in institutional courage writings as a sort of acknowledgement and apology, and which some people might call truth and reconciliation. So, whatever happened with the initial reception of Jeffrey's book or with the false memory reception in the 90's, there's still room for some repair involving those people: like not everybody is dead, and there's also the institutions. I know for me it would be extremely beneficial if the people or institutions who had joined my parents and ostracised me, were to actually apologise to me. That would be an amazing gift. Nobody has done that. Nobody. And I mean I would imagine this has probably been Jeffrey's experience too, that probably some of the people that were so up in arms about his book have come round to some extent, but have they really taken ownership for the way they treated him at the time? Maybe, but probably not. So, I think if we could figure out how to encourage more of that, it would go a long way to healing. That is a kind of accountability and apology.

JF:

I know that Jeffrey's closest friend back around the time he was writing the book was Charles Hanly, who subsequently went on to become president of the International Psychoanalytic Association. He severed his friendship with Jeffrey, completely severed it, wouldn't speak to him, and published a derogatory review of Jeffrey's book.



JF: I know, I want it, but no, I don't rationally think it's coming. Maybe it is a project for future generations – to figure out how to make it more likely that there's repair because I do really think it would be valuable. I think people are surprisingly defensive, like we are just very defensive creatures, and that defensiveness gets in the way of acknowledging and apology, and it doesn't serve anyone's interests in the long run.

## References

- Freyd, J. J., & Birrell, P. J. (2013). *Blind to betrayal: Why we fool ourselves we aren't being fooled*. Wiley.
- Lumbeck, E., & Simon, B. (2003). *Family romance, family secrets: Case notes from an American psychoanalyst, 1912*. Yale University Press.
- Masson, J. M. (1984). *The assault on truth: Freud's suppression of the seduction theory*. Faber and Faber.
- Masson, J. M. (1988). *Against therapy: Emotional tyranny and the myth of psychological healing*. Atheneum.
- Masson, J. M. (1990). *Final analysis: The making and unmaking of a psychoanalyst*. Fonthill.
- Simon, B. (1992). Incest – see under Oedipus complex: The history of an error in psychoanalysis. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 40, 955–988. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000306519204000401>

## 1 The Memories of Millions

Lynn Crook

In the 1980s acceptance of the reality and impact of child sexual abuse in the press and in society was high. Yet as more people started to accuse their alleged perpetrators, often family members, of sexual abuse during their childhood, a narrative began to develop in the early 1990s that memories of early sexual abuse could be false. This allowed the alleged perpetrator to become the victim and the person who was accusing them to be seen as acting on false and created memories of events that never occurred. This false memory narrative was fostered by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation and its \$7.75M PR campaign along with the “lost in a mall” study (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995). The media ran with it, which changed societal perceptions about the reality and impact of childhood sexual abuse. Survivors were generally silenced with the idea that therapists were creating wholesale memories of clients being sexual abused in childhood by family members and others. This narrative meant that millions of adults molested as children could be told their accusations were and are false memories.

Over the past century, our beliefs that children are molested have vacillated from denial to shocked acceptance and then back to denial. We listen as victims describe the shocking experiences that shamed and embarrassed them as children. When their accounts become too much to bear, we turn to others who tell us the abuse did not happen. They assure us the accusations are fantasies, or false memories, or impossible. Such false memory narratives become louder and more pervasive when our acceptance of child sex abuse claims has already taken hold.

Sigmund Freud listened to his patients as they reported molestation by family members. His patients expressed feelings of anger, disgust, helplessness, and betrayal. Freud believed them. He concluded that early sexual trauma results in neurosis for victims. He reported his findings in 1896 to colleagues at the Society for Psychiatry and Neurology in Vienna. In doing so Freud had violated a taboo—he had discussed incest openly. His colleagues shunned him (Masson, 1984).

Freud replaced his “seduction theory” with a compromise. While his clients believed they were molested, their memories were not true. Instead, they were a result of fantasizing sexually about the opposite-sex parent. He called this the Oedipal complex, a normal part of child psychosexual development. These fantasies are then repressed and years later may be remembered as actual incidents.