
EDITORIAL



Archiving Dissociation as a Precaution
Against Dissociating Dissociation

Judith Herman (1992) famously observed, “The knowledge of horrible events periodically intrudes into public awareness but is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level” (p. 2).

The truth of Herman’s observation makes editing the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation (JTD)* all that more sweet—for in creating this journal we are taking an action against the burial of knowledge. This action is made more powerful by the fact that *JTD* is archived on-line in addition to in print. I take pride and pleasure in the thought that our work in creating this journal will be a force for intellectual advance, and a force against repression and dissociation operating on a social level.

Herman (1992) goes on to note: “Like traumatized people, we have been cut off from the knowledge of our past. Like traumatized people, we need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the fu-

ture. Therefore, an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering history” (p. 2). We are at risk of forgetting the hard work and lessons learned by our predecessors. Thus, in addition to preserving our current knowledge, it is important to learn and preserve the knowledge of dissociation that has been created in the past.

One step we have taken in this regard is creating a digital archive of the journal *Dissociation*, published by its founders, Richard Kluft, MD, and Catherine Fine, PhD, from 1988 to 1997. Until recently, *Dissociation* was not widely available to those who were not members of the International Society for the Study of Dissociation (ISSD) during its 10 years of publication. Unlike *JTD*, which has a full text digital version offered by the publisher Haworth Press, *Dissociation* did not have a digital existence. *JTD* Editorial Board member Frank Putnam, MD, former editor of *Dissociation* Richard Kluft, and I worked with the University of Oregon Library and many other colleagues to create a complete digital library of all articles published in *Dissociation*. Now every paper ever published in *Dissociation* is freely available to scholars, students, and clinicians world wide in full-text and searchable electronic format via the University of Oregon Library digital library web site: <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/dspace/handle/1794/1129>.

The digital library of *Dissociation* not only exists, but it is already heavily used. Many of the individual papers have been viewed close to 1,000 times each. The collection is being used not just by researchers but also by the general public. In this way, the archive also contributes to the “open access” movement in which research and scholarship is made freely available for the benefit of society.

However as good as this is, we have not gone far enough. There are still strong forces that would deny the history of trauma and dissociation. One such disconcerting recent reminder of this came in the form of an article recently published in the peer-reviewed journal *Psychological Medicine*. This article (Pope, Poliakoff, Parker, Boynes, & Hudson, 2007) has the trappings of a scientific paper, with a so-called “method” and “results” section, but is better understood as pseudoscience or perhaps a publicity stunt. Pope et al. claim to have shown that “dissociative amnesia is not a natural neuropsychological phenomenon, but instead a culture-bound syndrome, dating from the nineteenth century” (p. 225). What was their methodology? Well, it is difficult to tell from the article exactly, but essentially they advertised in various internet and print venues, etc., offering US\$1000 to the “first individual who could find a case of dissociative amnesia for a traumatic event in any fictional or non-fic-

tional work before 1800” (p. 225). They claim to have received more than 100 replies but that none of these replies included a submission that was judged—apparently by the authors—to fit their criteria. They conclude this indicates dissociative amnesia is not an innate capacity of the brain but rather something best viewed as a “‘culture-bound’ form of conversion disorder, a phenomenon peculiar to our modern Western culture” (p. 232).

The Pope et al. (2007) paper generated a fair amount of press interest despite the numerous problems. The authors reported no replicable methodology. We are told only where they advertised, but crucially we are not told in detail how they evaluated the submissions. This would be like reporting how one recruited participants for a study on asthma, but not how one evaluated level of asthma. They appear to be judging submissions based on idiosyncratic personal opinions. At a minimum for scientific research, judges of submissions would be blind to the hypothesis of the researchers and an attempt would be made to get judges with a variety of theoretical orientations given the high risk of biased judgment. Related to this, there was apparently no attempt to measure the reliability of the judgments made by the authors. In scientific research requiring subjective judgment, one employs multiple judges and then measures and reports on inter-judge reliability. There was also no comparison with other diagnostic categories, without which we have no control condition. Many of our current diagnostic categories were unknown before 1800. This is true for all sorts of psychological, medical and scientific categories—both because of an enormous amount of empirical discovery and because categories in science and medicine are always to some degree (and indeed sometimes a large degree) social constructions. One can and should question the premise of the project in the paper—the epistemological stance that psychological phenomena can only stem from an innate capacity of the brain if they were identified before 1800. Next, if one does take that epistemological stance (or if one is simply curious about what was identified in the past), then this begs the issue of what it means to be identified. This is where the “methodology” in the paper falls so very short.

Why did a scientific journal publish this paper and why did the press show such interest in it? We may never know the answer to these questions, but it seems clear to me that we need to invest in more scholarship and archiving of that scholarship in order to prevent future instances of such pseudoscience. Two possible new projects to consider stem from suggestions of my colleagues. Frank Putnam has proposed we expand

the digital *Dissociation* project to include a digital archive of the scientific and medical literature in this area from the 19th and early 20th century.

Professor Ross Cheit, of Brown University, who created the invaluable “Recovered Memory archive” [http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Taubman_Center/Recovmem/index.html] in 1997, proposes an archive of more ancient literature describing dissociation amnesia. Cheit submitted five entries to Pope et al. in response to their advertised challenge, including an interpretation of the 5th century statements of Proclus (see deGrazia, 1983), and an interpretation of the 16th century Renaissance poem “Astophil and Stell” written by Sir Philip Sidney (see Hamilton, 1969). All five of Cheit’s submissions were rejected by Pope as not fitting criteria (February 2007, personal communication). It is clear that literary interpretation of works from centuries ago is a challenging business that should neither be trivialized nor cloaked in secrecy. It is one where there are natural opportunities for interdisciplinary exploration and collaboration. An archive of descriptions of responses to trauma from the ancient world would promote open discussion and debate about the appropriate interpretations of these ancient works.

It is heartening to realize that we can effectively contribute to the effort to combat ignorance and repression in the information age by making materials available and accessible to the world in digital format. Herman (1992) observed that while we are in a period of great excitement and activity in generating knowledge about trauma, “. . . history teaches us that this knowledge could also disappear” (p. 32). We must all join in the effort to continue to uncover old knowledge, seek new knowledge, and share that with our colleagues and society.

As of November 2006, the former ISSD is now the International Society for the Study of Trauma & Dissociation (ISSTD), happily bringing our professional home into closer alignment with this journal. We are also delighted by Haworth’s work in creating a new cover design for us with original artwork on each issue. As Editor of *JTD* I continue to be entertained and enlightened by the many insightful scientific, clinical, and theoretical submissions. With the help of our superb editorial staff, associate editors, editorial board, and reviewers we take pleasure in selecting an excellent sample of these submissions for publication in this journal. I hope you enjoy reading these important articles and I invite you to send us your best work for future issues. Also, keep tuned to the

JTD website I have created at <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/~jjf/jtd/> for author information, links, updates, and announcements.

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doi:10.1300/J229v08n03_01